

DEVELOPMENT
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health center that is just now in the midst of construction.

Development as a whole continues to hit a nerve in Chapel Hill as officials struggle to keep the town's close-knit, village atmosphere.

Last June, Chapel Hill Mayor Rosemary Waldorf sparred off with council members concerning a developer's plan to widen a section of N.C. 54.

One month later, despite the 8-1 decision by the council giving the go-ahead for an office building in Meadowmont, debate over a proposed parking lot sparked dissension from developers.

But Meadowmont does not stand as the sole point of contention in the issue of local development.

In January, the council put the brakes on a proposal submitted by a BP Gas Station located on the corner of Airport Road and Critz Drive to build a new convenience mart.

While the gas station's owner wanted to expand, the council struck down the proposal, citing that there was not a need for another convenience market.

Part of the controversy stems from questions that residents hold about how much control developers exert in the area's zoning process.

The same complaints aired at a public hearing during the original Meadowmont decision still remain on the minds of local residents.

Philip Goodman, of 112 Nottingham Dr., said developers proposed and won approval for projects in recent years that ignored the town's original Comprehensive Plan.

The plan, initially enacted by the council in 1989 and revised on two separate occasions since then, established a vision for growth in Chapel Hill including the preservation of the town's natural setting, the creation of affordable housing and the completion of expansive sidewalk/bikeway systems.

"There is no respect for what had been voted in as the Comprehensive

Plan in Chapel Hill," Goodman said. "Developers are basically running how development goes in this town. They make the Comprehensive Plan fit their development. If you change the plan every few years, you cease to have a need for that plan."

Despite these claims, Town Planning Director Roger Walden said development in Chapel Hill proved a tedious venture for developers.

"The irony is, if you talk to any developer, they will tell you war stories about developing in Chapel Hill," he said. "The developing process is highly participatory here. What is a two-week process in other areas, takes six to nine months in Chapel Hill."

Town Council member Pat Evans said that because the majority of development applications must obtain approval from the council and various resident-feedback committees, the town's growth had been remarkably slow and controlled.

"Everything here basically lies in a special-use permit," she said. "When people say Chapel Hill is growing too fast, I think they mean the region is growing too fast. We've had very contained growth."

Estimates from the Planning Department gauge the town's growth at about 1.8 percent a year during the past 10 years.

Walden said such steady growth allowed the town to provide adequate infrastructure, such as water and sewer services, for future developments.

"It's a good fortune that Chapel Hill doesn't have very rapid growth," he said. "Look at Cary (which has experienced around 10 percent growth a year.) Right now they have a major water shortage."

Despite the town's well-known philosophy against rapid growth, town officials have had to contend with mon-

strous development projects that have taken years to settle.

In 1992, the town authorized zoning for a 300-acre mixed-use development dubbed Southern Village which sits off N.C. 54.

While construction began in 1994 and residents started moving to the village in 1995, officials estimate the development is nearing capacity at 2,400 people and 800 households.

D.R. Bryan, a Southern Village developer, said the project was an early example of Smart Growth, a government initiative that seeks to reduce the negative effects of expansion.

"The town said in 1992 they didn't want suburban sprawl," Bryan said. "We wanted to make a pedestrian-friendly

place where people can go to the grocery store without getting into their cars."

Bryan said he hoped the village's compact design would cut significantly the number of daily trips each resident made,

thereby reducing overall traffic on outlying highways. "The average family takes 12 trips a day," he said. "We want to take out half of those trips."

Evans said that because residents had immediate access to services in the complex, such as a day-care center, a movie theater and a swim and tennis club, the village reduced overall traffic congestion on N.C. 54. She also said the dense growth of Southern Village preserved the rural feel of the town.

"Southern Village is a neighborhood development that encourages urban boundaries," she said. "It's a way of making wise use of the land and redirecting the impact of growth."

But because of limited available property in the area, large-scale projects like Southern Village and Meadowmont will probably not be included in the town's future development plans.

Because Chapel Hill has less than 10

acres of undeveloped land remaining, Walden said major mixed-use developments were unlikely in the future.

"You need a big piece of land in order to do (developments like Southern Village)," he said. "(Meadowmont and Southern Village) were the last two pieces of land like that, so you probably won't be seeing that kind of development anymore."

But Carrboro officials disagree, saying that dense developments, especially in the downtown area, are the future of the town's anticipated growth.

Alderman Allen Spalt said Carrboro needed to establish a downtown area that made wise use of space and included a collection of stores and services. He said several buildings in the present downtown area were only one or two stories high and created unnecessary automobile congestion.

"I would like to create a very compact downtown area that would not substantially develop any new residential area," he said. "If we don't do something like this, we will suffer in the long run."

However, because of anticipated high capital costs, Spalt said the project could not be financed by the town alone.

"We're a small town with a small budget," he said. "There's no way the town can finance this (plan). It has to be done with private capital if it's going to be done at all."

Like Carrboro's present efforts, Chapel Hill has proven to be committed to downtown development in the past — despite conventional wisdom that would suggest otherwise, said Town Council Member Bill Strom.

Chapel Hill has benefited from unprecedented growth in the face of criticism that the town's strict ordinances discouraged development, he said.

"I think there are elements of Chapel Hill that are village-like," he said. "But at 50,000 (people), we are far past being a village. We've spread and grown significantly since yesteryear. We are more like a small urban environment."

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

A Week for Greeks

UNC Greeks are uniting this week as they sponsor six days of events aimed to promote unity among University chapters, combined with social events and community service.

All week: Sorority and fraternity members post banners at their local houses to show their spirit during Greek Week.

Today: Dinner Swap between members of National Pan Hellenic Council, Panhellenic Council and Interfraternity Council members.

Thursday: IFC Greeks from UNC and Duke University will challenge each other in a basketball game.

Thursday: Gotham Night for all UNC Greeks.

Friday: NPHC Greeks will teach IFC Greeks the insides of stepping in the Pit.

Saturday: Alpha Greek Freak — International Step Show.

GREEK WEEK

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syncing and dancing.

Friday, NPHC Greeks will teach IFC and Panhellenic Greeks some of the tricks of stepping in the Pit. The idea came from a Greek retreat earlier in the year to emphasize interracial communication, Binder said.

Saturday marks the annual Alpha Greek Freak, an invitational step show in which East Coast university Greeks compete in Carmichael Auditorium. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the event's sponsor, hopes to encourage IFC and Panhellenic groups to attend with free tickets. \$1,000 will be awarded to both the male and female team winners. The event is expected to attract 7,000 spectators, Binder said.

Binder said his hope for the week was

to eliminate the stereotypes that circle the campus concerning the Greek community. "When you say 'Greeks,' a lot of people think white Greeks," he said. "And we have white Greeks, but we also have all these other Greeks."

In addition to the 32 predominantly white Greek fraternities and sororities, the Greek community is comprised of eight predominantly black fraternities and sororities and eight specialty groups, including the first Asian American sorority in the nation, Binder said.

Chi Psi fraternity member Tripp Frey, a freshman from East Grand Rapids, Mich., said mixing of fraternities would be helpful to the members' overall behavior. "Interaction among fraternities will enhance Greeks, creating better friendship and camaraderie."

The University Editor can be reached at udesk@unc.edu.

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SUNDAY Bartender's Choice
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Binge drinking blows.

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