

Council plans library, talks Lot 5 Farmers hurt by summer drought

Debate future expansion proposals

BY TRACEY THERET
CITY EDITOR

The Town Council received a concept plan for the expansion of the Chapel Hill Public Library that would add 37,000 square feet to the current floor plan.

The extra space would comprise a wing on the north and on the south of the existing library at 100 Library Drive off of East Franklin Street and Estes Drive.

A new turn-around and drop-off area and 120 new parking spaces also are proposed.

After hearing the concept plan, Council member Mark Kleinschmidt compared the proposal to Seattle's Central Library, a facility he visited recently.

"They made sure it was not only a library for 2007 but 2107," Kleinschmidt said.

"That building's going to be able to shift and move and be something different 100 years from now."

Kleinschmidt stressed the importance of this adaptability for Chapel Hill's library expansion and asked planners to keep the functionality of the added spaces in mind.

Also at Monday's meeting, the Council held a public hearing on the Downtown Economic Development Initiative of Parking Lot 5, a proposed 1.92-acre assemblage that would be located between West Franklin and West Rosemary streets with Church Street along the western boundary of the site.

Liz Parham, the executive director for the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership, endorsed the plan for the Lot 5 development.

"The vision of a downtown

Chapel Hill is a sustainable, mixed-use district that builds community as a center of education and a center of arts and culture," Parham said.

Resident Bernadette Keefe grouped residents of Chapel Hill into three categories — the rebels, those who are eager for more business downtown; the no-shows, who find downtown unsafe or unappealing; and the chicken littles, who are worried about the cost of Lot 5 or the loss of the downtown "feeling" Chapel Hill currently maintains.

Keefe identified herself as a "rebel" and said she strongly supports Lot 5 and a significant transition of the downtown area.

Aaron Nelson, executive director of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, emphasized the viability of maintaining the feeling of a strong downtown even though Lot 5 may raise high-

er than most Chapel Hill residents are accustomed to.

"We'll protect the green stuff by going high and dense," Nelson said.

But Council members still had questions for Ram Development Co., the company applying for the Lot 5 project.

Questions ranged from handicapped access to sidewalk lengths to the possibility of parking on Church Street, which was nixed.

Council member Jim Ward also requested that Ram work with the police department to ensure they could properly protect the area.

The Council recessed the public hearing and will return to the topic at a meeting on June 27.

A representative from Ram said the company hopes to break ground next spring and open the spring of 2010.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Lower N.C. rain levels hit crops

BY DAVE PEARSON
STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

April showers bring May flowers, as the saying goes. But the saying about freezing weather and droughts is less well-known.

Natalia Sanchez, a statistician at the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services said much of the state is experiencing below average amounts of rain, which is compounding the effect of Easter weekend's freezing temperature.

"I think last year we were in a similar boat for a while, then we got a tropical storm," Sanchez said.

"This year we haven't experienced any big rain."

She said the western tip of the state is in an extreme drought, having received between 71 and 78 percent of normal rainfall.

Sanchez also said a wide swath of the Piedmont is abnormally dry, but added that the pockets of rain the area has received have helped a lot.

The dry weather has affected farmers significantly, Sanchez said.

In drought areas, grass hasn't grown enough to meet farmers' demand to feed their cattle. As a result, she said, farmers have to buy hay to use as feed, but the drought has also lessened the amount of hay available. Sanchez said her office has received reports of farmers selling their cattle earlier than they'd planned because the cost of feeding them is too high.

"Mostly we just need rain in the coming weeks," Sanchez said.

Peter Robinson is the man to talk to about rain.

Robinson is a professor in the UNC Department of Geography, who specializes in meteorology and climatology.

Robinson joked that all anyone wants to talk to him about is the weather before he said the bottom line with weather is "We don't know."

Robinson said water is available, just not accessible.

"We have an enormous amount of water above us," Robinson said, referring to clouds.

"But there are no mechanisms that we can use to make it rain."

Robinson said no matter how accurate storm forecasters might be, the Atlantic Basin is an enormous area.

"Even if they were right on target every year, it would still be difficult to translate what's going to hit us," Robinson said.

He said the latter part of the past century had fewer strong storms than should be expected but was quick to add that for people on the ground, the biggest issue would be whether they live where a storm hits.

Robinson also spoke about the freeze this past spring.

"Most of the eastern part of the country had a spring freeze," he said.

Robinson said it was a large system, which he defined as "a bit of weather."

One victim of that bit of weather, Sanchez said, is the peach crop.

Sanchez said North Carolina farmers are reporting that approximately 84 percent of the peaches harvested so far are of poor or very poor quality.

She also said the state's apple crop is in a similar predicament, with 81 percent being poor or very poor. Sanchez said that it is farmers, not consumers who will most feel the damaged apple crop but that the freeze affected much of the nation's peach-growing region.

"It's not going to be a good peach year."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Nifong barred, forced to resign immediately

FROM STAFF REPORTS

Mike Nifong will be able to add a new line to his resume — former district attorney.

The now infamous Duke Lacrosse case drew national media attention from its beginning and placed the Durham DA under tremendous pressure to deliver a conviction.

But in the end, it was Nifong who ended up facing judgment. In four days of witness testimony, including a tearful admission of wrongdoing by Nifong himself, the N.C. State Bar established that the Duke case had turned into a "fiasco" for which the DA bore responsibility.

During his testimony, Nifong announced that he would resign

as district attorney effective July 13, regardless of the outcome of his disciplinary hearing.

But that wasn't fast enough for Durham County Judge Orlando Hudson, who ordered Nifong's office keys and access card seized after the State Bar found the prosecutor guilty of ethics violations and revoked his law license.

The State Bar disciplinary panel said Nifong's political interest had motivated his behavior in the Duke case, pushing him to make misleading media statements and denigrating remarks about the Duke lacrosse players.

The most damning charge was that Nifong willfully withheld evidence from defense attorneys. In

failing to promptly disclose full DNA test results that were ultimately favorable to the defendants, the bar found Nifong guilty of an egregious violation of both his ethical responsibility and state law.

The decision to revoke his license effectively ends Nifong's legal career in North Carolina.

Governor Mike Easley has said he is already searching for a replacement for the Durham DA. That person will hold the position through 2008, when a new election can be held.

Easley has said he's anxious for the state to move on.

"It looks bad for North Carolina," Easley said of the case.

Meanwhile, Duke University

officials announced June 18 that they had reached a settlement with the three defendants in the case, heading off the possibility that the former lacrosse players might pursue legal action against the school.

"This past year has been hard for many people who care about Duke — for students, faculty, staff, alumni, families and friends — and for the three students and their families most of all," the university said in a written statement. "We resolve to bring the Duke family together again, and to work to protect others from similar injustices in the criminal justice system in the future."

The families of the three exonerated players might still pursue civil cases against Nifong in an effort to recoup a portion of the estimated \$3 million in legal bills they accumulated during the ordeal.

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