

Police to Receive Technological Upgrades

The Chapel Hill Police Department received a federal grant to improve its computer network.

By NISHANT GARG
Staff Writer

In an attempt to address lagging technological know-how, the Chapel Hill Police Department has embarked on a project that would enable it to get rid of existing ailments.

The U.S. Department of Justice approved a \$65,737 federal grant last year for the police department to resolve some of the problems that plague its computer system.

Police spokeswoman Jane Cousins

said the block grant funds would be used to upgrade the computer information network.

"The federal grants have been earmarked for technological improvement," Cousins said.

"The police department submitted an application (to the federal government) in July 1999."

The improvements will address problems such as the insecurity of officers with existing technology, the loss of mugshots in databases and the lack of effective communication between patrolling vehicles.

Department officials said they planned to accomplish these goals by replacing the records management software and installing laptop computers called mobile data terminals in traffic enforcement vehicles.

The existing software has caused a great deal of deliberation in the Chapel Hill Police Department since early 1999, when frequent breakdowns in the system began hampering work efficiency, Cousins said.

The funds will not be available until the Chapel Hill Town Council authorizes the acceptance of the grant and provides a local match of 10 percent from the town.

Council member Pat Evans said she anticipated that the contribution from the town would be approved as part of the regular budget.

"The match has to be a part of the budget - probably the police budget," Evans said.

Cousins said the grant would also be used to install laptops that connect the police department to the state informa-

tion network and the police department records program.

The laptops would also be used for downloading police reports directly into the police department database.

Major Gregg Jarvis said he expected the cost of the project to be about \$400,000.

Cousins said she anticipated positive results from the implementation and use of the new technology.

"The project would be beneficial in increasing officer safety," she said. "(Officers) will be able to retrieve information immediately."

"They will be providing service to citizens by quickly responding in the patrolling area."

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BUDGET

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plus funds and cut spending. Hunt redirected \$72 million originally intended for capital improvements within the UNC-system and requested a 1 percent spending freeze for all state departments.

As a result of these actions, Hunt was able to gather \$836 million in state flood relief funds.

Following Hunt's decisions, federal representatives sent \$2.2 billion in emergency aid.

But despite hefty federal support, Hurricane Floyd has drained North Carolina's rainy day fund, an appropriation originally intended to make sure the General Assembly always had a balance for its expenditures.

In addition to Hurricane Floyd, factors in North Carolina's revenue shortage include tax-related court decisions and tax cuts made by the General Assembly.

Following suits by N.C. residents, the state Supreme Court declared two taxes to be unconstitutional and ordered much of the revenue collected from the taxes to be repaid.

The intangibles tax, collected since 1937, was overturned in 1997, while an income tax on retirement benefits, collected since 1949, was overturned in 1998.

As a result, the General Assembly must now endure the perpetual loss of about \$250 million in annual revenue, as well as repay \$1.2 billion already collected. The final balance of the repayment, about \$640 million, is due this year and must be appropriated in the next session of the General Assembly.

On top of problems created by the hurricane and the court rulings, a bipartisan decision to cut taxes is leaving representatives considerably less revenue to allocate.

Proposed by Republicans and backed by Hunt, the General Assembly passed tax cuts five years ago, when budget surpluses seemed to suggest that the state

was collecting too much money. Although the state is continuing to expand old programs and develop new ones such as Smart Start, the N.C. budget must now reflect the decision to trim \$1.5 billion in taxes.

"There have been significant tax reductions in recent years, and (the cuts) have had the effect of impairing the state's ability to meet its obligations," BOG member John Sanders said.

Reduced revenue and additional expenses will result in major funding difficulties in the upcoming legislative session. There, representatives must balance the budget for the 1999-2000 fiscal year and discuss requests for additional appropriations, such as the BOG's financial aid and capital funding packages.

The General Assembly is prohibited by the N.C. Constitution from approving a budget that incurs a deficit, so every new appropriation must fit within the state's projected revenue.

Jim Johnston, director of the General Assembly's fiscal research division, said he remained optimistic about the missing funds.

"We'll have to delay our sales tax estimate until late April, much later than normal," he said.

"But over the long haul, during the next year, we'll gain it back - just not by the end of the month."

Legislators are aware of this year's tight budget, but many remain confident they can handle any problems that will arise. "We will balance the budget," said Sen. Beverly Perdue, D-Carteret. "We've been doing it, and we know how."

Rep. Charlotte Gardner, R-Rowan, said limiting spending on new projects would probably be the only way to balance this year's budget.

"(The budget) is not a deficit, but there's just not going to be a lot of money to cover new things," she said.

"I think new appropriations will be few and far between."

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PROFESSOR

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did say it several times," Greene said. "He also designed the program so he could tell if we were cheating."

She said the professor altered the answers so he would be able to distinguish his work from that of his students.

Greene said the class had no respect for the visiting professor, and students made no attempt to hide their contempt

for the professor.

"It was definitely clear the students disrespected him."

Stavis said this was a highly unusual situation that needed to be handled with speed and care for the benefit of both the college and the students.

"The primary concern is to move through the process quickly and as thorough and fair as possible."

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LANDFILL

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zoning as it was stated in the public hearing a couple of weeks ago," he said. "I think this is a step in the right direction."

Ward said council members must now find a new site that would suit the county before the ownership of the landfill and waste disposal transfer from Chapel Hill to the county could be completed.

"If we're going to say no to the commissioners, we need to be committed to finding a site somewhere else," he said.

However, Ward said it was premature to make a commitment to a site in the Eubanks Road area.

Ward said the Greene Tract had more appropriate uses, including a recreational area, mixed-use development and even a possible school site.

Council member Joyce Brown said she hoped the decision would not prolong the implementation of the transfer.

"I don't see why this should slow it down," she said.

"I hope that it won't."

Council member Kevin Foy said the commissioners' decision would have positive results for the area.

"This will go a long way towards bringing a resolution," he said.

Chapel Hill Mayor Rosemary Waldorf said she was very pleased with the Board of Commissioners' decision, but that Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Hillsborough must commit to work with the board to decide what 60-acre site would be transferred to the county.

Waldorf said all parties must agree to any revisions in the deal, evaluate a Greene Tract survey and decide on a site to be transferred to the county before the responsibility of waste management could be shifted.

"If we get all those things done by no later than the end of this month, then the handover can occur on April 17."

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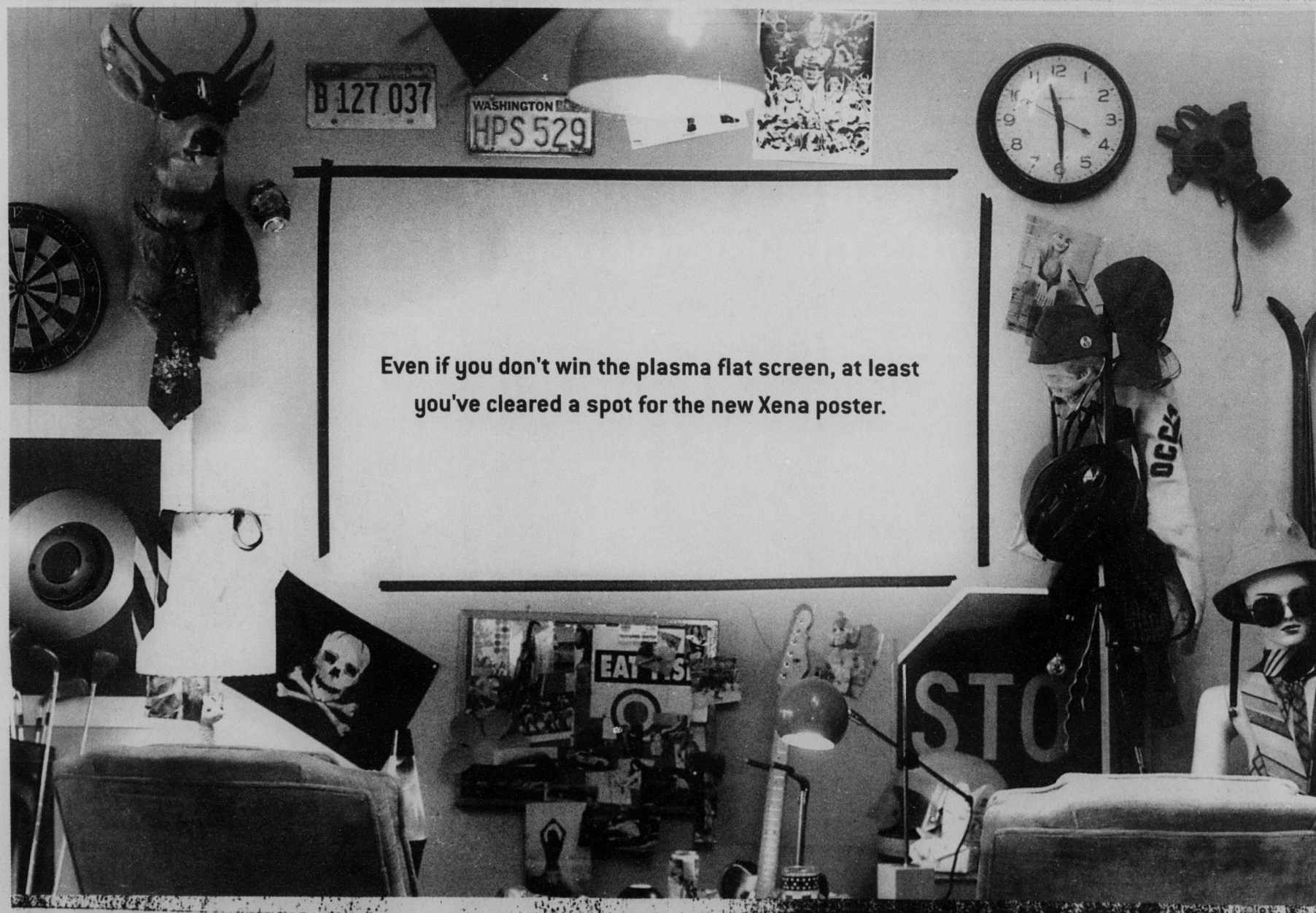
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