

Commissioners to meet on requests

Education tops agenda for discussion

BY GREGG FOUNO
STAFF WRITER

The Orange County Board of Commissioners and area legislators want to make sure the county's legislative requests get first priority in the N.C. General Assembly.

To that end, officials will meet for breakfast at 7:30 a.m. Monday at the Courtyard by Marriott on N.C. 54 to discuss the county's needs.

Commissioners published their list of requests March 1. Among the 55 items, increased funding for local schools and county projects is at the forefront.

"We've always been high on education," said Commissioner Stephen Halkiotis. "We try to fund everything they ask for, but some-

times it's like pouring money into a giant hole in the ground. It seems like it never fills up."

The board publishes many of the same requests each year on its legislative agenda.

"Orange County is so progressive with visionary ideas that people meet them with skepticism, especially home-builders," said Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Orange.

New items for the 2005 legislative agenda include supporting legislation for increased per-pupil funding to schools, supporting state funding for school resource officers and backing a public referendum on a lottery that would provide funding for education. Orange County Finance Director

Ken Chavious said that lawmakers previously have helped Orange County's schools and that he hopes they will continue to do so.

"Legislative agendas in the past gave us the new half-cent sales tax increase to fund public schools," he said.

One of the other issues the county stresses in its agenda is paying for Medicaid.

"The number one issue is Medicaid relief," said Chavious. "It's been one of the most growing expenses the county has faced."

Halkiotis also said he thought North Carolina is behind the times in covering Medicaid costs.

"The state needs to take over all of the Medicaid costs that are currently being paid by the county," he said. "North Carolina is one of the two or three states left that hasn't

done that. It should be a state responsibility."

Old proposals that appear again this year include a tax on cigarettes and a tax on alcohol.

"We are proposing that cigarette tax money goes back into public health-related programs as well as opportunities for tobacco farmers who won't be farming as much tobacco anymore because of the tax," Halkiotis said.

Both Halkiotis and Kinnaird said there should be a push to change an impact fee on housing to an impact tax.

"We have a tax system that doesn't yield enough for our needs," Kinnaird said. "Right now people pay as much for a trailer as for a \$300,000 house."

The commissioners also laid out election-related requests, such as

using optical scanning, tabulating but not disclosing absentee ballots before Election Day, allowing state employees to take off work in order to service the polls and letting people revote whose ballots were lost.

Commissioners also support a ban on video poker machines.

"There are 155 video poker machines in this county, and it's costing us \$40,000 a month to be checking on these machines that bring no revenue to our county," Halkiotis said.

Kinnaird said that legislators typically support county requests, but that they take time to implement.

"In 10 years, they'll do what we do, but they'll think it was their idea."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

POLICE LOG

FROM STAFF REPORTS

■ A drug raid at 4:10 p.m. Wednesday at the Berkshire Manor Apartments, at 112 N.C. 54 in Carrboro, yielded two arrests and the seizure of 12.8 grams of cocaine, Carrboro police reports state.

According to reports, Roberto Carlos Riviera-Torres, 24, and Araceli Lara-Morales, 26, both originally from Mexico, were arrested when police served a search warrant at Apt. U-6, where they both live.

Police confiscated 12.8 grams of cocaine in two separate groupings, more than \$2,100 in cash, scales, sandwich bags and various paper documents, reports state.

Riviera-Torres and Lara-Morales were charged with felony possession with intent to sell and distribute a controlled substance, felony maintaining a dwelling for manufacturing and distributing drugs and misdemeanor possession of drug paraphernalia, reports state.

The two were taken to Orange County Jail each to be held on a \$50,000 secured bond. Both were scheduled to appear Thursday in Orange County District Criminal Court in Hillsborough.

■ An unknown suspect shot into a residence while the building was occupied at 12:30 p.m. Wednesday at 107 Hargraves St., Carrboro police reports state.

According to reports, a 22-year-old woman and a 24-year-old man were at home when they heard one shot, followed by another one 30 seconds later.

The second shot entered through the rear wall of the bedroom, entering the wall about two feet above the head of the woman, who was sitting at her desk, reports state.

The incident still is being investigated, reports state.

■ A 53-year-old Chapel Hill man was arrested at 5:07 p.m. Wednesday and charged with being drunk and disruptive in front of Woody's Tar Heel Tavern & Grill, Chapel Hill police reports state.

According to reports, Daniel Alvin Wilson, of 100 W. Rosemary St., was passed out on a bench at 165 E. Franklin St., reports state.

After regaining consciousness, he began cursing and fell on the sidewalk when he decided to walk away, reports state.

He was taken to Orange County Jail to be held on a \$200 secured bond. He is scheduled to appear April 11 in Orange County District Criminal Court in Hillsborough.

CORRECTION

■ Due to a reporting error, the March 10 story "Bodies speak volumes" states that professional troupe the Country Kings performed a hate crime re-enactment at a drag show at UNC. It actually was performed by a five-member amateur group.

It also states that performers Veronica Steele and Jamocha Shake tied for the amateur prize at the event. Steele actually tied for the prize with a five-person group of which Shake is a member.

To report corrections, contact Managing Editor Chris Coletta at c.coletta@email.unc.edu.

The Daily Tar Heel

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One copy per person; additional copies may be purchased at The Daily Tar Heel for \$.25 each.

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Address changes multiply

Residences could get new numbers

BY ADAM W. RHEW
STAFF WRITER

Even more address changes might be on the way for some local residents — ones that might affect how quickly rescue officials make it to an emergency.

The Chapel Hill Town Council already must change the name of Martin Luther King Jr. Street, a by-product of the council's decision last year to rename Airport Road after the civil rights leader.

But the street's residents might soon have new street numbers to go along with the new name.

The 12 residences along the small street now have addresses like "3A" or "7B."

"In order to keep consistent with the addressing in town and for 911 purposes we need to make these addresses a 3-digit number," Deborah Squires, the town's senior geographic information system technician, wrote in an e-mail to Town Information Officer Catherine Lazorko.

Squires included in the e-mail proposed address changes that

would give the residences more traditional addresses such as "101."

The council naming committee, which is in charge of the street renaming, is currently discussing whether to pursue the initiative independent of the county.

But local emergency personnel say the changes might not have any effect on responders.

"If we get dispatched to 103 or 105 versus 3A or 3B, it really wouldn't make that big of a difference," Chapel Hill firefighter David Sasser said.

Robert Bosworth, deputy chief of operations for the Chapel Hill Fire Department, said he does not see the changes adversely affecting response time.

"Is it going to be a big problem? No, as long as (new addresses) are logical and clearly marked," he said.

The town initiative comes as county emergency management officials begin the first stages of a process to identify problems that might delay emergency personnel response time to 911 calls.

The agency has hired two consulting firms, Geographic Technologies Group and McKim & Creed, to help identify problem areas within the county, said

Steven Newton, Orange County Emergency Management Services' wireless 911 coordinator.

The goal of the project, he said, is to identify street numbers situated in a manner that might confuse emergency personnel — like even house numbers situated on odd-numbered sides of the street.

Newton said the firms will evaluate a database of maps of county roads — maps that currently confuse dispatchers because of their flaws — to identify any problem areas.

Newton said the groups also will look at data that pinpoint a specific address for every business and residence.

"You're not sure you're on the house until you've passed it," Bosworth said.

"As dumb as it sounds, to back a fire truck up to find a hydrant could be problematic."

The council naming committee will hold a second meeting with residents of Martin Luther King Jr. Street on Tuesday to discuss potential names for the street.

Airport Road is set to officially change names May 8.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Public to share thoughts about reassignment

BY JENNIFER FAIR
STAFF WRITER

After identifying its top five criteria to consider in school reassignment, the Orange County School Board is now turning to the public for feedback.

County schools are undergoing the reassignment process due in part to the construction of the district's third middle school — slated to open in Efland in 2006.

A public hearing on the criteria will be held at 6 p.m. Monday at A.L. Stanback Middle School.

Residents also can respond to the reassignment criteria online at <http://www.orange.k12.nc.us>.

"I'm eager to hear what students and parents have to say," said board member Liz Brown.

The criteria identified by the board include students' proximity to schools, the socio-economic and ethnic balances of schools after reassignment, the need to minimize the number of affected students, and allowing students to progress easily from elementary to middle to high schools.

"We want to have a cross-section of students in the new school," said board member Delores Simpson.

Board member Al Hartkopf said that while he wants to achieve socio-economic and ethnic balance at the schools, he does not want to break up communities or force children to attend schools where they do not know anyone.

"I think we have a moral mandate to teach children no matter what building they're at," he said.

Both Hartkopf and Brown also said they want to make sure students' trips to school are kept short.

"Some of these children are expected to go five hours or better between getting on the bus and lunch," Hartkopf said. "You can't teach a hungry child."

Brown added that the board wants to spread out the free and reduced lunch population so the district doesn't end up with a school

"We're just trying to determine how to make ... decisions, not what those decisions will be."

LIBBIE HOUGH, COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

like Central Elementary — where 70 percent of the student population receives free and reduced lunches.

Chairwoman Libbie Hough said the board has not yet started looking at the specific numbers of students or neighborhoods that will need to be reassigned.

"We're just trying to determine how to make those decisions, not what those decisions will be," she said. "We're a year away from a final decision."

The district undertook its last reassignment process because of the construction of Cedar Ridge High School, which first opened its doors in 2001.

The unintended outcomes of that reassignment included growth in some areas of the district and a lack of growth in others, Hough said.

Some schools in the district are now over capacity and others are under capacity, she explained.

The board wants to use this reassignment opportunity to rebalance all of the district's schools.

"We're looking at all 11 schools," Hough said.

Though it is not one of the board's top five concerns, Hartkopf said he also wants to expand the district's year-round program and offer it to more children.

Hillsborough Elementary School is the district's only year-round elementary school.

Other criteria the board is considering include geographic continuity within the district and developing a plan that is sustainable for five to 10 years. The school board will approve its final reassignment plan in February 2006.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Economic indicators show pluses

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The nation's employment climate improved, shoppers rang up sales and factories boosted production last month, fresh signs that the economy is chugging ahead at a respectable pace.

That was the latest snapshot of economic activity presented in the Federal Reserve's survey of business conditions around the country, released Wednesday.

"The economy has continued to expand at a moderate pace," according to the survey, which is based on information collected on or before Feb. 28.

The survey also found that retail prices were "generally flat or up modestly." Some companies were more inclined to pass along some of these costs to customers, the survey noted.

These indicators of inflation, jobs and other economic condi-

tions will be discussed by Fed policy-makers when they meet next on March 22.

To keep inflation and the economy on an even keel, the Fed has pushed up short-term interest rates six times since June 2004. Economists are expecting another quarter-point increase at the March meeting.

One of the things economists will be closely watching at the March meeting is any sign as to whether Fed policy-makers will be sticking with or abandoning their current stance of raising interest rates at a measured, or gradual, pace.

With the job market clearly on the mend but still not back to full throttle, some economists believe that a gradual approach to raising rates will be maintained for a while longer.

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INSIDE Carolina

Inside Carolina invites Tar Heel fans and faculty staff to an **OPEN HOUSE VIEWING PARTY** for all ACC Tournament games Friday, March 11.

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An Hors D'oeuvres Buffet for \$5.95 + tax, beverage service, plus Special Viewing Chairs from ECKO will be available in Alumni Hall making this THE place to be. Doors open at 11:30am. Grille seating reservations are required and members have priority. For details or Grille reservations call 962-1101.