

Cities fight panhandling with mixed results

Chapel Hill program predated

BY KAYLA CARRICK
SENIOR WRITER

Giving back to the community can come in all shapes and sizes. In this case, it comes in tin cans, parking meters and even cast iron cubes. Raleigh, Asheville and Portland, Ore., all have programs to cut down on panhandling while still helping out their homeless populations. Portland has old parking meters downtown where people can drop

their spare change to go toward homeless services, and Asheville offers cast iron collection boxes welded to poles. Chapel Hill is now in the fourth month of its own program designed to do the same thing — Real Change from Spare Change. Since the program is new, leaders still are searching for the best way to make it a success. With the funds from Chapel Hill's program, leaders want to

expand the downtown outreach staff to be as large as Durham's. But looking at other cities experiences, Chapel Hill will need more than just tin cans. Durham has a more established street outreach team — four years and two full-time staff members. To raise the money to fund such a staff, Portland leaders have advice for Chapel Hill: spread the word. "Constant education and promotion of the program is critical for its success," said Megan Doern, communications director for Portland Business Alliance.

Portland's program started more than three years ago and has raised \$10,000 dollars in that time. In its first year it raised \$1,500. But the group is having to switch things up to keep the money coming in. There are only 10 meters in downtown Portland, and leaders are making a push for more. "We're going to redesign our meters," Doern said. "That will give us an excuse to publicize the program all over again." Without renewed efforts to publicize programs like these, initiatives can fall by the wayside.

All that remains of Raleigh's Real Change Not Spare Change program, launched in 2004, is a poster displaying the Real Change motto on a vacant storefront. At one time, many downtown Raleigh businesses displayed the poster to encourage people not to give to panhandlers. But Asheville's program has fared a little better. Leaders first had the idea in 2002, and after shuffling it through several task forces, set up a collection box in July 2007. In the past eight months, Dwight

Butner, a business owner and former president of the Asheville Downtown Association, said more than \$1,000 has been collected from five boxes. "We never anticipated raising a whole lot of money on this," Butner said. "We want to find businesses or community groups that will offer to match what we raise." Butner said making the collection boxes visible will help the program — "kind of like a little billboard." Contact the Investigative Editor at iteam@unc.edu.

Forums review economic plans

BY ROBERT C. GUNST JR.
STAFF WRITER

Local business owners see uniformity when they look at downtown Chapel Hill. "It seems like most of the businesses on Franklin Street are either Carolina gear stores, restaurants or bars," said Christina Steger, manager of Tarheel Book Store. To hear this and similar concerns, the town of Chapel Hill will review the Economic Development Plan in public forums this week and next. "We need guidance from citizens to help determine our track and the adjustments that we will need to make," Chapel Hill Town Council member Bill Strom said. The plan still is in draft form and focuses on making Chapel Hill more transit-based and on diversifying local businesses.

The town's plan also emphasizes sustainable development and creating stronger ties to the University. Local business owners have many different opinions about what economic issues are important right now, but many said they did not know about the upcoming forums. "There are big parking problems in Chapel Hill," said Antonio Rodriguez, manager of Pepper's Pizza. Cluck-U Chicken plans to begin delivering food to serve those who do not want to navigate the logistics of Chapel Hill parking, General Manager Norm Praet said. But Bill Hester of Bill Hester Fine Art in University Square said the town's problem isn't a lack of parking. "If people are truly compelled to come downtown, then they will find ways to get here," Hester said.

"I want to see us get off this parking kick. We need to put some romance down here." He said he thinks the town should hold more cultural events and rely less on UNC sports to attract visitors. The town has a unique role in creating favorable conditions to promote economic development and business growth, said Adam Klein, director of government relations and economic development for the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce. The forums will discuss the town's economic strategy statement and six goals for promoting growth. Residents will have the opportunity to make their voices heard on how to solve economic problems at the forums. "At this point, we are trying to gain input on all parts," Chapel Hill

Weigh in on town development
Time: 10 a.m.
Date: Today
Location: Franklin Hotel, 311 W. Franklin St.
Time: 3 p.m.
Date: Thursday
Location: Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, 104 S. Estes Drive
Time: 7 p.m.
Date: March 11
Location: Christ United Methodist Church, 800 Market St.
Economic Development Officer Dwight Bassett said.
Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE BAND



DTH/CASSIE BUTLER

Students from Western Guilford High School in Greensboro take part in one of the Carolina Jazz Festival events last week in the Student Union. James Ketch, UNC Jazz Band director, helped during the event. The festival also had a presence on Franklin Street.



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