

To all Durham City and County Leaders and Staff,

As Durham is poised to adopt a new Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), we—the undersigned authors, organizations, and community members—urge our local government to seize this opportunity to create a more just and climate-resilient future for all.

The new UDO will dictate how land is developed, profoundly shaping our built and natural environment for decades to come. Given the current global climate crisis, a data-informed UDO oriented toward sustainability and equity is an opportunity to advance environmental justice as well as ensure species protection and climate resilience moving forward. Therefore, we present our proposal: [“Advancing economic, racial, and environmental justice in Durham’s regulation of land development: a community-driven proposal for the implementation of a new Unified Development Ordinance.”](#)

Developed through extensive community engagement and expert consultation, our proposal introduces a data-driven and equity-oriented framework for the new UDO: the Durham Equity and Conservation Planning Tool, which overlays historic and current environmental and social vulnerability data to illustrate the intersectionality of environmental concerns for the new UDO with a multiplicity of other social issues.

Goals of our proposal:

1. Plan for Climate Resilience
2. Remedy Historic Environmental Injustices
3. Restore and Preserve Natural Systems
4. Protect and Connect Wildlife
5. Promote Quality Affordable Housing
6. Reduce Environmental Impacts of Development through Green Design

Our goals directly align with Durham’s Comprehensive Plan, particularly its commitments to environmental justice, racial equity, carbon neutrality, biodiversity, affordable and healthy housing for all, green infrastructure, and equitable access to nature and recreation. We echo the Comprehensive Plan’s promise to prioritize historically marginalized communities and ensure that no neighborhood is left behind in Durham’s growth and resilience strategy.

We call on Durham’s leaders to adopt a Unified Development Ordinance that reflects our shared values of justice, equity, and stewardship for future generations. Let’s not miss this moment.

With urgency,

Carol Hamilton, President, New Hope Bird Alliance

Barbara Driscoll and Jennifer Maher, J.D., Conservation Co-Chairs, New Hope Bird Alliance

Rah Bickley, President, Durham Wildlife Stewards (local chapter, NC Wildlife Federation)

Keshi Satterwhite, Founder & CEO, Planning Ahead

Dr. Ron Sutherland, Chief Scientist and Southeast Program Director, Wildlands Network

Samantha Krop, Neuse Riverkeeper and Director of Advocacy, Sound Rivers

Robert G. Healy, Professor Emeritus of Land Use Policy, Duke University and Co-Chair New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee

Robert Howes, Director of Conservation West, Triangle Land Conservancy

Alexis Luckey, Executive Director, Toxic Free NC

Bonita Green, Executive Director, Merrick-Moore Community Development Corporation

Johnny Randall, PhD, Chair, Triangle Connectivity Collaborative, and Director of Conservation (retired) North Carolina Botanical Garden, UNC-Chapel Hill

Ryan J. Fehrman, Executive Director, Eno River Association

Denise M. Nepveux, Co-lead of Policy and Advocacy Committee, CACHE (Carolina Advocates for Climate, Health & Equity)

Emmy Grace and Pat Carstensen, Co-chairs, Headwaters Group of the Sierra Club

Kenneth M. Chiha, Director of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

Clay Bordley, Owner, Panther Creek Forest Farm