To: Mayor Kevin Foy and Chapel Hill Town Council Members

From: Dr. John K. (Yonni) Chapman

Date: October 15, 2008

Re: Agenda item #5f, "proposal to establish a civilian review board"

The anger and unrest on the part of many black residents of Chapel Hill concerning their profiling, harassment, and demeaning by police officers is palpable. I cannot speak concerning the Latina/o community, or other people of color because I have little personal experience with these residents. But I suspect they have some of the same problems with law enforcement.

From my conversations with black residents, as well as several reports we have had at the Hank Anderson Breakfast Club, I know that this is a real and raw issue with black parents, black youths, and many others. The shocking policies and practices of the public schools, that now criminalize black youths rather than dealing with discipline "in house," powerfully send the same message to black residents as unjust police practices on the street.

I do not believe, as some in the Police Department have told me, that this is a case of "a few bad apples." It is generally the policy of those in power to blame bad behavior on some "Lt. Calley," some Keating, some rogue cop. There should be no surprise that Police Chief Curran recommends no civilian review board. It is simply the predictable answer suggesting that there is no SYSTEMIC PROBLEM, that the Police can regulate their own behavior. We have seen what happens when the fox is allowed to guard the chickens. Do we have to experience the kind of crisis that the nation is going through today to convince us that public regulation of power is a necessity?

We need a civilian review board that is empowered to intervene on behalf of the public in law enforcement. I will leave it to others with more expertise to recommend what form that board should take, but I urge the Council to establish a definite process to consider and vote on the proposal for a civilian review board.

These issues have been raised to you and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools by the NAACP on numerous occasions in the past. There is also increasing support among progressive people in Chapel Hill for action on these issues. I know that former Councilman Thorpe--who you are honoring tonight--and other council members have been very concerned about these injustices.

As a member of the Town's Sustainability Committee, which is pledged to work for social justice sustainability, as well as environmental and economic sustainability, I can tell you that ensuring dignity and equal rights in law enforcement for ALL Chapel Hill residents, will likely be one of our priority goals. I do not speak for the Committee on this, but we have had discussions that convince me that what I'm telling you is accurate.

Please do not act, like so many before you, as if the feelings and judgment of black Chapel Hill residents does not matter. Thank you, Yonni Chapman