

Board might act on redistricting

BY RACHEL ULLRICH
STAFF WRITER

At a meeting Tuesday, county leaders might bring to a close a heated debate about how members of the Orange County Board of Commissioners are elected.

Since they brought a petition about the issue to the board in January, rural residents have argued that their votes go unheard because the larger precincts near Chapel Hill and Carrboro dominate the current electoral system.

Earlier this year, they called for new district lines to be drawn to encourage the election of commis-

sioners from rural areas.

The commissioners since have proposed three options, with variables including everything from the number of commissioners to the size of proposed districts.

If all goes according to schedule, a referendum on one of the plans will be on the ballot next year.

Commissioner Alice Gordon said she is optimistic about what the changes could do for the county, though some might need revision.

"It's conceivable that we'll choose a plan to put to a vote," she said of Tuesday's meeting.

"But if we find something comes up, we have more time through the end of the year."

Some community leaders still are hesitant to support the commissioners' plans.

Rep. Bill Faison, D-Orange, had put together a plan earlier in the process that he still thinks would do a better job.

"I think far and away the plan we proposed is better," Faison said of his

plan to enlarge the board to seven, including mostly geographic-based members and one at-large spot.

Faison explained that the population and the number of commissioners in each district are almost exactly equal in his plan, encouraging more even distribution.

"It fits the demographic better," he said of the plan.

Faison introduced a bill that failed in the General Assembly earlier this year that would have put his proposal to a referendum.

Bob Strayhorn, a local farmer who helped take the issue to the commissioners in January, has reservations about plans other than Faison's, which he said better reflects the will of the people.

"It was really a fair plan," he said of Faison's proposal. "It made sure the areas had the amount they should have."

Gordon said that under new plans, commissioners would be geographically distributed and would remain true to the principal

of one person, one vote.

Both Strayhorn and Faison noted that the commissioners primarily have focused their efforts on schemes involving a five-seat board, the current size.

Faison said the Chapel Hill Town Council and Hillsborough Town Board both have recommended larger boards.

Gordon explained that she personally prefers five-member boards. "It's a more efficient, more effective number."

"And there's nothing in the petition that says (residents) want seven," she added.

She noted that a five-seat board more evenly apportions votes. "There is almost no deviation from the population," she said.

The commissioners will review the plan at its 7:30 p.m. meeting at the Southern Human Services building off Homestead Road.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

COMING SOON



DTH/LARRY BAUM

UNC freshman Aurelia Belfield auditions for the "The Vagina Monologues" on Monday evening in Gerrard Hall. Belfield, who is a dramatic arts major, has wanted to be in the play ever since she first saw it with her mother two years ago. More auditions will be held today.

GPSF readies report

Stresses need for funds, child care

BY KATHRYN ROWLAND
STAFF WRITER

Basketball tickets to sit with spouses, money for conference and research travel and a possible rise in teaching assistant stipends — what more could graduate students ask for?

More say in University tuition decisions and better transportation and child care programs in Chapel Hill, perhaps, according to the 2005 November Report, which the Graduate and Professional Student Federation soon will begin printing.

The report documents the progress of GPSF President Mike Brady's administration during its first six months. It originally was set to be released in October but was delayed by the illness of Ashley Brown, vice president of internal affairs.

A major issue for Brady has been representing graduate and professional students in the tuition advisory task force along with Brown, the report states.

It says the task force supported a proposal to "increase the minimum teaching assistant stipend to \$7,000 per class, per semester with an increase of \$500 for stipends that already are above that minimum."

But Secretary Theresa McReynolds said by increasing stipends — with money that comes from raising tuition — there is a potential for departments to decrease accordingly the number of teaching assistants they hire.

"By raising graduate student tuition to pay for those increases, you're taking money from (all graduate students) to give it back to only a portion of those people," she said.

"Three of the four proposals increase graduate student tuition at a higher amount than undergraduate," McReynolds said.

The report also documents the transition to an online application for a new travel award that will pay for conference and research travel for graduate students.

McReynolds said more than 100 applications for the award had been received in both semesters of its existence. The deadline was midnight Friday, she said, and between 12 and 17 applicants will receive the award.

Another new program included in the report will enable graduate students to buy basketball tickets for spouses to accompany their own free student ticket.

And graduate students with children continue to look to the GPSF for "expanding full-time child care options around campus," which the report states is a long-term goal.

"The next steps for child care are to try and identify more space for permanent child care facilities," Brady said. The goal came after plans for a child care center were dropped from final construction plans for the Student and Academic Services facility, the report says.

Finding space also is the issue for establishing a permanent graduate student center, Brady said, adding that it still is being discussed in meetings and thus is not highlighted in the report.

On another front, the report states that transportation issues have been very problematic this year. It blames fuel shortages for increased dependency on mass transportation and the system's resulting insufficiency.

"We need to start talking to some local groups within the University and community to try and figure out what we need to do to improve our transit options," Brady said.

The report states "major reforms to the transportation system will be necessary to ensure reliability."

McReynolds said the GPSF hopes to resolve many issues by the end of its term. "We're just getting into a lot of stuff that will come out in the April Report."

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