

Plans laid for new natural gas station

Must be accessible to general public

BY AYOFEMI KIRBY
STAFF WRITER

Orange County residents with environmentally friendly cars will have a place to fuel up next fall, as plans to build a compressed natural gas fueling station for private vehicle owners are under way.

The Triangle J Council of Governments and the State Energy Office granted Orange County \$25,000 to begin building the new alternative fuel station with the requirement that it be accessible to the general public.

There are about 13 state-owned alternative fuel vehicles in Chapel Hill, used by police stations, parks and recreation departments and parking services, said Bill Terry, interim director of the town's Department of Public Works.

Though there is an alternative fueling station in Chapel Hill on Airport Road, it has not been opened to private vehicle owners.

"Any time we can get more access to fuel up, it's a good thing," Terry said.

One possible location discussed as a potential site for the fueling station is the Orange County Schools maintenance facility south of Hillsborough, near Interstates 85 and 40.

A team of school and county representatives will begin meeting soon to discuss the location, said David Stancil, director of the Orange County Environment and Resource Conservation Department.

"It has great access to two interstate exchanges, which is great for ... private and for state vehicles to use," he said.

Stancil said the county's public works facility in northern Hillsborough also is being considered as a possible location for the station.

Cars powered by compressed natural gas are becoming more popular as major car manufacturers, such as Honda and Ford, have introduced new models to the market within the last year.

"Compressed natural gas is an up-and-coming fuel," Stancil said. "There are not many cars on the streets, but they are increasing each year."

Stancil said a new station in the Triangle might increase purchases of automobiles that run on alternative fuel.

The new compressed natural gas station will have the option for private vehicle owners to pay with a credit or debit card, similar to the system used at gasoline stations.

"They are going to include card readers," said Anne Tazewell, alternative fuels program manager at the North Carolina Solar Center.

"Compressed natural gas is not a liquid, so there will be the ability to give the gas/gallon equivalent," she said.

Tazewell also said she hopes the new station will encourage Orange County residents to purchase cars powered by natural gas, which she said will improve air quality both locally and statewide.

"Because natural gas is such a clean-burning fuel, this will help address all of our air quality problems in the state," she said.

"It is a good first step for our community to help solve these problems."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Factory closing underlines trend

Hooker Furniture set to displace 240

BY LAURA YOUNGS
SENIOR WRITER

As yet another state furniture factory shuts its doors, economists and industry analysts say the trend of markets heading overseas will continue as production costs drop.

Hooker Furniture announced last week that it will close its Maiden doors in October, leaving 240 workers behind.

"Even though Hooker is performing well ... there has been a major shift in where wood furniture is produced in this industry," said Paul Toms Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of Hooker Furniture, in a press release.

"Because of ever-increasing customer demand for lower-priced wood furniture imported from Asia, we have been unable to generate enough orders to run all four of our domestic wood furniture manufacturing facilities at full capacity."

The closing of the Maiden plant isn't an anomaly in a state dependent on the once-lucrative manufacturing sector.

Since 2000, North Carolina's work force in the industry has dropped 27 percent, from 78,500 to 57,400.

"When it's all about cost, it's just not a spot where U.S. manufacturers are in a position to compete," said Bob Connolly, a professor of international finance and economics at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School.

Connolly said overseas advancements in shipping and manufacturing technologies have created a market in which U.S. manufacturers have a tough time competing, sending many companies to other countries to take advantage of cheaper costs.

He added that because mass production of furniture overseas is more cost-effective, businesses in the lower end of the furniture market — the largest sector in North Carolina — are forced to cut jobs.

But in the higher end of the market, Connolly said, in which quality, customizing and distribution are more important, cost isn't the driving force and more companies are able to stay within U.S. borders. In this area, manufacturers have an easier time finding new ways to compete.

"People are facing a tough choice right now, because they're going to have to travel a long way to find a new job."

PATRICK CONWAY, UNC ECONOMICS PROFESSOR

Hooker Furniture's closing was part of a trend this summer. Since June, several companies have announced lay-offs or closings, including Lay-Z-Boy Inc., Bassett Furniture Industries Inc., Thomasville Furniture Industries Inc., Ethan Allen Inc., Steelcase Inc. and Vaughan-Bassett Furniture Co. Inc.

Adding to these problems is the fact that those who lose their positions in the furniture or manufacturing industries have a hard time getting new jobs because they possess limited education and job-specific skills, said Patrick Conway, UNC professor of economics.

Many of the jobs that come to North Carolina require skills that former manufacturing employees don't have, he said.

"They're quite skilled at what they do, but they don't have the sorts of skills that would transfer easily into the high-tech sector,"

Conway said. The loss of such jobs has been going on for more than two decades. But in recent years, most of the positions available have been in the service sector, leaving laid-off workers to compete with school-age job-seekers at lower wages.

"Those people are facing a tough choice right now, because they're going to have to travel a long way to find a new job," Conway said.

"And they either have to leave that rural area or accept work at much lower wages, perhaps so low it keeps them in poverty."

The Associated Press contributed to this article. Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

ACLU sues to strike amendment

Same-sex unions would be banned

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union filed a legal challenge Thursday to knock a proposed state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage in Arkansas off the November ballot.

The group spearheading the drive to constitutionally define marriage in Arkansas as between a man and a woman said it would seek to intervene, saying voters should have the right to decide.

"The ACLU is desperate to evade democracy," said Jerry Cox, president of the Arkansas Marriage Amendment Committee.

The ACLU says the proposed amendment, which also would prohibit state recognition of civil unions between same-sex couples, is deliberately vague — masking potentially far-ranging effects on civil unions, single people and heterosexual married couples.

"There's a lot of vagueness and a lot of misrepresentation," said lawyer Blake S. Rutherford of Little Rock. "The important thing, when a voter walks into a voting booth, is to have as much information before them so that they can make an informed decision. The language in this amendment doesn't give the voter that opportunity, and that's the primary basis for our challenge."

Rutherford sought an expedited hearing.

Amendment backers said the legal challenge mirrored complaints pending in Louisiana, Michigan and Ohio, where similar proposals are on the ballot.

"That seems to be the primary way of operating by the people who oppose these efforts," Cox said in an interview. "They know how difficult it will be to (defeat the measure) at the ballot, and so they try to win in court."

Later, at a news conference, Cox said the proposed amendment had been thoroughly researched, its text approved for the ballot by the attorney general's office and its backing — more than 90,000 valid signatures of registered voters — certified by the secretary of state's office.

Arkansas already has a statutory ban on same-sex marriage, but passage of the ballot measure would give the ban constitutional standing, making it nonreviewable by a state court.

Supporters say constitutional stature is necessary to prevent a state court from striking down the state law, as the Massachusetts Supreme Court did in that state. They also say the proposal would not deny same-sex couples any right they already have in Arkansas.

But Rutherford said the proposed amendment's provision banning civil unions could take away homestead protections and other rights from common law married couples who move to Arkansas from other states. The Marriage Amendment committee disputes that.

Arkansas ACLU Executive Director Rita Sklar also criticized provisions of the proposed amendment that would grant the Legislature the authority to decide whether to grant recognition to a common law marriage from another state, and to determine the legal rights and obligations of married couples.

THE Daily Crossword

By Diane C. Baldwin

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- ACROSS**
- 1 Pats daintily
 - 5 Grains color?
 - 10 Spill over
 - 14 Discharge
 - 15 Mary Tyler or Roger
 - 16 Couple
 - 17 Canine treat
 - 18 Wall painting
 - 19 Hard on the eyes
 - 20 Mental nudge
 - 23 Sardonic style
 - 24 Current vogue
 - 25 Watch accessory
 - 28 Slalom trail
 - 29 Pastoral spot
 - 31 Bin's purpose
 - 33 Fail to do one's best
 - 35 Distinctive atmosphere
 - 36 Fixed, fanciful idea
 - 42 Genesis character
 - 43 Bare minimum
 - 44 Modicums
 - 48 Gotcha!
 - 49 Tube top
 - 52 Printer's measures
 - 53 Absurdly eccentric
 - 55 "Camille" star
 - 57 Secret observer
 - 59 Courtentenor
 - 62 Speak from a soapbox
 - 63 GI on the lam
 - 64 Become tiresome

- DOWN**
- 1 "Tammy" singer
 - 2 Romantic involvements
 - 3 Eureka
 - 4 Beer mug
 - 5 Arsenal supplies
 - 6 Great heap
 - 7 Hole-maker
 - 8 Expunges
 - 9 Yield to pressure
 - 10 Bronco prodder
 - 11 Fall behind
 - 12 OPEC product
 - 13 Snoop
 - 21 Stocking fiber
 - 22 Fuss and pother

- 25 Half-goat man
- 26 Grimm beast
- 27 All in
- 30 Division of the psyche
- 32 Talk wildly
- 33 Deli pickle
- 34 Part of GTE
- 36 Summoned
- 37 Black, in verse
- 38 Sushi fish
- 39 Abalone eater
- 40 Contemptuous exclamation
- 41 Missouri tributary

- 45 Temple team member
- 46 Kickback
- 47 Goal maker
- 49 Creepy
- 50 Flowering
- 51 Ragweed's irritant
- 54 Scoundrel
- 56 Slushing about
- 57 Gaffer's warning
- 58 Present!
- 59 Punching tool
- 60 Honolulu garland
- 61 Highland topper

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