

Chapel Hill, NC
Mayor Pam Hemminger

CHAPEL HILL BUILDING INTEGRATED COMMUNITIES

A collaboration of the Town of Chapel Hill, local community groups, residents, and the statewide Building Integrated Communities Initiative at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill Building Integrated Communities (BIC) is a community planning initiative in which community members, stakeholders, and Town staff and leaders develop strategies that will address issues facing immigrant and refugee communities and generate innovative, locally-relevant public policies. The BIC initiative aligns with the Town's vision set forth in its comprehensive plan, Chapel Hill 2020, including creating a place for everyone, community prosperity and engagement, and nurturing our community.

In 2017, the Town was selected to be a part of the statewide BIC initiative. Local governments are chosen based in part on the willingness of elected officials to expand opportunities for sustained immigrant leadership and civic engagement. Mayor Hemminger and the Town Council enthusiastically supported bringing this initiative to Chapel Hill, and the local network of community organizations serving immigrants and refugees were eager to collaborate with the Town on it.

The initiative's goals are to share and build knowledge about Chapel Hill's immigrant and refugee communities, improve relationships and communication with immigrant and refugee communities, and support resident participation in local government. Achieving these goals is a three-phase process. The first phase, a community assessment, gathered information on immigrant and refugee residents and their recommendations to improve local government. Chapel Hill's 2018 Community Assessment Report reflects the valuable input of 250+ local residents who took part through public meetings, surveys, interviews, or a review of oral history collections. The Town translated the Executive Summary to Burmese, Karen, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish, the primary languages of its immigrant and refugee communities.

The next two phases of the initiative are action planning and implementation. The Town is currently finishing action planning, in which strategies were developed to address resident recommendations. Implementation is an ongoing process that will officially begin in February 2019, but has already started for some key strategies. Officials believe the keys to BIC's success are its focus on collaboration and community engagement. Through collaboration involving the Town, UNC-Chapel Hill, and local community organizations, BIC engaged with more than 250 immigrant and refugee residents. Their input informed the development of strategies that will directly improve the everyday experiences of their communities and support the Chapel Hill 2020 goal of creating a place for everyone.

Officials say the initiative has provided the Town with resources and capacity to engage with immigrant and refugee residents in new and deeper ways than ever before. The community assessment of immigrant and refugee residents was the first of its kind for the Town. The efforts have also deepened connections with local community organizations, including more than a dozen that work with immigrant

and refugee residents. These organizations have served on the BIC steering committee, playing an active role in developing the proposed strategies and demonstrating a new level of commitment to working collaboratively with the local government to address immigrant and refugee issues.

The initiative also has provided immigrant and refugee residents with new opportunities to engage with Town government and use their voices to impact their own community. The Town has built relationships and trust with community members who previously felt no sense of connection to local government or identity as community leaders. Developing diverse community leaders to engage in Town government and work for positive community change, officials say, is perhaps their proudest achievement to date and will be carried forward in the implementation phase of BIC. To date, the Town's commitment of resources has mainly been in the form of staff time. Looking ahead, the primary challenge is expected to be identifying sufficient resources to fully implement action plans, and the Town Council will consider future funding opportunities as these plans are implemented.

Additional information is available from Sarah Viñas, Assistant Director, Chapel Hill Office of Housing and Community, at svinas@townofchapelhill.org or 919-969-5079 (habla español).