

## **Draft Language Opposing Substantive Changes to the Chapel Hill Transit Advertising Policy**

Past and current residents of Chapel Hill and Carrboro have fought hard to enable, protect, and practice the principles of free speech. While we appreciate the difficulties the Town of Chapel Hill has incurred in administering the current advertising policy, we believe it is as well-reasoned now as it was in 2012 and already offers the pathway needed to prevent the imposition of demeaning, disparaging or inappropriate viewpoints, words and images on transit users.

Declaring that public busses must be free from all kinds of political, religious and “issue” advertising while simultaneously supporting corporate advertising is antithetical to our values as a public body. Reducing opportunities for non-profit, civic and religious organizations to reach their intended audiences on public transit serves only to erode our civic fabric and civil discourse.

Here are just some of the organizations that we are concerned would be prohibited from advertising on Chapel Hill Transit because their messages or services could be considered political, religious, issue-oriented, or otherwise “objectionable”:

- The NAACP
- Churches, synagogues, mosques, Buddhist centers and other faith institutions
- Organizations that nurture and protect reproductive health and rights, such as Planned Parenthood
- Organizations like the Rape Crisis Center that draw attention to sexual violence and oppression
- LGBTQ+ organizations and service providers
- IFC and CEF, whose serve people in our community that many people find objectionable
- Campus Y committees
- The Refugee Community Partnership and El Centro Hispano, who by virtue of their work with undocumented individuals, lift up important issues in our community
- Organizations seeking to protect voters’ rights and/or to get out the vote.

We know that other partners are deeply concerned about the use of hate speech and symbols, such as the confederate flag, and advertising by terrorist organizations like the KKK, particularly given recent events. We believe this kind of speech is clearly regulated under the current policy.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Chapel Hill Town Council and Chapel Hill Transit Partners Committee for inviting our input on the proposed policy changes. We have a shared interest in increasing revenue to the system, particularly in light of recent SMAP reductions and increasing operating and capital costs. We hope we can accomplish this without compromising public speech, and we look forward to continuing our work together in the absolute spirit of partnership.