

Allen Buansi, Candidate for Chapel Hill Town Council

1. What are the highest priority affordable housing issues in your community?

Most important priorities: Rental housing, Affordable homeownership

Top priorities, but not the most important: Senior housing, Critical repairs, Mobile homes, Permanent housing for homeless

2. Should local government provide more money or less money to support affordable housing in your community?

Much more money. One of the primary sources of funding for affordable housing in Orange County is the Community Development Block Grant Program. President Trump's proposed budget would cut block grants to the Town by one-third. Such a dramatic cut in critical funding means local governments must be creative in finding ways to fill the gap. As the Town continues to look for ways to increase revenue, especially via expansion of its commercial tax base, we need to be prepared to devote a portion of new revenue to the Affordable Housing Fund, the Affordable Housing Development Reserve and other affordable housing projects.

3. Do you support donating surplus government-owned land to affordable housing developers?

Yes. The vast majority of available land in Chapel Hill has been built upon. Thus, we must maximize use of existing available land, which includes surplus government-owned land. Organizations such as Empowerment, Inc., the Community Home Trust, CASA, Habitat for Humanity and others are dedicated to providing housing options for low- and moderate-income families. Some have recognized the need for affordable rental housing, and I will support their efforts to acquire properties for that purpose. I will also support creating incentives for repurposing existing properties as affordable rentals.

4. Do you think local jurisdictions do an effective job coordinating housing policies and programs with other jurisdictions in the county, including Orange County government?

Moderately effective. Every jurisdiction in Orange County has its own set of housing policies. These policies come out of different priorities and strategies for addressing each jurisdiction's need for affordable housing, so naturally there are challenges in coordinating policies. Yet addressing affordable housing effectively in Chapel Hill will require a coordinated effort by all of Orange County's governments. Where there are opportunities to coordinate efforts (ex. Greene Tract), there must be open communication and concerted action between governments and between these governments and the public. We must actively seek input from those who would be most directly impacted by any proposed plan (ex. the Rogers-Eubanks community). We can improve communication with impacted communities by proactively inviting its members to join those conversations, whether in informal or formal discussions between government staff or elected bodies.

5. What's one example of an affordable housing program or development that you think worked well. Please explain why you think that was successful and how you will support more of these successes in the future.

The Penny for Housing program has worked very well for the past few years. Since 2015, the program has created a pot of almost \$700,000 annually in property tax revenues for affordable-housing projects that assist low- and moderate-income families. This past year, the Town Council committed to continuing the Penny for Affordable Housing Program in its budget. I will continue to support this program and will make it a priority to identify other programs that generate revenue for affordable housing. Such revenue can be used to repair and upgrade some of the 336 older public housing units and other affordable housing projects in town.

6. Will you support a Town of Chapel Hill bond referendum that includes funding for affordable housing?

No. We need to turn over every rock to find ways to fund affordable housing, but at this time I do not think passing a bond referendum is advisable. We would need a thoroughly vetted and detailed plan in place before I would consider supporting a bond referendum. Though our Town maintains a AAA bond rating and low debt levels, we have passed a series of bonds in the last few years that have significantly increased the tax burden on homeowners. I am concerned that if we pass yet another General Obligation Bond, Chapel Hill taxpayers – especially our low- and moderate income residents – will be overburdened as the Town repays bondholders. According to a recent report prepared for the Town Council by David, Paul, Rosen & Associates, the Town may not have a large enough tax base to support a housing General Obligation Bond program with recurring funding cycles. What's more, the Town has reported that it will not be able to issue General Obligation Bonds for another two to three years. In the short term, I favor continuing to make affordable housing a budget priority and using part of the increased revenue from our growing commercial tax base to fund affordable housing projects.

7. At this time, the task force assessing the American Legion Post property owned by the Town of Chapel Hill has not included recommendations for affordable housing. Would you support affordable housing being developed on a portion of the property?

Yes. I support using a portion of the American Legion Post property for affordable housing. With over 90 percent of the available land in Chapel Hill already built upon, we need to maximize use of existing spaces, which include limited surplus government properties. Thus, I favor using limited surplus government properties like the American Legion Post property for affordable housing. Development of the American Legion Post property offers a unique opportunity to address some of our critical needs for affordable housing, commercial property and green spaces.