

Airport to stay open indefinitely

Move could hinder Carolina North

BY CHRIS COLETTA
MANAGING EDITOR

June 3 — Controversy surrounding the University's proposed satellite campus soon could be rekindled, thanks to identical bills pending in both chambers of the N.C. General Assembly.

The bills call for the indefinite continued operation of the Horace Williams Airport, a University-run strip located on a 963-acre tract of land scheduled to become Carolina North, a research park and mixed-use development about 1 1/2 miles from the main campus.

Rep. Verla Insko, an Orange County Democrat and the main sponsor of the bill in the House, said the provision will be included in the House's budget plan. Such a strategy will speed up its passage.

"It's just easier that way," Insko said. "It's not a controversial issue."

The proposals are meant to ensure a home for the N.C. Area Health Education Centers, a program that transports University leaders and faculty from the airport to various areas in the state. UNC officials have stated that other possible homes for the program, including Raleigh-Durham International Airport, are inadequate for its needs.

But if the area does not close, the University will have to alter its plans for Carolina North because its current proposal calls for breaking ground on land now occupied by the airport.

Such a scenario long has been recognized by local officials, and it has proven to be a point of town-gown contention.

But now, with the situation coming to a head, both town and University officials say they want to reach a solution — even if they don't entirely see eye-to-eye.

"Hopefully, we can take advantage of the time we have now," said Mark Kleinschmidt, a member of the Chapel Hill Town Council.

At a meeting in April, the council passed a resolution stating that it would refrain from further consideration of Carolina North until the airport's fate was clear.

And at another meeting two weeks later, council members grilled Tony Waldrop, UNC's vice chancellor for research and economic development, on the same issue.

In an interview Tuesday, Waldrop said the University's plans to get around the airport, which involve altering the order in which it would build the satellite campus' seven phases, are feasible.

"As I said in the presentation to the Town Council ... certainly we believe in the plan that we have for Carolina North," he said.

Waldrop added that changes to the Carolina North blueprint, including phasing changes, are likely to go before the University's Board of Trustees later this month for approval.

But Kleinschmidt said he's unsure as to how UNC will proceed.

"It doesn't seem that the functions that the University is looking to have occur on that site would actually be workable."

The House's budget, which will contain Insko's airport provision, is likely to hit the floor Monday or Tuesday and be passed next week.

(Editor's note: Insko's provision was included in the version of the budget signed by Gov. Mike Easley last month. The trustees have yet to seriously consider updates to Carolina North plans.)

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Council, Waldrop square off

BY EMMA BURGIN
AND JOSEPH SCHWARTZ
SENIOR WRITERS

May 13 — UNC's plan to break ground on a million-dollar satellite campus appears to be experiencing some turbulence.

The Chapel Hill Town Council approved an ordinance last month that effectively halted all communication dealing with Carolina North until the fate of the Horace Williams Airport is decided.

The N.C. General Assembly required the University to keep the airport open until Jan. 1, 2005, and is expected to extend the deadline to help relocate the Area Health Education Centers, which transports physicians across the state from the airport.

But the University met with the council May 5 for a presentation scheduled before the ordinance passed. Officials presented the first revision of the plan since December to the council.

For more than three hours, the council questioned Tony Waldrop, UNC vice chancellor for research and economic development, and Doug Firtenberg, of Stonebridge Associates, on issues the plan does not address.

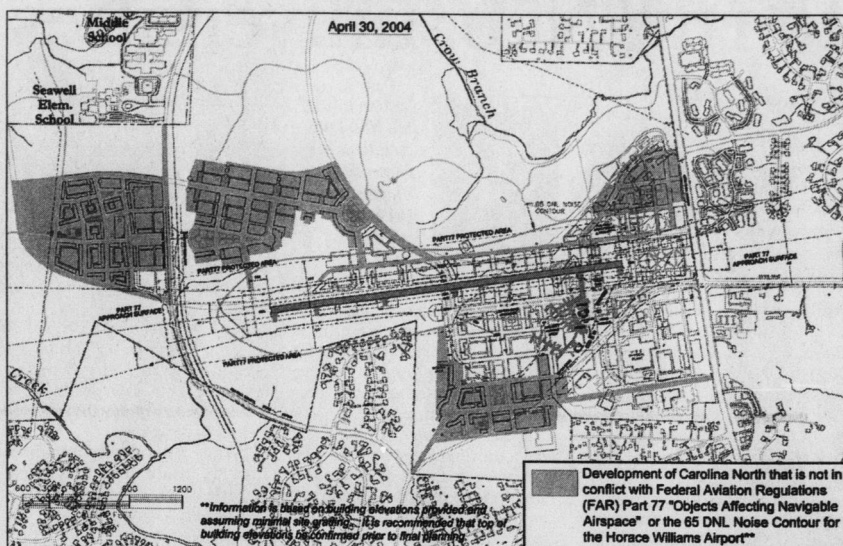
Waldrop skirted the issue of the airport, continuously noting that he would address it in "the next couple of slides."

After a lengthy back and forth about the importance of parking and the potential failure of the project, the council members quit asking questions and started demanding answers.

"I can't believe we've been here for three hours and we've acted like the airport isn't even there," council member Sally Greene said.

The airport was even equated to an elephant in the room by council member Jim Ward, who noted that any discussion about the plan as it stands could be irrelevant.

Waldrop then revealed several alternatives to the plan, including a new starting point for the development. The plan, which assumes the airport will close Jan. 1, 2005,



COURTESY OF TONY WALDROP'S OFFICE

The alternate plans for Carolina construction, spawned by the potential of Horace Williams Airport's continuing operation, include options for construction around the site. A search for a Raleigh airport location is under way.

requires the University to break ground where the airport now sits.

Rep. Verla Insko, D-Orange, said Tuesday that the legislators that comprise the Joint Select Committee on the Horace Williams Airport will meet Thursday for the first time to discuss AHEC's future.

Insko said last month that legislators likely will keep the airport open for at least two years

in order to find a new home for AHEC.

Waldrop said the University will not close the Horace Williams Airport until an alternative location is found for AHEC, and Raleigh-Durham International Airport is no longer an option.

But Carolina North is still on its way to what officials hope will be a smooth landing.

Waldrop said UNC plans to present a second set of revisions

to the Carolina North Executive Committee and the UNC Board of Trustees this summer, and submit formal applications to the town between September and December.

"We firmly believe in the integrity of this plan," he said. "I'm not saying we have to start tomorrow, but the need is now."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

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