

NEWS

Proposed \$96 million power plant at UNC meets opposition

By SCOTT GREIG
City editor

The public hearing held by the Chapel Hill Town Council on Monday spawned debate between town residents and University officials over the environmental impact of the proposed \$96 million power plant UNC wants to build beginning in 1988.

The hearing, which took place in front of about 50 people in the Municipal Building's meeting room, was held to discuss the issuance of a special permit for construction on the plant between Cameron and McCauley streets.

Because of the debate surrounding the construction, the council voted to continue the hearing on

June 16 when it would review data on several aspects of the plant that it felt were unclear or too technically worded for anyone but an engineer to understand.

Gordon H. Rutherford, director of UNC's Planning Office, said the plans for the plant include expansion, relocation of the fuel tanks, replacement of the old boilers and construction of new exhaust stacks that could be as tall as 275 feet depending on what the Environmental Protection Agency mandates.

Rutherford also said the new plant, proposed to be in total operation by 1991, would have much better emission standards than the present plant because of more stringent EPA guidelines.

UNC officials said it was decided two years ago that a new plant was needed because the present plant was failing to provide reliable and adequate service. Officials also felt that the University, with this new plant in operation, would be able to meet more energy needs and reduce its reliance on outside sources like Duke Power.

More than 90 percent of the University's heat and about 20 percent of its electrical needs would continue to be generated on campus by the new facility if it is built. The University now buys nearly 80 percent of its electricity from Duke Power Co.

"Replacement of the power plant is a public necessity that is required to maintain the operation of the University," said a report issued by CRS Serrine, a Greenville, S.C.-based architectural firm commissioned by UNC to conduct a study of the new plant.

The recommended life span of the boiler presently in use at the plant is 30 years. Of the five boilers in operation, two are 50 years old and one is 40 years old.

Rutherford said the plans include switching from the present pulverized coal boiler system to the more modern circulatory fluidized combustion or CFC system. He said this type of operation is more common in Europe where it is accepted as highly efficient.

Councilman Arthur Werner pointed out that the CFC system

allows for freer circulation of the coal inside the combustion chamber, thus resulting in greater burning efficiency. He also said this system has fewer problems with the release of nitrous oxide and sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere. Sulfur dioxide, the main cause of acid rainfall, is not allowed to escape in large quantities because it chemically combines with limestone that is added to the system.

According to Rutherford, the CFC system would burn coal at an efficiency rate of about 70 to 80 percent, whereas the present system used by UNC burns at a rate of almost half that.

UNC officials said this increased efficiency and reliability would leave the University less reliant on Duke Power for its future energy needs. They pointed out that while UNC presently pays \$20 million a year for outside energy, it is estimated that by the year 2009 that cost could be as high as \$220 million a year.

An engineering consultant hired by the University has projected that the new plant would result in utility savings of \$237 million over 20 years.

"We have no choice but to replace the old equipment if we are to continue to supply the University with the power it needs to keep its facilities in operation," Rutherford said.

The present power plant, between Cameron and McCauley streets, was constructed in 1940. It was moved to this location from its previous one between Venable, Carroll and Phillips halls.

The new plant, according to officials, would supply an acceptable amount of UNC's energy needs until the year 2035. They added that this estimate calls for the addition of another boiler unit around 2010.

Planners said the present location was considered to be the best choice for the new plant because it has so many built-in advantages. They said these advantages, such as the train access, made it easy for other locations to be rejected with very little discussion.

Ruth Greenberg of 425 Brookside Dr. owns three lots adjacent to the power plant. She told the council

the plant has never worked toward the public good and has been harmful to the community for the past 30 years. Greenberg, the wife of a former UNC professor, said the plant is an eyesore and has done little for the surrounding area but greatly decrease the property value. She also said the promise of a buffer zone of trees and shrubs to improve the appearance of the neighborhood has never been fulfilled.

Rutherford responded to Greenberg's charges saying that although the buffer zone was not looked after as promptly as it should have been, trees have been planted three or four times, but have not grown successfully. He said the plantings will continue until they are successful.

"It shouldn't be near any residential area, much less right beside one," said Joyce Brown of 215 Vance St., whose property sits right beside the present plant.

Robert Giles, who went to UNC as an undergraduate and as a law student, strongly urged the council to oppose the permit. Giles is the joint owner of property at 413 W. Cameron Ave. and said he would stand opposed to any plans for this new plant until further and more extensive studies were done on the environmental impact and possible alternate sites.

Giles gave the International Business Machines Corp. installation at Research Triangle Park as an example of new technology that could be looked into as a possible alternative to the proposed system. IBM's system utilizes "heat pump technology" to provide its energy.

Giles also said there was much less concern from town officials about what the University did than about what someone from the private sector did.

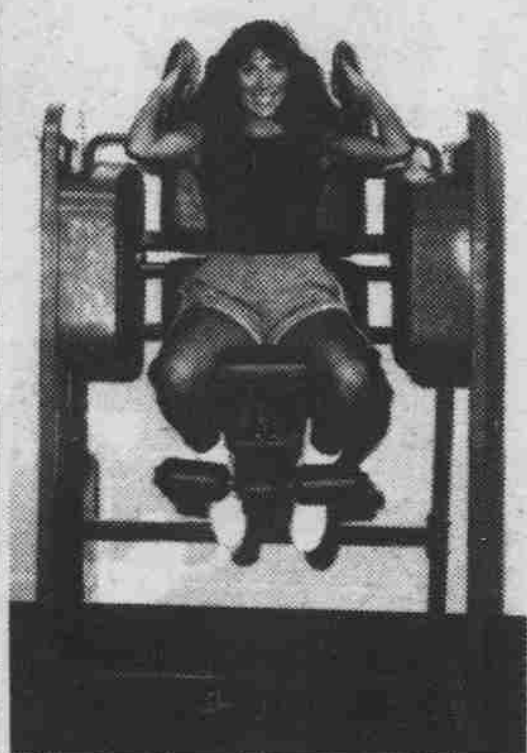
"It's a matter of money," Giles said. "How much should we expect the University to bear the burden of this project?"

Councilman Werner agreed with Giles on this point and suggested that more studies, to be funded by UNC, be conducted on several aspects of the plant, including feasibility, location, cost and environment.

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