

Gordon to Connect Board, Schools

Conflict over site of 3rd high school

By MARY MCGUIRT
Staff Writer

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Board of Education addressed concerns from the Orange County Board of Commissioners by announcing Monday night the appointment of Commissioner Alice Gordon as liaison to the commissioners in the search for a site for the system's third high school.

The appointment of Gordon was influenced by earlier comments made by commissioners Margaret Brown and Barry Jacobs regarding their exclusion from discussions about the possible use of Southern Park as a site for the new school.

"It strikes me as an odd way to do business," Jacobs said, addressing the issue. "It's not that I don't trust them, it's just that the process could be inclusive."

After the announcement was made, Etta Pisano, co-chairwoman of the school board's redistricting committee, urged the board to continue working with the commissioners. "I hope you will ask for Gordon's help," she said. "It can be a win-win situation."

The site for Chapel Hill's third high school, originally intended to be completed by 2005, has yet to be determined.

Steve Scroggs, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools assistant superintendent for support services, said that although the high school was supposed to be completed within two years, the search for a site is ongoing.

"We're not going to have a third high school in 2005. It's not going to happen," he said, adding that the school could be finished by 2006.

Scroggs said CHCCS has about \$30 million to work with in building the school.

The two areas that originally were proposed as sites for the school are located on Rockhaven Road and Old Lystra Road.

Scroggs said that the estimated cost for construction on Rockhaven Road would be about \$5.2 million and that construction on the Old Lystra site would cost about \$4.75 million, not including potential additional costs.

Proposals to build the new school at the Southern Park site were made after residents recognized a need for a high school in the southern part of town. "We already have two high schools in the northern part," Pisano said.

Original plans for Southern Park were designed to use the entire 73-acre area,

located in the vicinity of Dogwood Acres, to build a park for the town of Chapel Hill.

However, Scroggs presented the possibility of dividing the area into four segments and building the high school on a 20-acre portion of the site. He went on to say there wasn't a "game plan" yet.

When considering the Southern Park site, Scroggs said, the main area of focus should be on how much could be built there and how much of the park would remain.

Also, he said, building a school in the park would require sharing infrastructure, such as parking lots and roads, with the park and other businesses.

Upon conclusion of this discussion Monday night, residents were allowed to voice their opinions about the issue.

Many said they were frustrated with problems in communication with the town and the school board.

Pisano agreed and said she thought the problems were slowing down the process.

The issue was tabled for further discussion. The school board next meets Feb. 6 at the Chapel Hill Town Hall.

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

"We're not going to have a third high school in 2005. It's not going to happen."

STEVE SCROGGS
CHCCS Assistant Superintendent

Orange School Board Accepts Timetable to Find New Leader

Agenda to guide 2nd superintendent hunt

By JESSA GIROUX
Staff Writer

The Orange County Board of Education has finalized an improved schedule for conducting its second search for a new superintendent.

The initial search began in September after former Superintendent Randy Bridges left to take another superintendent position in South Carolina.

The search restarted after a Dec. 21 meeting in which the board was "divided" about what the search's outcome should be, said Allison Schafer, legal counsel and director of policy for the North Carolina School Boards Association. The board first made its decision in a closed-door session that, some residents later argued, was illegal under the N.C. Open Meetings Law. Advertising costs of \$250 for the open position are the only additional fees for the new search.

Applications for the position are due Feb. 12, after which the board will meet to discuss candidates and to conduct interviews. The board will meet again March 18 to narrow the candidate field, and it

plans to make its final selection April 16.

A group of parents arrived at a Jan. 6 board meeting to voice its support for Bert L'Homme, one of the original superintendent candidates, in the new search.

L'Homme, who is Durham County Schools' associate superintendent for instruction, and Jeanie Freshcorn, associate superintendent for Scotland County Schools, were the school board's original candidates.

But L'Homme has since decided not to apply for the position a second time.

The parents expressed their desire to be a larger part of the selection process and hoped that there would not be a second search. A community forum did not occur for the first superintendent search, and "people said they didn't know the candidates," said school board Chairwoman Brenda Stephens.

This time, the board added a much-welcomed community forum to its search. The forum is planned for April 14. "Whenever there's official board response to the media, we want everyone to adhere to it this time," Stephens said.

Parent Jackie Wolfe, a L'Homme supporter, said she would "keep an open mind" about the future candidates.

Wolfe said that she remains optimistic about the next set of candidates and that the selection process "will probably be improved, but I'm not sure it'll result in a better candidate."

"The man for the job is gone," she said.

The community's need to have a voice through the planned forum and the need for a selection timeline were main topics of discussion at the Jan. 21 meeting, said Anne D'Annunzio, Orange County Schools spokeswoman.

Among the issues discussed at the meeting was Schafer's suggestion that board members hear comments from the public and address them at future meetings.

Board members hope the organization and conciseness of the search's schedule will make it more successful.

In addition to greater emphasis on public feedback, board member Delores Simpson said, the board needs "to cover every avenue so that there will not be any doubt for what we want for a superintendent or not want for a superintendent."

Simpson said she believes that "ironing out all the fine points and then coming up with a consensus" will be the effective approach in improving the board's search.

"We probably rushed (the first search) too much," said Simpson, even though she believes that the board took all the appropriate steps in interviewing candidates in its last search.

Board officials hope to improve the fairness of the interviews as well. Stephens said the board wants to assure that "everyone will have an equitable interview."

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