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Durham Appearance Commission

TO: Durham City-County Planning Commission, Durham City Council and Durham County Board of Commissioners

FROM: Durham City-County Appearance Commission

RE: Expanding Housing Choices

DATE: April 17, 2019

The Durham City-County Appearance Commission supports the efforts currently being undertaken by the City of Durham to find approaches to expanding housing options in the central neighborhoods of the City. The Expanding Housing Choices effort seeks to allow more housing options in hopes of increasing the number and variety of housing units available in the urban core.

The Appearance Commission has reviewed the materials developed by the Planning Department and the proposed amendments to the UDO and believes that the proposal, if adopted, would allow for more housing options in the urban core and would allow density and housing supply to increase over time. In support of the proposed amendments the Commission offers the following comments.

- **Neighborhood Context.** The Appearance Commission recommends that housing developed under this program respect the mass and scale of existing housing stock and compliment the architectural characteristics of their context. Context area should be defined. Such definition may include other housing units on the block face, across the street, adjacent to the sides, and contiguous properties to the rear. Less weighted contextual consideration should be given to housing as it gains distance from the subject property and the consideration given to housing across streets should consider the width of the street.
- **Demolition Policy.** The Commission believes that the program should not encourage the demolition of sound housing units in the urban core by either direct action or by neglect. The City should create means to strongly discourage the practice.
- **Incentives.** The Commission recommends that the City and County consider financial and tax policies that could encourage homeowners to construct second housing units on properties on which they reside (their primary residences). Changing regulations alone will not spur the level of new housing necessary to address Durham's housing needs but through incentivizing owners to develop new housing units the City can make this type of housing development possible for a broader spectrum of City property owners. For example, the City could give deferential property tax treatment to home owners who rent their second units to low income families and individuals.