

Options pit space, development

Part of comprehensive plan update

BY TED STRONG
CITY CO-EDITOR

For Orange County the math is simple: Fewer houses means more water.

The crowd at the Orange County Board of Commissioners' quarterly public hearing with the county's planning board mostly was glad to see the county staff's four proposals that would limit severely the number of housing units that could be built in rural sections of the county.

Commissioner Stephen Halkiotis was unable to attend the session, the first of three public hearings on this aspect of the county's update of its comprehensive plan. The next hearing is set for Feb. 27.

The proposals are designed to set more stringent limits on housing density to better strike a balance between growth and the problems it brings.

Craig Benedict, the county's plan-

ning director, said excessive growth can create problems in a number of areas, including pollution, water supply and efficient provision of public services.

Benedict also said the proposals would reflect traditional distinctions between rural and urban districts in the county. "What we are trying to do with these new scenarios is not do anything radically different from what people have done in the past," he said.

The plans would require between two and five acres per dwelling unit. Much of the county now only requires 0.92 acres per unit.

That ratio could be met with larger lots, or with smaller lots and dedicated open space, an option Benedict said has become increasingly popular in the county.

"The emphasis is on the bottom-line density ... that can be achieved in many ways," said County Manager John Link.

Designated open space even could be leased out for farm use, Benedict said.

"What we're trying to strike here with the amendments to the land-use plan ... is some sort of balance to be sustainable for the future," he said.

It was the sustainability specifically of the county's water supply that concerned many residents at the hearing.

"I think water's going to be our most important problem from here on out," said county resident Richard Roberts.

"It's going to get scarcer and scarcer and harder to find."

Benedict said that a U.S. Geological Survey recommendation of two acres per dwelling unit for a rechargeable water resource might be too conservative, as the data it was based on did not include the county's two relatively severe droughts since 1996.

"It is not an unlimited supply," he said of the county's water reserves, which include the Eno River.

Melinda Ruley, another county resident, also urged a move to lower density.

And she said that while development already has had an impact on the county, commissioners have done a good job of mitigating its impact.

"You all have done such a fine job of protecting us so far from the horror show that exists in Durham and Wake counties," Ruley said.

Benedict said approximately 2,000 lots have been approved as parts of new major subdivisions since 1987, and more than half those lots are still undeveloped.

But life-long county resident Robert Nichols suggested another way to preserve water supplies: Build more reservoirs and contain more of the water that flows out of Orange County.

"There's plenty of water here," he said.

He added, "All we gotta do is store the water."

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MARATHON

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ferent organizations have registered teams, Walker said.

"What's great about it is we're able to unify groups of people that may not have a chance to interact with ... any other group on campus," Attwater said.

The marathon is dually goaled, because it aims to unite the campus through diversity while helping the patients at the children's

hospital.

"The theme of the marathon is team work, and our mission statement as an organization speaks to unite all campus groups under the common goal of supporting the children's hospital," Walker said.

"We just hope everyone has a good time and we can provide as much support as possible to the children's hospital."

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FLU

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enza scare.

UNC Hospitals as well as other hospitals around the state would be responsible for administering care to infected patients as well as ensuring that the virus wouldn't spread.

Crane also said the state's seven portable hospitals, one of which was sent to aid Hurricane Katrina victims earlier in the year, would be important in helping any areas severely affected.

"All the hospitals would be very important, but UNC would probably play a larger role than some of the other hospitals along with the others that are research hospitals," Crane said.

But to a certain extent, UNC Hospitals already might be a step ahead of the game when it comes to assuming that role.

"The SARS scare last year served as a template for us on how to han-

dle something of a highly infectious nature," said Lynn Wooten, spokesman for UNC Health Care.

"What we went through a couple of years ago provided us with a response mechanism that would apply here to a great extent."

In the event of a pandemic, UNC Hospitals would undergo an in-house quarantine in order to protect healthy patients as well as doctors, Wooten said.

Wooten also said UNC Hospitals would be ready to address the state's needs.

"We are a level-one trauma response center, so we're a big place, unlike some smaller community hospitals that might not have that type of space to work with," he said.

"We have experts on hand who understand these things and who would work closely with their counterparts on the state level."

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PLANT

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"We need to move forward promptly," said Bruce Runberg, associate vice chancellor for facilities planning and construction. "The cost of delay would be a quarter million dollars per month."

The public hearing last night was continued from a public discussion Nov. 9 to iron out issues citizens harbor toward the facility, located on the south side of West Cameron Avenue.

In response to the concerns of citizens, Town Manager Cal Horton reported that UNC will comply with the noise ordinance and provide acoustic analysis but that the campus couldn't commit to limiting future growth, which Horton deemed reasonable.

With the agreement in place, some say it's time to move past the issue.

"The University and town unfortunately look like adversarial positions," said Dennis Markatos-Soriano, a Chapel Hill resident and UNC alumnus. "I hope we can move forward on sustainable energy issues like this."

New cooperative town-gown

relations seem promising.

"Sometimes there appear tensions," said Edith Wiggins, a council member. "But intense situations like these make a much better product."

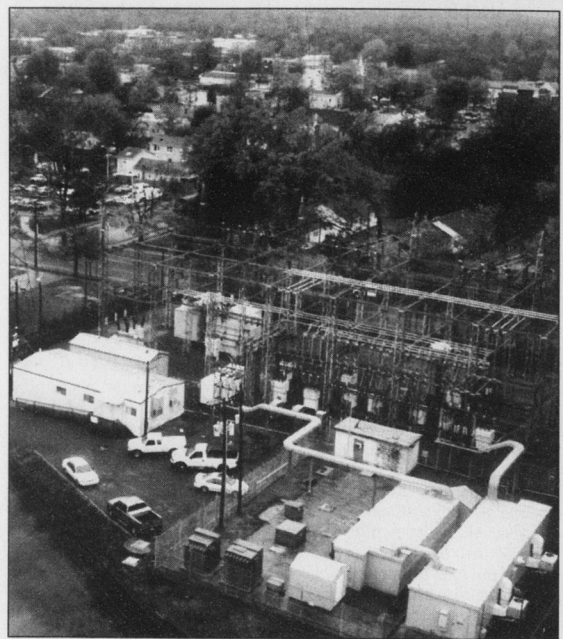
Among the other highlights at the meeting:

■ The council forwarded to town staff a request from resident Brenda Brown to hold a Rosa Parks commemoration Dec. 1. Brown proposed organizing a bus procession from the Interstate 40 exit on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to Town Hall, followed by a walk to the town operations center.

■ Council members authorized Horton to initiate next July the process of developing a neighborhood conservation district for the Mason Farm neighborhood.

■ A motion to authorize Horton to conduct a pilot wireless project in the Craig-Gomains housing area that will connect selected students living in town-owned housing units to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools network services for one year was included in the approved consent agenda.

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The University's cogeneration facility, which provides electricity and steam to campus, borders the Cameron-McCauley Historic District.

DTH/LOGAN PRICE

PRATT-WILSON

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"She's really gung-ho about her efforts, but I haven't seen any improvements from my perspective," Mask said.

The problem, Mask said, will be difficult to change.

"The kids love (drinking). It's something they can all identify with," he said. "There aren't too many places to go where you don't have access to it."

Committee member and parent Michael Eisen, a state coordinator for preventing underage drinking with the Department of Human

Health Services, said he believes the committee still has been successful in revitalizing the issue.

"They made the issue something in the foreground," Eisen said. "Sometimes these things get caught up behind other issues, especially in election season, so it's important that (Pratt-Wilson) keeps this in front of everyone's consciousness."

The group's strategies have gathered attention, attracting people from outside the local community.

"We came down to see the way they're doing things," said Jerry Mudge, a parent activist from Charlotte, who drove in for the

Nov. 3 committee meeting.

Mudge, who lost two sons in a drunk driving accident, said a similar program recently started in Mecklenburg County is hoping to build off the committee's model.

Still, Mask said the group needs to look at other ways to combat the problem.

"You have to get some kids involved in the process, not attack them," he said. "If you attack kids, they are just going to rebel, whether they like it or not."

Eisen admits the committee's efforts are unlikely to cause drastic change overnight, but he said he is encouraged by recent developments.

"Change is slow," he said. "You've

got to be in this for the long run."

Pratt-Wilson likewise acknowledged the unique, long-term challenges Chapel Hill, as a college town, presents to the committee, but she stressed that the group's efforts primarily are focused on changing attitudes about underage substance abuse at the middle- and high-school levels.

Mask contends that youth culture must change before any lasting impacts become apparent.

"My biggest complaint about the school system and the community is that we're very good at identifying the problem, but we're not very good at solving it."

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DEPRESSION

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college students who report having been diagnosed with depression has risen significantly.

"In the past, there weren't treatments for people with these mental health issues, so they never got to the university level," says junior Melanie Pace, vice president of Students for Mental Health Awareness.

Increased awareness has helped to destigmatize depression, Pace says.

"I believe there is less stigma attached to getting treatment than there was in the past," says Dr. Allen Hamrick, associate director of CAPS at UNC, in an e-mail. He says he believes that is why CAPS has seen a dramatic increase in students seeking its help.

Approximately 65 percent of the students at CAPS seek counseling for depression.

The service's growth is not an isolated incident. Counseling services at universities across the nation are witnessing similar increases, Anderson says. The rise brings many new implications for universities as they try to attend to students' needs.

"Whenever possible they are trying to add staff members, add more counseling hours," he says. "But there are difficulties finding staff to handle all these students."

Faruqi, who was treated at CAPS, cites the program's limitations.

"CAPS is really short term," she says. Students are offered six to eight free sessions, Hamrick says, with the goal to switch students who need it to long-term counseling.

But some students are looking for more long-term help from

CAPS.

"That was kind of a problem because I got used to seeing a person," she says.

The ACHA study indicates that more students are opting to treat their depression with medication than therapy.

"Therapy is slower," Hamrick says. College students often find themselves having to weigh between struggling in class or taking medication.

But Faruqi says the results of the medication prescribed by CAPS were mixed.

After her counseling sessions ended, she was concerned about taking medication without being monitored regularly.

"If no one is meeting with the student, (medication) can be risky," Anderson says.

But the biggest problem, Anderson says, is students who never seek help. Depression may actually be underreported, he says, stemming from a lack of understanding about the illness.

"There is still a lot of fear and ignorance," Pace says.

"Major depression ... is a physical, emotional, cognitive response beyond a person's control," she says.

"There is much more involved here than a person's will to deal with things."

Faruqi says she has trouble explaining to her friends that her depression is beyond her control.

"The main stigma is that it's a sign of weakness or that we just need to 'snap out of it,'" Faruqi says.

"It's definitely not something that I want to be ashamed of. It is a part of me, and I want to be able to discuss it."

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