

## Town, Legion agree to land deal

BY BRANDON REED  
STAFF WRITER

Members of the American Legion fought to keep the United States' soil free from intrusion. Now, local officials have fought for a compromise so that the group's area chapter can keep its land.

The Chapel Hill Town Council tonight will remove the American Legion site on Legion Road from a list of potential city schools locations designated under Chapel Hill's Land-Use Management Ordinance in the fall.

In exchange, the town council will receive a right of first refusal on the land. "If they were to consider selling the property to someone else, we would first have the opportunity to buy it," said Town Attorney Ralph Karpinos.

Steve Scroggs, assistant superintendent for support services for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, said the right of first refusal is the only thing the district was seeking from the Legion and other potential school-site owners.

Four sites remain on the city schools' list of potential school locations. The list now includes

two sites on Eubanks Road, one on Obeyes Creek Road and one on Weaver Dairy Road.

"As sites become more and more difficult to find, it's going to be harder and harder to release people from the list," Scroggs said.

"After that, we're back to scratching and clawing for sites."

Scroggs said that because of town ordinances, there are not many locations on which the district is able to place a school.

The district is constantly looking for sites with a lot of open land and for sites near schools that are already open, he said. "Soon, there's just not going to be property big enough to put a school on."

Scroggs said the district also offered to remove the Legion site in return for the right of first refusal in its compromise with the group.

Schools officials met with Legion members several times in the fall after members voiced public opposition to the schools' move. "Clearly, the American Legion would rather deal with the town," Scroggs said.

But the town-authorized contract is not legally binding for future councils, Karpinos said.

"It's a pledge of this council's commitment that wouldn't be binding on future councils," he said, adding that he hopes that future councils will take this year's agreement into consideration.

"The parties here are pledging something in good faith," Karpinos said.

The council still could have blocked future development of the site without the agreement.

If the Legionnaires or other future owners wanted to develop the site, the city school board could freeze this action for 18 months, during which it would have to decide whether it would purchase the property or allow the development to occur, Karpinos said.

After 18 months, schools could seize the property through eminent domain, but any move by the Legion or an outside party would have to go before the council.

Legion Post Commander Al Hackney declined to comment Monday because he thinks that the matter is not completely settled.

Contact the City Editor  
at [citydesk@unc.edu](mailto:citydesk@unc.edu).

## Budget group considers keeping garbage pickup

Groups might start paying fees

BY JAKE POTTER  
STAFF WRITER

Area residents charged with reviewing Chapel Hill's budget outlook are closing in on recommendations that could minimize the impact of a projected multi-million dollar shortfall for next fiscal year.

The budget review advisory committee discussed Monday several recommendations — including a resolution for a community-wide debate on the town's commercial trash hauling — that it will make next week to the Chapel Hill Town Council.

Several members showed interest in a recommendation that would retain the town's commercial trash collection program but assign charges to all commercial trash bins — including residential rental locations, tax-exempt nonprofit groups, fraternities and sororities — none of which are required to pay the \$801 monthly commercial rate now.

The proposal is an alternative to the original recommendation from budget consultant Maximus Inc. to privatize the town's entire commercial trash system.

The idea of eliminating commercial trash services lost clout when it was revealed in Maximus' final report Thursday that dropping services would only save the town up to \$300,000 each year — not \$600,000, as the firm originally predicted.

Maximus Vice President Kenneth Murray said Monday that the new option still could reap benefits for the town.

"It's still a substantial savings," he said. "We think it's a strategy that can still be pursued."

But that drop in potential savings, committee members say, is a deciding factor in why they now favor retaining trash services.

Dropping the town's commercial services also might put the town in direct conflict with a 1999 county interlocal garbage agreement.

### BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

Maximus' 10 budget recommendations as outlined in their final report to the town budget review advisory committee:

1. Eliminate commercial and residential rental garbage collection services.
2. Conduct a full revenue study in order to ensure that the town levy exact fees for its services.
3. Eliminate the internal services superintendent position within Public Works Department.
4. Eliminate both the fleet supervisor position in Public Works and maintenance superintendent position in the Transportation Department; consolidate the two parts manager positions into one.
5. Either reassign the traffic engineering function to Public Works or install a more sophisticated maintenance management system.
6. Eliminate weekly payroll and expand electronic direct deposit.
7. Review customer-intensive activities against industry standards for efficient service.
8. Begin planning system to identify future technology needs.
9. Make police department's starting salaries and educational opportunities competitive with other markets.
10. Dispatch both fire department first responders and a county paramedic unit to all emergency medical calls.

SOURCE: MAXIMUS INC.

DTH/MARY JANE KATZ

Committee members have cited worries over private trash-collection companies ballooning costs for commercial properties as another reason to retain services.

"I've got concerns that BFI and Waste Industries would come in and raise the rates and pay workers less," said committee member Alan Rimer. "If, in fact, we were to turn this over, would commercial (customers) get a break? Probably not."

Maximus' final report indicates that overall revenue could rise by up to \$389,000 if all locations had to pay the monthly fee.

Committee members also debated whether raising pickup rates to break even would push customers to private companies.

"We'll find out very soon what the competition will be," said committee member and former town Mayor Joe Capowski.

This year's budget development process has come under heightened scrutiny after a projected \$5 million shortfall triggered predictions that the property tax rate would jump 10 cents.

Committee action could put a dent in the shortfall, but town priorities such as funding for police department incentives still could raise overall costs.

Town Manager Cal Horton said the town would act to increase staffing and pay in the police department while reducing overtime hours.

New Chapel Hill police officers start at a base salary of \$30,755, contrasting with the \$33,030 base salary that Durham's police department provides and the state Highway Patrol's starting salary of \$32,069.

Out of the 137-person staff, 100 work overtime, Murray said.

"A lot of these staffing issues are about community objectives rather than numbers," Horton said.

The department now has 10 vacancies.

Maximus' final report also recommends that Chapel Hill provide educational incentives to not only new recruits, but also to current staff.

Maximus also presented a proposal, to be brought before the council tonight, that the firm conduct a revenue enhancement and fee study by mid-June.

The study's findings, if completed by the proposal's target date, also might affect next fiscal year's budget.

Maximus is asking for \$38,155 to complete the study, which will examine cost allocation plans and land development and regulation fees.

A subcommittee will meet again Thursday morning and possibly once more Saturday to draft final recommendations for the council.

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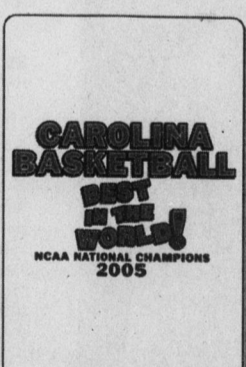
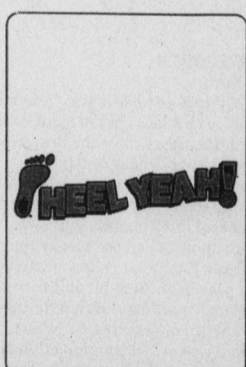
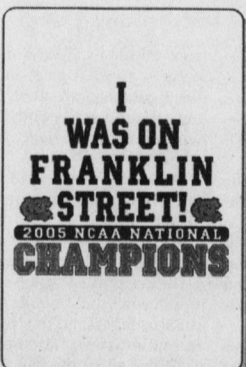
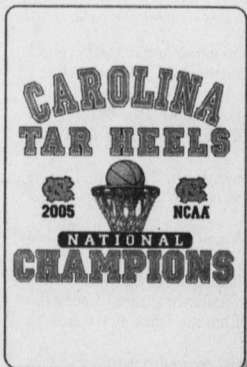


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