

New Hotel Will Only Help Town

A proposed addition to West Franklin Street could breathe new life into the downtown area.

And for once, there seems to be broad support for new construction.

Last week, the Chapel Hill Town Council held a public hearing on The Franklin, a five-story, 66-room hotel slated to be built across from Ham's, where the abandoned Trailways Bus Station currently sits. The bus station was purchased last year by Richard and Robert Capps of Greenville for \$795,000. The Capps also own hotels in Greensboro, Jacksonville and Greenville.

A surprising number, from a broad range of groups, spoke in favor of the construction project at the meeting.

The Downtown Commission and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce voiced support, as well as residents of the Northside District and the historic district to the south of West Franklin Street.

Getting residents and business leaders to agree on the fate of downtown Chapel Hill is far from an all-too-common occurrence.

But there is good reason to welcome a business like The Franklin to West Franklin Street.

A hotel located at the heart of the downtown area is certain to be a boost for local businesses — especially eateries such as the Carolina Brewery, Four Eleven West, 23 and Pyewackett Restaurant.

Unlike many higher-class hotels and inns, The Franklin will not have a restaurant within its walls. That means the occupants of those 66 rooms will have to venture out to eat — and luckily Franklin Street is not low on options for hungry visitors.

In fact, The Franklin's passing on an internal restaurant probably is a large reason behind the vocal support from local businesses.

Also, retail shops will undoubtedly benefit from the added foot traffic up and down the street.

So business owners have a vested interest in seeing a hotel added to the downtown landscape.

But what do residents have to gain? One obvious benefit is the addition of jobs at the hotel that are easily accessible by mass transit.

Secondly, hotel planners have been careful about drawing up plans for a structure that doesn't superimpose itself, or "drown out," surrounding areas. After all, a five-story building on Franklin Street could appear monstrous beside small one- and two-story shops.

To counter that fear, the upper floors of The Franklin will be tiered, so that only the first two floors are seen by pedestrians.

In addition, two levels of parking will be built below the hotel. That way, there will not be an extra burden on the already-cramped parking situation downtown and a mid-sized parking lot will not lower the area's aesthetic quality.

These considerations by the hotel planners helped win over local residents.

And let's face it: almost anything would be better on Franklin Street than the current abandoned bus station.

I don't believe that residents, businesses or the Town Council should worry about the new hotel being an eyesore either.

Number one, it's catering to the wealthier set — so aesthetic quality (both within and outside) will be important.

Also, designers have said that the structure will be brick and reconstituted stone, with wooden windows. So it will fit right in with the architecture of the University and surrounding area.

All in all, the proposal seems to be a good mix of much-needed business development, balanced with smart growth planning. This is the type of "smart construction" that both Chapel Hill and Carrboro should continue to pursue as both towns grow in the coming years.

The proposal will come up for a vote before the Town Council on Nov. 12. If approved, The Franklin could be up and running as soon as summer 2003.

Hopefully, I'll come back a few years from now as a wealthy land and be able to afford staying there ...



JONATHAN CHANEY
CITY COLUMNIST

Campus Officials Respond to Mail Threats

DPS officials have received numerous phone calls about suspicious mail, but so far all have proved harmless.

By JOHN FRANK
Staff Writer

UNC Mail Services officials said Tuesday that they have not identified any packages as potentially harmful,

despite the adoption of strict guidelines.

But the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Environment, Health and Safety have responded to about 20 emergency calls on campus regarding suspicious mail in the last week.

In every case, the DPS officers determined there was no credible threat.

University Mail Services, the sole recipient of all University mail, said regardless of the precautions it takes, its system is not foolproof.

"We are doing our best to screen and

watch for suspicious packages, but it is incumbent on faculty and staff to be alert," said Tommy Brickhouse, manager of University Mail Services.

EHS Director Peter Reinhardt said the reports of suspicious mail were made by faculty, staff and students.

The deans' offices at the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Medicine each received two of the 20 suspicious pieces of mail last Wednesday.

Reinhardt said people are being cautious about the mail they receive in light of

the recent anthrax scares.

"We are cautious because we never know when it may be a credible threat," Reinhardt said.

University Mail Services staff are also being careful to look for "red flags" when manually sorting mail, Brickhouse said.

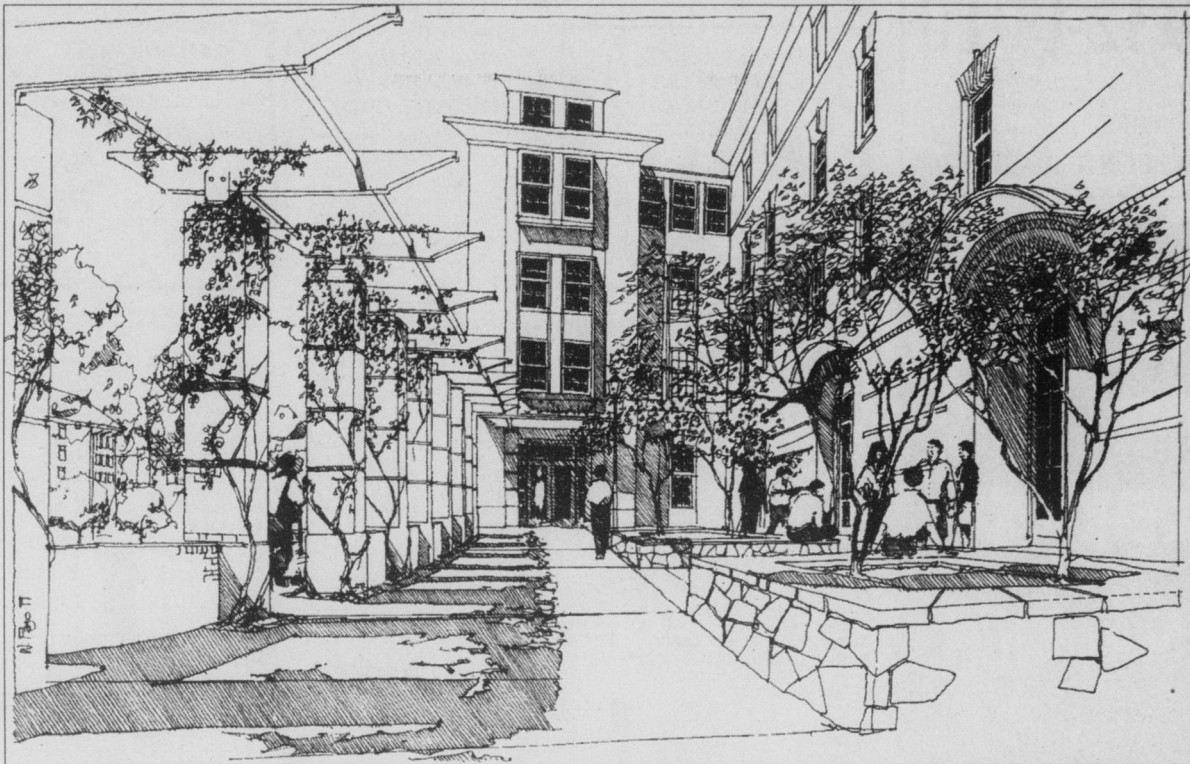
The service's five main indicators to identify a suspicious package are the lack of a return address, handwritten mailing addresses, irregular or bulky packaging, excessive postage and items marked "personal" or "confidential."

Brickhouse said the lack of a return address, the typewritten address labels and the incorrect addressee on the packages received by the two deans' offices should have been caught by University Mail Services.

"They just slipped through," he said.

All faculty and staff on campus also received an e-mail from the DPS, EHS and University Mail Services last week, informing them of safety precautions to

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SKETCH COURTESY OF HANBURY EVANS ARCHITECTS

The construction of four new residence halls on South Campus is meant to alleviate strain as UNC embarks on implementing its Development Plan. The sketch above is an artist's conception used for planning the new buildings, which are close to completion (below).

Plan Mandates Housing for More Students

By MATT VISER
Senior Writer

The University plans to add 3,300 more students to UNC's campus during the next eight to 10 years.

Some have disputed whether the University needs to grow at such a rate.

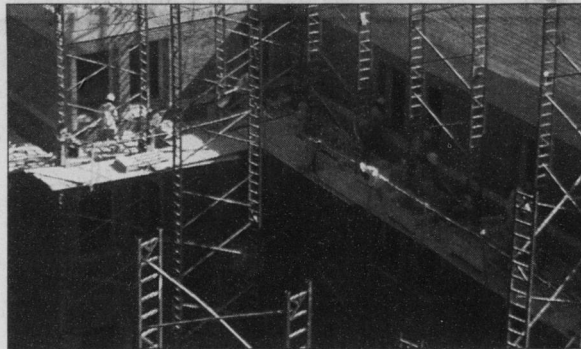
But University officials say they have a plan to accommodate all additional students.

The lingering discussion has been made somewhat moot by the town's passing of UNC's Development Plan on Oct. 3.

Plans to accommodate new students now have been given the green light.

A Bed for Every Head

The late Chancellor Michael Hooker developed a plan in 1998 for "a bed for every head." His mission was to provide a residence for every new student



DITH/KATIE RIGGAN

enrolled at UNC.

Hooker's plan was part of a deal made with town officials that aimed to combat a high cost of living in Chapel Hill.

In 2000, the average house in Chapel Hill sold for \$311,000, almost twice as much as a home in Durham.

Town officials worried that the University's growth would only add to students' demand for housing in Chapel Hill, further inflating the cost of living.

But UNC officials were aware of the town's concerns and took them into consideration when devising plans for

the largest growth project Chapel Hill and the University have ever seen.

"We didn't want to push more students into the community," said Sue Kitchen, vice chancellor for student affairs.

"When we first started talking about enrollment, members of the town were very adamant about us accommodating that growth on campus."

More Space for More Students

During the next 10 years, students will be shuffled repeatedly to accommodate a

complex housing plan for South Campus.

Four residence halls, the construction of which is in progress, will be completed by spring 2002, and students will begin moving in for the fall 2002 semester.

Four rooms will be suite-style with two double bedrooms sharing a semi-private bathroom. The residence halls will provide 900 more beds for undergraduate students.

Although the four residence halls were not part of the Development Plan, Karen Geer, administrative officer of facility planning, said the new residence halls will facilitate the progress of the Development Plan.

"They're almost finished," she said. "Only the buildings that are going to be built from now forward are in the Development Plan, but (the residence halls are) going to house a thousand students."

"They will start the migration of students to the South Campus."

Next, a new married student housing complex will be built in the Baity Hill area. Eleven three-story buildings will be constructed and eventually will replace the Odum Village apartments. University officials say the 50-year-old apartments are in dire need of repair.

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Building for the Future

A four-part series examining UNC's Development Plan

- Oct. 10: Analysis
- Oct. 17: Transit
- Today: Housing
- Oct. 31: Additions

More Riser Seating Unlikely

By JESSICA SLEEP
Staff Writer

Officials say architectural and seating difficulties within the Smith Center prevent the possibility of building additional risers in the near future.

Although they have explored the possibility of constructing a new riser section under the west end of the basketball court, officials say it is not a feasible option for the upcoming basketball season.

"Right now we don't have the capabilities to do risers on the other end," said Clint Gwaltney, director of ticket operations.

Gwaltney explained that constructing new risers is very difficult logistically because the west end of the Smith Center is configured differently than the east end, where the risers now stand.

Gwaltney said the two exit tunnels located on the east end made it easier to construct risers last year because the seats were already elevated, so people were able to see the court over students standing in the risers.

But he said the seats located in the west end are not elevated, so any students standing in riser sections would

obstruct the view of people seated in the corners near the basketball court.

Gwaltney said the architect who built last year's risers and the Smith Center also assessed the physical possibilities of building new risers on the west end, but concluded that constructing new risers would be much tougher logistically.

Steve Kirschner, director of sports information, said he doesn't think constructing new risers will be an option.

Kirschner said one problem with building new risers is that there are already people sitting in the area where the risers would be built.

Kirschner said building risers last year was easier because there were more empty seats in the Smith Center, so officials were able to move people around to make room for the risers. But he said that this year there is no extra space to relocate people who already have tickets behind the west basketball goal.

Carolina Athletic Association President Reid Chaney said that in order to construct the risers last year, 50 to 60 alumni had to be moved to make room for the risers.

But he said to put risers on the west end of the basketball court, about 180 to 190 alumni would have to be relocated.

Chaney also said finding comparable seating for those alumni is difficult because most of them have seats near the basket.

Chaney said to build new risers, alumni would have to lend their support. "Even if we can get 150 alumni to change their seats, if we don't get the other thirty we need, then we can't build the risers," he said.

Chaney said students also play a role in whether the risers can be constructed. He said the demand for additional risers must be supported by adequate student attendance at the games. With the exception of the Duke University game last year, not all student tickets were distributed for every home game, he said.

"When we try to get more student seating and create more risers, it hurts our chances when there are student tickets left over after each game," he said.

But Chaney said new risers are still a possibility in the future, even though there won't be any constructed this year.

"Yes, I definitely do believe it's still a possibility," he said. "But it can't happen overnight."

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Town May Incorporate Tract in Transit Plans

By ANGIE NEWSOME
Staff Writer

Concerns about future traffic problems prompted town officials Monday to address the impact of UNC's proposed Horace Williams development on regional transportation plans.

The Chapel Hill Town Council voted to continue participating in a regional transportation study and instructed town staff to develop a process to connect regional mass transit plans to the future Horace Williams development.

No plans now directly link the tract to a proposed corridor that would connect areas of the Triangle with various forms of mass transit.

Council member Kevin Foy said it was important to consider the tract when planning the corridor.

In 1995 the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Transportation Advisory Committee initiated a study of how to plan the corridor, which recommends transit options like bus lanes, diesel rail and light rail.

Town Manager Cal Horton said the

second phase of the study, which examines transit improvements between Durham and Chapel Hill, started in 1999.

The regional transportation plan details most area transportation plans but does not focus on specifics with the Horace Williams tract.

"The plan was too far along to add Horace Williams," said council member Bill Strom.

The Horace Williams tract is a 979-acre parcel of land north of main campus that is slated for development under the University's Master Plan, a 50-year guide for development and growth.

UNC wants to house research and residential facilities as well as commercial development on the tract.

Plans include proposals for 1,900 residential units. The plan also predicts 45,000 daily auto trips around the development.

Mayor Rosemary Waldorf also urged consideration of the tract's impact on regional transit planning

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