

CAROLINA NORTH

Plenty of time left for debate

The idea of developing UNC's massive Horace Williams tract off of Airport Road has been kicked around for the past few decades. Spurred by the need for space to house UNC's many growing programs, Carolina North is beginning to take shape.

UNC planners took a major step last month by unveiling plans for the first phase of development of the 975-acre property.

Groundbreaking is still years away, so the concerned citizens of Chapel Hill and Carrboro need not raise their torches and pitchforks in protest just yet.

The current plan develops only a quarter of the land in five or six phases over a 50- to 70-year period, and the first phase won't begin until 2008 at the earliest.

Every detail of the project will be the well thought out result of complex negotiations that will

WYATT DICKSON
UNC BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS COMMITTEE

include representatives of all affected entities.

For UNC to remain one of the nation's leading research institutions, it is absolutely essential that we have a place where University researchers can collaborate with partners in the private sector. It's also important that students have increased opportunity to apply their classroom knowledge in a real and meaningful way.

Carolina North will be more than a research campus. It not only will host new research facilities and administrative offices, but also will provide affordable housing and retail outlets.

What Carolina North should not and will not be is an extension of main campus.

Undergraduates should not be bused out to attend classes — and fortunately any ideas along this line have been shot down. Town officials are pushing for plans to build new public schools to stem current overcrowding.

If possible, the University should incorporate primary education facilities into its plans. This would serve to create a greater feeling of community at Carolina North and certainly would give the University better footing in its relationship with the town.

But many hurdles must be cleared before work begins. First of all, the property is not zoned for the kind of development that the satellite campus would entail. The town has zoning authority over University property — and if history is any indicator, Carolina North has the potential to spawn a political bloodbath.

A few years ago state N.C. Sen. Tony Rand, D-Cumberland, an unapologetic Tar Heel supporter, sponsored a bill that would have taken away the town's zoning authority over UNC. The zoning battle that would ensue might prove that particular attempt a mere shot across the town's bow.

There is also the issue of the Horace Williams Airport that currently occupies the southern portion of the property.

The airport is scheduled to close in January 2005, but that's not likely. The Area Health Education Center, the airport's primary user, brings in millions of dollars each year to UNC Hospitals. Closing the airport would threaten the vitality of this benchmark program.

The airport also is used by influential UNC alumni with deep pockets and connections to the state legislature. So shutting down the facility is not an easy thing to do, as Chancellor Moeser soon learned when he arrived.

Carolina North is a much needed project that will strengthen UNC's reputation as a first-rate research university. But planners need to take a step back and realize the airport shouldn't and needn't be sacrificed. There is more than enough space for both on the Horace Williams property.

Contact Wyatt Dickson, a member of UNC's Building and Grounds Committee, at wddickson@email.unc.edu.

Another stage has begun in the long history of relations between UNC and the two towns that co-exist with the University.

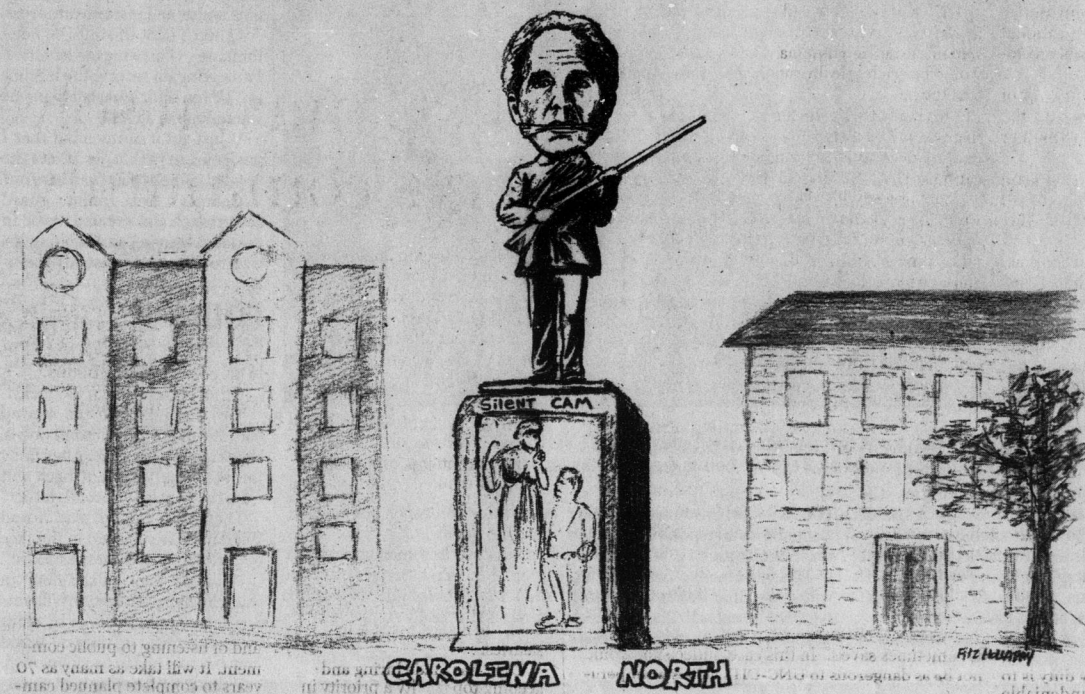
At the center of the action is the Horace Williams tract, a significant portion of which has been earmarked as the foundation for Carolina North: UNC's future satellite campus.

From a University standpoint, Carolina North represents progress. It is a giant, 240-acre symbol of UNC's drive to expand its academic boundaries as one of the nation's top centers of higher education.

From the perspective of many residents of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, the proposed satellite campus becomes something else entirely: a potential 240-acre threat to the personality and tradition of the area.

People on both sides of the issue have interests to protect, and compromise is essential. Without the blessing of the governing body for each town, University officials' dream of a satellite campus won't become a reality.

EDITORIAL CARTOON



By Fitz Holladay, wfhollad@email.unc.edu

Project would imperil towns

I hope that the University will take some time to think about the Chapel Hill that would house Carolina North.

Will this community still be as attractive to faculty, staff and students if it is no longer called "the Southern part of Heaven" but "the northwestern part of Research Triangle Park" instead?

The attitude of UNC officials seems to suggest Orange County is no more than a host organism for its future research campus.

This kind of thinking fueled RTP and the suburbs of north Raleigh and Cary, which carry lots of cash but are largely devoid of character.

I would hate to see my hometown and alma mater devolve into the sprawl that congests the rest of the Triangle. We have other problems here, such as the skyrocketing price of housing.

This partially is due to the slow

RUBY SINREICH
EDITOR, ORANGEPOLITICS.ORG

pace of UNC's construction of student housing, but it's also because of all the things that make Chapel Hill unique in this region: healthy downtown, walkable urban areas, environmentally sensitive neighborhoods, diverse intellectual culture, support for artists and musicians, thoughtful community leaders and a little southern charm.

These are the things that give us a sense of community and make the University so inviting.

Looking at the current proposal for Carolina North, it appears that planners ignored the report of the town's Horace Williams Citizens Committee.

They also brushed aside its own plan, developed in 1997 by representatives from the University and the town — myself included.

One key element of that plan was the University's voluntary agreement to limit the amount of development not to exceed the transportation capacity of the surrounding area. This meant that until effective transit was in place, not too much would be built.

This was based on the assumption that no one would want to work, study or live in a place surrounded by gridlock and pollution. In my opinion, it is still a false assumption and indicator of the University's dependence on the quality of life in Orange County.

How, then, can they logically explain 19,125 parking spaces, no designated transit (or school) facilities, no fiscal equity proposal, no dedication of open space and the phased realignment of our major east-west arterial road?

To me, this plan amounts to disregard for the health of the community. There are many laudable components of the Carolina North proposal, but they will do nothing to mitigate the severe impact of developing this campus without regard for its host organism: southern Orange County.

The towns and the University cannot thrive or excel without each other's cooperation. One's failure will be the other's demise.

The best course for the future of the entire community is for the University to collaborate with Chapel Hill and Carrboro to develop and preserve the Horace Williams property with a long-term vision, rather than the current get-rich-quick scheme.

I would suggest a joint planning process modeled on the previous UNC-Chapel Hill Planning Panel, the report of which was endorsed by both the Town and the University in 1997.

As is, the Carolina North proposal in its current form cannot form the basis of any fair or reasonable negotiation process. I fear there might not be many more crossroads at which people have any input on which path to take.

I implore UNC leaders and planners to consider the critical nature of our symbiotic relationship.

Contact Ruby Sinreich, a member of the Chapel Hill Planning Board and editor and founder of OrangePolitics.org, at rsinreich@orangepolitics.org.

Campus would signal progress for University

My head swims whenever I really think about Carolina North.

Most of my recent concerns are rooted in the here and now — graduation, finding a job, paying the rent. Sometimes it's hard to wrap my mind around the cultural impact of a development project few of us will live to see to completion.

Yet with last month's unveiling of the first draft of the development plan for the 975-acre Horace Williams tract, Carolina North has returned to the forefront of town-gown relations. Many permanent residents of Chapel Hill are deeply worried about how the new satellite campus will affect their community.

Some of their concerns are perfectly reasonable. Without carefully balancing regular commuters with improved mass transit opportunities, traffic to and from Carolina North could become, at best, a congested, teeth-grinding inconvenience.

At worst, it could be dangerous in the areas where increased traffic would funnel through neighborhoods teeming with families and young children.

These issues I can understand. But it bothers me when people look at Carolina North and ask, "Why?" Why develop the Horace Williams tract at all? Why build a new research institution here?

I'm often taken aback by these questions. Why should we build Carolina North? My knee-jerk reaction is to ask, "Why not?"

Carolina North is the future of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. UNC-CH now has a golden opportunity to help accommodate scientific and technological research that could have global benefits.

Education is the primary goal of the University, and the research facilities on the satellite campus would allow both undergraduate and graduate students to receive hands-on

MIKE GORMAN
EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER

training in job skills and research methods.

From a student's perspective, Carolina North will offer an abundance of potential internships and salaried positions a few miles from main campus.

Moving research operations to Carolina North could, in time, free main-campus facilities for undergraduate use: either increased housing or more instructional facilities.

North Carolina State University already has its Centennial Campus, a satellite campus similar in design to Carolina North. Government, private and academic workers at Centennial Campus generate a staggering amount of research, and Centennial has been a boon to N.C. State's academic life.

No, UNC-CH wouldn't lose its way without Carolina North. The University would still be a shining star in the public school constellation.

However, Carolina North does present an opportunity to rededicate and expand the University's commitment to academic excellence.

The promise of world-class research facilities coupled with affordable tuition could help to draw, even more so than today, the best and brightest minds in the world.

Critics of Carolina North want time to stand still. They want to keep life in Chapel Hill as it is now: respected but traditional.

But even I can see that time moves forward. Even I can look past the short-term worries and see that in the long run, the University must move to keep pace. Carolina North is a step forward.

Contact Mike Gorman, editorial board member, at jhgorman@email.unc.edu.

Negotiations are approaching quickly. While it's impossible to predict the outcome of these discussions and debates, some facts are clear.

One certainty is that Carolina North will provide UNC's future faculty members and students with the tools to contribute important research to the state, the country and the world.

A second certainty is that the physical presence of the satellite campus will have a noticeable impact on the surrounding communities. The possibility exists that this impact could be detrimental to the spirit of Chapel Hill and Carrboro. A third certainty is that before the first stone can be upturned, before the first clump of dirt can be dug, the two sides must come to an agreement.

We are only in the opening pages of this chapter in town-gown relations, but the conflict already is shaping up.

Contact Elliott Dube, associate editorial page editor, at dubee@email.unc.edu.

Plan is missing details about traffic, housing

When UNC unveiled its plans for Carolina North in a series of community forums last month, its slide show featured pictures of families walking their dogs and riding bikes in an idyllic setting.

How could anyone have a problem with that? Because the plans did not include details about integrating effective public transportation or affordable housing into the 50-year plan for the development of the Horace Williams tract.

I recognize UNC's need for expansion to fulfill its obligation to North Carolinians, but growth must come responsibly. It should be compatible with the goals and values that Chapel Hill and Carrboro promote.

The plans that we've seen thus far don't meet that standard and must be improved significantly.

The biggest flaw in the plan as it currently appears has to do with the lack of creative public transportation solutions. The proposed number of parking spaces — just fewer than 20,000 — is simply unacceptable.

First of all, the impact traffic levels will have on the surrounding neighborhoods will reduce the quality of life for many Chapel Hill residents.

When interstate-level traffic comes to residential two-way streets, Chapel Hill becomes a less attractive place to settle.

Second of all, bringing extra traffic into the town will have a negative environmental effect.

Protection of neighborhoods and the environment needs to be kept in the forefront as UNC develops. Public transportation solutions are imperative because they will reduce both the number of necessary parking spaces and the resultant traffic levels.

UNC did not address those concerns adequately in the plans it unveiled last month, and it must do so soon.

Another concept missing from

TOM JENSEN
CHAIRMAN, STUDENTS FOR A PROGRESSIVE CHAPEL HILL

the first-round presentation was that of affordable housing.

In recent years it has become more and more expensive to live in Chapel Hill, forcing many lower-paid UNC employees out of the market. The University should use the development of Carolina North as a catalyst for reversing that trend.

In the recent Chapel Hill Town Council elections, all three candidates endorsed by the advocacy group "Friends of Affordable Housing" were elected. This clearly is an issue residents care about, and it would be good to see UNC take the lead in working toward a solution as the town's dominant institution.

As the plans for the development of the Horace Williams tract continue to develop, affordable housing must be addressed.

UNC heard these and other concerns from local citizens during last month's forums, and it will soon receive the recommendations of the town's Horace Williams Advisory Committee. The University should show good will toward the local community by adequately changing its plans to reflect those concerns prior to seeking approval from the Board of Trustees and the Town Council.

The development of the Horace Williams property should be an exciting project that will enhance greatly UNC and the local community.

But a willingness to make an investment in both Chapel Hill and Carrboro has not yet been shown — and it must be in order for this monumental project to be a success.

Contact Tom Jensen, chairman of Students for a Better Carolina, at tjensen@email.unc.edu.