

Commissioners get local schools' budget estimates

Timeline well ahead of typical years

BY DAVE PEARSON
SENIOR WRITER

Local school districts delivered budget estimates to county commissioners earlier this week.

The Board of County Commissioners requested the budget estimates for the next fiscal year from the Orange County and Chapel Hill-Carrboro City school districts last November.

The estimates are meant to give commissioners an idea of schools' likely needs for county money to maintain programs with normal growth taken into account.

"Hopefully people will feel they were heard and had the opportunity to plan further ahead," said Barry Jacobs, chairman of the board.

This is the first year the commissioners have requested to see the school budgets so early in the budget planning process, which is typically resolved by June. The board will look at the budgets at its upcoming retreat.

Neither school district's budget can be finalized until the state legislature makes its decisions

regarding items such as teacher pay increases and how much it will allot for capital improvements.

Because of this, the school districts made their projections based on the increases of previous years.

"We don't have any way of knowing what the state legislature is going to do," said Pam Hemminger, chairwoman of city school board.

Ruby Pittman, executive director of finance for the city schools, said the preliminary budget will be very close to the finalized budget.

Pittman said that the district did growth projections and that increased enrollment is driving the budget increases.

She said the preliminary budget is the best projection the district can do at this point.

Patricia Harris, finance director for the Orange County Schools, said that specific numbers won't be available until February or March but that she is not worried about what the state will decide.

"We have no reason to believe it will be different from other years," she said.

Jacobs said he hopes the preliminary budgets will make it easier for the county to plan for how much money it will need to keep up with state requirements.

"The legislature tends to give us unfunded mandates," he said in regards to teacher pay increases, which the state requires but counties fund.

The schools only included requests for what they need to continue present operations. Money for capital improvements, such as the building of new schools, renovations and new programs, were not included in the requests.

Jacobs said the state cut the amount of money it will put into capital reimbursement programs and has not come through with projections from the education lottery.

"It reduces our flexibility on what we can spend," he said.

Stephanie Knott, city schools spokeswoman, said the district will continue to revise its estimates.

"We are glad to have the task of putting much of the budget together behind us," Knott said.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.



Frank Taylor Wright was a frequent sight up and down Franklin Street. He rode the bus to Chapel Hill most days and became a recognizable figure with his finely tailored suits, hats and umbrellas. He died Monday.

Remembering Mr. Wright

BY ANASA HICKS
STAFF WRITER

Orange County lost a colorful man Monday.

Frank Taylor Wright, a Durham resident and integral part of Chapel Hill, died of breathing complications at UNC Hospitals Monday evening. He was 90 years old.

Wright was known for his bright and impeccably coordinated suits, which he showed off six days a week on Franklin Street.

"That was his profession," said Larry Edwards Jr., Wright's grandson.

Wright lived with Edwards and his wife for the past 13 years. "I'm 50, and for as long as I remember, he's been dressing up."

Edwards said that every day except Sunday, Wright woke up at 5 a.m., dressed in a suit with a matching hat, shirt and umbrella, and went to catch the 7 a.m. bus to Chapel Hill, returning at about 3 p.m.

He often caught a ride with Laura Moran, his next-door neighbor of seven years.

"I'll miss him ringing my doorbell four times a day to catch a ride

to the bus stop," Moran said.

Wright was born in Orange County in 1917 and spent most of his life between Chapel Hill and Hillsborough. He worked in Lenoir Dining Hall and 20 years for the town of Fayetteville.

"He always dressed up, but he didn't know that people noticed," Edwards said.

Local artist Artie Dixon did a photo essay on Wright in 2000.

She said Wright told her, "I have to believe people were born for something, and I was born to dress."

Wright was very popular in Chapel Hill.

"He would get rides home from Chapel Hill all the time," Lisa Moran, Laura Moran's sister, said. "People loved to help him."

Edwards said that Wright loved having his picture taken and that he had an effect on the young people of Chapel Hill.

"They would sit there and talk to him and they were amazed at how much he knew about Chapel Hill and about life in general," he said.

"They were also amazed that at 90 years old, he would dress up

every day."

"He really enjoyed struttin' his stuff," said Sheri Edwards, Wright's daughter-in-law. "He said that if he didn't get up and dress up every day, no matter how he felt, he would probably die."

Larry Edwards estimated Wright owned 150 suits.

"About two months ago, I told him, 'If you buy one more suit, I'll put you out,'" he said.

Sheril Koroluk, who works for the Preservation Society of Chapel Hill, remembered the first time she saw Wright.

"It was Valentine's Day 1999," she said. "He was walking down Highway 54, wearing all black with a red tie, red boots and a red umbrella, and I just thought he looked so cool."

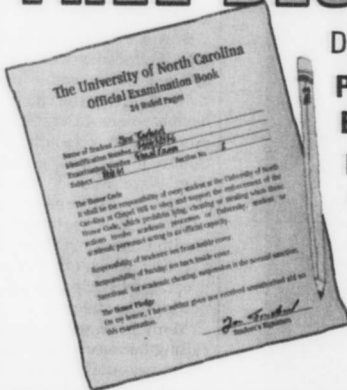
Wright's funeral will be Sunday at 10 a.m. at Jones Funeral Home.

Edwards said he'll bury his grandfather in a red suit, black shirt, red hat and a red umbrella.

"He just had a ball — that's what kept him living."

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