

Community service important to Wilkerson

For the fifth in a series of articles about the Chapel Hill Town Council, The Tar Heel talked with Council Member Roosevelt Wilkerson, Jr.

By JIM GREENHILL
Staff Writer

Roosevelt Wilkerson, Jr., called "housing affordability" his number-one priority as he serves the four-year term he started in 1987 on the Chapel Hill Town Council.

Affordable housing should be aimed at people earning \$10,000 to \$15,000 per year, Wilkerson said. "This community may not want to recognize (it, but) ... there are far more persons in that economic strata than there are in the upper strata," he said.

Tandler, a development of affordable homes on Merritt Mill Road that is near completion, is a good project, Wilkerson said, "but more needs to be done."

"I'm also concerned about economic development for minorities," Wilkerson said. This means more jobs and business ownership, he said.

Racism still exists in Chapel Hill, he said. "I don't think it's mainly a thing of the past," Wilkerson said. "It's not as open as in the past, but I

still think there are some racial tensions in Chapel Hill."

Wilkerson said the University's largely segregated Greek system "may be indicative of our community." Laughing, he said that "death sometimes has a way of changing things. It just takes time for some attitudes to pass away, and that's what I mean by death — some people just will not change."

Wilkerson, 38, moved to Chapel Hill in 1983. "It's a good place to live," he said. "That's what got me here. I had three choices and this is the place I chose and this will be home for us."

The council member is married and has two children. He said that he ran for the council out of "first of all, a commitment to service, second, a desire to be involved and to lend what little expertise I might have in serving our community."

Wilkerson is also pastor of the St. Joseph Christian Methodist Episcopal Church at 510 W. Rosemary St., a job he has held for 19 years. His wife is the community schools director for the Orange County School System.

Wilkerson was born in Dayton, Ohio, and came to North Carolina to

attend Duke Divinity School although he had originally intended to attend Emory University in Atlanta, Ga. "I like the physical environment — the trees, the natural beauty of the area, which is one of the things that got me to North Carolina," he said. He lived in Raleigh, Durham and Charlotte before coming to Chapel Hill.

"The thing that appeals to me is the University environment," Wilkerson said. "A good academic environment sets the tone for the community to be a good quality community."

The relationship between the town and the University has "definitely improved," Wilkerson said, a fact he attributed to "(Chancellor Hardin's) willingness to listen to the issues that are brought about by the University that have a direct impact on the town."

The student liaison to the town council is a good idea that must stand the test of time, Wilkerson said. "I don't think it would be right to not listen to student concerns. The stu-

dent population is a very important part of the fabric of Chapel Hill."

Asked about the issue of development, Wilkerson said "the key to providing good, sound development in Chapel Hill or any community must be environmental sensitivity, aesthetic sensitivity."

But there's a need for balance, he said.

"It's tough, and sometimes developers catch a lot of grief that's undeserved," Wilkerson said. "I don't think walking through the application process should be easy, but I do think that sometimes developers get caught up in emotional issues and sometimes political decisions are made instead of valid planning issues."

On the controversy surrounding the proposed \$100 million Gateway shopping mall and office development, Wilkerson said "in terms of a mixed-use project, (it) comes close to meeting the criteria established by the council (but the) development initially came in with too much de-

tail." Wilkerson is also looking at future problems the town may face. He said he is worried by "the leveling off of the growth rate, which will have an impact on our budget over the next three to five years."

Health costs are an emerging issue, too, he said. Wilkerson said the cost of providing the town's employees with health insurance increased 50 percent in the 1989-1990 budget, and may increase 30 percent more in the 1990-1991 budget.

"How do we meet the revenue shortfalls to cover those increases?" he asked.

The role of the town council is "providing guidelines or policy for meeting the growth demands of the town," Wilkerson said. "Whereas individual citizens may just look at one piece of the pie, I think the council's responsibility is to look at a broad perspective, without regard for a council member's own biases."

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Seating

seats, but we want to leave our options open," Frye said.

Once the seats are installed, Elliot and Frye will work to determine where the additional student seats will be located. "By the time school starts, I feel confident we'll have some definite idea," Elliot said.

"My goal is to retain student seats in a student section," Frye said. "It's possible that we could sit in other

areas that would make an actual block of students."

Plans to provide even more student seats by scaling down seats in rows M through AA were also considered by athletic department officials, but officials were hesitant because of the cost and because of possible damage to the structure of the Smith Center.

"This has become a second prior-

ity," Elliot said. "Right now we're interested in doing things that can be done expediently."

Officials will continue to research that plan and will decide by the spring of 1990 if it is feasible, he said.

"The athletic department is willing to talk about it, and that is positive," Frye said.

Elliot stressed that renovations will not affect current seatholders. "People who sat in certain seats will not be affected by reduction in the size of their seats or the elimination of their seats," he said.

Members of the press, many of whom are University sports information staff members, who normally sat in the press boxes, will be accommodated elsewhere. "We are committed to giving the press adequate work space," Elliot said.



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