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1) I love trees. I'll say it. I love running on trails, walking the dog, biking with the kids. Nature good. There is a lot of talk in town lately about trees. A lot of side-taking (as if anyone is anti-tree??). What is getting lost in this is the bigger, more complex picture.

2) It's easy to frame this as good people v. evil, greedy developers – that's so easy. Which side would you be on? But the real story is far more complex. And it's a story about equity, and diversity, and affordability. Issues pro-tree people also care deeply about.

3) But no one's really talking about that part. So, here goes... Chapel Hill has had a rural buffer in place since the late '80s. This means that there is a circle around the edge of town beyond which we have agreed not to develop.

4) The intent was to preserve forests, farms, and the general rural nature of Orange County, beyond the buffer. This has prevented sprawl- which is critical, especially in the context of [#climatechange](#) - and makes public transit less expensive and more efficient. Plus, trees.

5) But it also limits the amount of developable land within Chapel Hill. That makes that land more expensive. Limiting the land that we can use for new development means that we need to use the land inside the buffer very strategically. [#tradeoffs](#)

6) This is where the tree thing gets more complicated. If we try to prevent new (re-)development in town to preserve trees, we are undermining the tacit agreement of the rural buffer, namely that we would develop more densely in town, to preserve nature on the edges.

7) Meanwhile, people continue to move here because it's a great place to live. Chapel Hill continues to grow. We have a demand for 149 additional housing units/year. What happens when we don't keep up with demand? Who pays the price? Suppressing supply increases housing prices.

8) Chapel Hill is already prohibitively expensive. Because it's a college town. Because it's a really nice place to live. But limiting developable land even more increases housing prices even more. It also increases the price of land, which is passed on to homeowners and renters.

9) It also increases property taxes. Limiting the number of people who can live here also increases the cost/person of Town services, which is passed along in the form of higher taxes. We want developers to build affordable housing but land is too expensive to make it feasible.

10) Meanwhile, we fight for trees while on any given night there are 40 unsheltered people living amongst those trees. Recently, trees have been cut down to make room for affordable housing, senior housing, better access to health care. [#tradeoffs](#) [#communitybenefits](#)

11) The Town's policies require some tree canopy preservation in new development. We owe it to the trees we do remove to make the most of the spaces where they used to be. Density allows us to limit the footprint, preserve more trees, and take care of people, too. [#tradeoffs](#)

12) Who are we pricing out of the community when we prize trees over people? Those who are already struggling to get by. Those who have been historically marginalized in this highly-educated, university-dominated community. Those on fixed incomes.

13) Those who are working multiple jobs to try to keep their kids in the CHCCS schools. Communities such as Northside and Rogers Road - historically black neighborhoods whose members have been systematically priced out of homes that have been in their families for generations.

14) There are [#tradeoffs](#) in the tree conversation, and it is critical that we all understand what they are.