

Classes might tackle sustainability

BY ERIN ZUREICK
STAFF WRITER

Students at UNC could have the option of taking classes in a new curriculum focused on sustainable development as early as fall 2005.

The Environmental Affairs Committee, part of Student Congress' executive branch, recently initiated plans to create such an academic program. The initiative was a plank on Student Body President Matt Calabria's platform.

"It has been a priority since (last year's) campaign and will help UNC students learn how to be more environmentally conscious," Calabria said.

The program should help foster collaboration among departments at UNC crucial to the topic of sustainability. Calabria said it would "take an array of classes with a theme and create a cluster in order to bring the sustainable development theme together."

The move would help UNC retain its image as one of the nation's most progressive universities in the field.

"Carolina is a leading university, and to continue as a progressive school, a curriculum is needed," said sophomore Alia Khan, former vice chairwoman of the Environmental Affairs Committee.

Schools such as Columbia, Harvard, Carnegie Mellon and Ball State universities are among the institutes that already have developed programs in the field.

The University already boasts initiatives related to the issue, including the Sustainability Coalition — a group dedicated to promoting sustainable practices on campus.

But though UNC offers an array of classes that relate to the topic, mainly in the Department of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, it suffers from a lack of coordination among academic units.

"There is a lack of an interdisciplinary approach, and the topic is much broader than just environmental sciences," said Vincent Lagace,

chairman of the Environmental Affairs Committee.

A curriculum could combine anthropology, economics, geography and public policy, among other topics.

"Sustainability is a topic involving environmental, economic and social issues that brings together many groups and that would need to be organized campuswide to function well," said Douglas Crawford-Brown, director of the Carolina Environment Program.

If the program were implemented, sustainable development could become an academic minor or a program of study at UNC. The addition of a minor would require the approval of the involved departments and the filing of a request.

"Sustainability is a specialized topic for a minor and is not necessarily an area of study," Crawford-Brown said. "I am open to the possibility, but not convinced yet."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Residents air concerns on parking lot models

BY TANNER SLAYDEN
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STAFF WRITERS

Residents of Chapel Hill took the opportunity to voice comments and concerns about the proposed development of downtown parking lots 2 and 5 at the Chapel Hill Public Library on Thursday and Friday.

The meetings were facilitated by Chapel Hill Town Council member Bill Strom and project consultant John Stainback, of Stainback Public/Private Real Estate LLC.

About 30 members of the community were able to become more familiar with Stainback's plans for renovating the facilities. But officials stressed that the proposals are still in their formative stages.

"None of this is more than a preliminary concept for a financial model," said Town Manager Cal

Horton of the models and design structures Stainback used in the presentation.

Those present at the meeting had several areas of concern about the proposed developments, tentatively scheduled for construction from 2007 until 2011.

Lot 5, across from University Square, and lot 2, behind Spanky's restaurant on Rosemary Street, would be redeveloped into mixed-use buildings with new parking facilities.

Neil Newcomb, owner of McAlister's Deli at 205 E. Franklin St. said he was concerned about the shortage of parking that could arise if construction begins on three major parking facilities downtown.

But Stainback said the plans would have as small an impact as possible.

Still, Horton said, parking downtown will be hard to come by if construction begins. "During construction, there will be a time where parking will be the dearest commodity downtown."

After Stainback presented a cash flow analysis of the projects showing positive gains for each year of construction, Dave Hartzell, director of the Center for Real Estate Development at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School, questioned the accuracy of the numbers.

"You can make the numbers look however you want," Hartzell said. "This is looking way out into a crystal ball. ... The key point is that we've seen these numbers change multiple times. This makes me a little skeptical."

Stainback admitted that there are several variables that could produce significant changes in the numbers. "There are a lot of moving targets with this project," he said.

Strom said the purpose of providing the projections is to arm the Town Council with enough information to make an informed decision about whether to move forward with the plans.

"This gives us a sense of what the potentials are and where some of the downfalls and weaknesses lie," Strom said.

He added that the information would provide the basis for a stronger negotiating position with building contractors.

"When all is said and done, we will have a more vibrant and successful downtown," Strom said.

The two meetings made the developer, the council and the town more comfortable with the potential downtown development plan, Stainback said.

"Some good ideas were offered (at these meetings)," he said. "We are helping residents see how this development will be an asset to the town."

Stainback also said that there will be a lot of time to review the development plan, and that last week's meetings were just two of many opportunities for residents to ask questions and learn about the projects.

"The process will help the town implement lots 2 and 5 and make money doing it," he said.

Strom also said the meetings were a good chance to explain what the town is trying to do.

"The town and Stainback met with business owners and neighbors to show them how this development will be affecting them," Strom said. "The members of the community who attended the meeting showed us what to keep an eye on in the future."

The council will decide to move on to the next phase in the process — authorizing developer solicitation on the projects — tonight at its business meeting.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.



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