

Rachel Schaevitz, Candidate for Chapel Hill Town Council

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

Most important priorities: Rental housing

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

Important, but lower priorities: Affordable homeownership

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

Slightly more money. It is clear that affordable housing is one of the most critical challenges facing our community. Local government should make it a top priority. We do need "much more money" but I don't think it all needs to come from our local government. Therefore, I checked "slightly more money" because I do believe we should contribute more funds, but I think our best plan for supporting affordable housing involves not only "more money" but a targeted collaboration with our neighbors, use of surplus town land, and leveraging the resources of other stakeholders like UNC to increase our stock of affordable homes. Let's use our funding wisely and efficiently so that we can add the most high-quality affordable homes possible to our town.

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

Yes. When the town donates land, it dramatically reduces the cost of the overall project for the developing partner, which in turn, makes it easier for them to offer housing at a more affordable rate. Certainly the terms of that relationship must be spelled out explicitly, for example, at what rate the units will be offered, and at what percent of Area Median Income folks could afford it. That being said, whenever possible, I prefer that we guarantee the long-term affordability of a property through a 99-year renewable ground lease, rather than donating the land outright.

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. The creation of the Orange County Affordable Housing Coalition in 2013 was a critical first step to collaborating and coordinating all of our efforts in an efficient way. Our next step should be to develop a strategic plan with benchmarks, milestones and short- and long-term goals in partnership with other local stakeholders such as UNC and UNC Health. This plan would help us determine our investment based on our shared needs, resources and assets. While the efforts and successes of the Affordable Housing Coalition are phenomenal - addressing student demand on the market for affordable units, and the needs of UNC Health's lower-wage workers are also critical components of this complex issue.

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 Northside Neighborhood Initiative has been very effective in protecting multi-generational family-owned homes from speculation and redevelopment. I think it is successful for many reasons including: it is a true collaboration between citizens, the town, UNC, and our local nonprofits and it was a grass-roots initiative that came from the community itself. A key component of this initiative has been the Promise of Home Program that provides critical repairs and maintenance for older residents so that they can age in place. One of the reasons I so fully support this initiative, and would advocate for replicating it in other areas of town, is that it mixes affordable homes and market-rate homes together in the same neighborhood. Doing so provides better, more equitable outcomes for all involved, prevents neighborhoods from gentrifying, and contributes to a more diverse, vibrant community.

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

Yes. While I am not opposed to using government or bond funds to partially mitigate our affordable housing shortage, I do not think we should rely on them as our primary financing strategy. Instead, we should look at all options and conduct a cost/benefit analysis that includes the impact of each option on different neighborhoods and stakeholders in town. A bond referendum would be considered a viable option only after we've determined how much housing we need, when and how quickly we would plan to use the money, and examined current financial terms (i.e., interest rates). We need to be thoughtful about bonds as a financing strategy, because they could exacerbate the problem of affordability by creating new taxes or fees for those already struggling to stay in Chapel Hill.

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. My answer is "maybe." Here's why: As chair of this Task Force, I do not advocate for any particular use over another, but work with the community group assembled, and feedback from the public, to inform our recommendations to Council. That being said, our recommendations to date only include guiding principles we hope Council will adhere to for any use on that site -- specifically that it be affordable/accessible to all in our community, regardless of physical ability or ability to pay -- and we have yet to finalize our recommendation for preferred uses. Because construction of the DHIC/Greenfield Place complex is already underway just up Legion Road, some residents have expressed concern that building more affordable units on the American Legion site would cluster a good deal of below-market-rate housing in one part of town. Others believe that the affordable housing shortage in town is critical enough that building more units anywhere in town is advisable. My role is to make sure that both of those opinions are heard and to help bring the group to a consensus. As a Council member, I would have a slightly different role. I would take the recommendation coming from the Task Force, along with recommendations from other stakeholders and reliable sources in the community (such as OC Affordable Housing Coalition) into consideration. Because the town will likely build a public amenity on a portion of the land (park or other recreational facility), it would be ideal to have affordable homes nearby, so that those residents had easy access to the amenity. However, I would want to hear more information from these groups about the fitness of that property for affordable housing versus other Town-owned land, their thoughts on clustering affordable homes together, and the feasibility of building affordable units on the frontage of Legion Road when removal of the pond will cost \$400,000 before construction of any kind can begin.