

Locals debate housing plans

BY ANTONIO VELARDE
STAFF WRITER

Habitat for Humanity of Orange County expects to spend the next few months looking over four different concept plans for the development of low-income housing off of Sunrise Road in northern Chapel Hill.

The concept plans, which were presented Thursday by local designers to the Habitat board of directors, range from 42 to 56 units and would include both single-family homes and town homes with buffer areas, green space, and common areas set aside for community activities.

The 17-acre development area, located near the Chandlers Green neighborhood, has many residents concerned about what they see as the negative impact of high density housing on the local environment.

"We don't oppose a development, but we do oppose one of

high density," said Doug Schworer, president of the Sunrise Coalition, an organization formed last February in response to the development project.

The Sunrise Coalition has concentrated on stating their preference for a lower-density project that would include about 20 to 25 mostly single-family units, said Schworer.

"We would support something more in the range of a house per quarter acre," said his wife, Lindsay Schworer, who attended the presentation Thursday.

In the past, the coalition has been concerned with the impact of developing on uneven terrain and the removal of trees from the land. Residents also expressed concerns about the entrance to the land — a blind curve that would present safety problems.

Susan Levy, executive director of Habitat, said that the concept

plans are tentative.

"We, like members of the neighborhood, are seeing these designs for the first time," Levy said. "No decisions have been made yet."

Habitat will spend the next few months considering the plans, giving suggestions to the designers and narrowing the concept plans down to one or two, Levy said.

The plans will then be taken back to the community, where residents of nearby neighborhoods and Habitat members will consider a final plan to be presented to the Chapel Hill Town Council.

In 2002, the council agreed to support the project with a \$50,000 loan. "I think we've come a long way," said Schworer regarding the presentation Thursday.

"We are optimistic with what will come in the future."

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BASNIGHT

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Basnight said in an interview Monday that North Carolina contributes more money to its public universities than do other states but that further cuts to the classroom cannot be endured.

"I'm trying to help Carolina, I'm trying to help the student, so that people across this country look at this school with envy," he said.

The letter stated that in the past three years, state funding per student has been cut by more than \$700. In addition, the 1990-91 fiscal year saw 15.8 percent of the state budget go toward public universities, but that contribution has dropped to about 12 percent.

BOG member Anne Cates said that although tuition increases are the answer nobody wants, they are necessary to preserve a high quality of education. "I can tell you that nobody on the BOG wants to raise tuition," she said. "But what has

happened is our state is poor. I don't like raising it but we can't cut anymore."

Board member Addison Bell said the letter hit the mark when discussing the lack of resources available for higher education. "I think the senator's letter emphasized the fact that the legislature is not going to have the funding that we need," he said. "And he is in a key position to understand and know that."

But Jonathan Ducote, president of the UNC-system Association of Student Governments, said that he is concerned with Basnight's line of thinking and that raising tuition is not the best solution.

"I think that for the most part that it's the easy thing to do, to raise tuition," he said. "I believe the money is there. It's just a matter of having the right priorities."

Ducote added that his concern lies with Basnight's argument that a portion of the proceeds from the potential increases will go toward

financial aid because often students in the middle-income bracket have a tougher time getting federal assistance. "The middle class has the biggest problem affording college," he said.

Ducote added that the Carolina Covenant referenced in the letter is not available at all UNC-system schools. The UNC-Chapel Hill program is designed to help low-income students graduate debt free.

But Basnight pointed out that when money runs out, the state cannot keep cutting classroom funding and must generate additional revenue.

"When you fall short, do you let education continue the present level of funding or do you raise the tuition a very modest amount?" he said. "We can benefit the student by increasing tuition and spending it on things that will increase the experience of the student."

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CHANGES

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— as much as \$150,000 — since funds for revised reports come from the projects' fixed budgets.

Foy was quick to address the issue at Monday's public hearing, several hours after the University submitted its application. "To do the best we can and also to get it before the public, I propose we ask the

University to give us a presentation on this proposal right away before our staff even looks at it," he said.

Council members saluted Foy's commitment to action on the application, but member Mark Kleinschmidt said this wasn't the solution to problems with the OI-4 zoning process.

Foy agreed, stating, "I see this as a way of dealing with the reality, not a solution to the long-term

problem."

The University has requested time in front of the council next week to look at improvements that can be made to the proposal.

The council has a busy schedule next week, but Foy said it will come to an agreement regarding OI-4 negotiations by the end of April.

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BOG

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might make," he said.

Other members of the board also have expressed concern that Easley will not be able to fund state universities sufficiently, despite his request that the BOG not increase tuition.

"We have good information on what we project the revenues will be on the state level," BOG member Addison Bell said. "It would be wonderful if the governor could find the money and convince the legislature to provide it."

Bell added that waiting to see if Easley's budget is large enough is not possible. Campuses need to know what tuition rates will be so they can plan for the fall semester, he said.

Regardless, current information indicates that the state budget will fall short of meeting the needs of the UNC system, Bell said.

"The budget shortfalls the state is experiencing are alarming," he said. "I think the board is convinced that we have to have more funding ... and we are exhausting all avenues to come up with the funding."

Nevertheless, ASG President Jonathan Ducote said tuition increases are not a cure-all for UNC-system deficiencies.

"I'm concerned that these campus-initiated increases haven't worked in the past, so how are we going to make them work in the future?" said Ducote, a nonvoting BOG member.

Ducote also said he worries that students from middle income families who do not qualify for financial aid will be priced out of the state's public universities, a thought Wilson dismissed as unfounded.

"We haven't seen any data to support that allegation," he said, adding that tuition increases would include funds for financial aid.

As Friday's vote rapidly approaches, tuition increases are becoming a likely reality. Although the board might adjust the campus proposals, Wilson said, it probably should increase tuition.

"What I hope the board will ultimately do is carefully review these requests, reduce them in the amount that is appropriate and yet provide sufficient funds to slow the pace of erosion of quality."

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MADRID

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death toll of about 90 people. By Wednesday evening, people were wary of the metro system.

"When the doors opened, there was a distinct pause before anyone got on," Sulzer said. "People were thinking, 'Oh God, are we next?' Everyone looked suspiciously at any backpack. It makes you nervous."

Initially, Spanish officials blamed the Basque separatist group ETA for the bombings. But after reports arose of al-Qaida's claim of responsibility for the attack as a retaliation for Spain's support of the war in Iraq, Sulzer said she felt an incredible sadness.

Sulzer said that most Spanish citizens were opposed to the war in Iraq and that outgoing Prime Minister José María Aznar's decision to support President Bush was seen by many as a purely political power move.

"His personal choice caused a lot of people's deaths," she said.

Wednesday's attacks became a major motivator for voters in the Spanish Socialist Party's victory in Sunday's general election, and new government officials have pledged to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq if there is not more multilateral involvement.

On Thursday, officials at UNC's Office of Study Abroad sent e-mails to the six UNC students studying in Madrid to confirm their safety. Senior associate director Madge

Hubbard said all six students responded immediately and said they were unharmed.

To ensure students' safety abroad, the office conducts meetings for all students studying abroad to provide them with basic safety information.

Some programs also hold meetings that address specific political situations in particular countries and any safety measures that should be taken. No such meeting occurred for students studying in Madrid, Hubbard said, and despite the bombings, students will not be removed from Madrid.

Sulzer said that although she knows of a few students who have considered returning to the United States early, she plans to stay in Madrid until May and does not think it is likely another terrorist attack will occur before then.

"You just go about your life as best you can," she said. "I'm comfortable with where I'm at, and I don't think any of us feel threatened."

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The Daily Tar Heel

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