

Council hears plans for election program

Public hearing approved for May 14

BY ARIEL ZIRULNICK
SENIOR WRITER

A public financing program to fund local elections will move on to a public hearing following approval from the Chapel Hill Town Council on Monday.

Although the resolution passed without dissent, many on the council expressed reservations for the voter-owned election program that will fund campaigns for local office with public money. It is intended to open up the election process to a broader array of candidates.

Concerns and confusion expressed by council members hinted that there could be significantly more friction at the public hearing. Many were worried that the proposal, which is filled with dollar amounts and complicated funding schedules, will be too difficult for the public to understand well enough for a healthy discussion next month.

"This is filled with details," Mayor Pro Tem Jim Ward said. "It's going to take a while for the community to digest what was said, what was proposed."

Mayor Kevin Foy said the key will be to get the word out early

enough for Chapel Hill residents to fully discuss and comprehend the program.

"It does seem like something that's unusual enough that we should use nontraditional ways of publicizing it," Foy said, suggesting that a link to the program summary be placed on the home page of the town of Chapel Hill Web site, where other major agenda items typically are placed.

The document currently available online is a more concise version of the full proposal. A lengthier, more detailed staff report also exists, and council member Bill Strom suggested that document also be made available on the Web site.

Council member Bill Thorpe had a more traditional suggestion for increasing public awareness and understanding of the VOE program, which is meant to make the local electoral process more accessible.

He plans to lead a community information session to field questions from Chapel Hill residents about the program's intricacies.

"I want as much time as we can get," he said. "This is a big, big change."

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BILL THORPE, CHAPEL HILL TOWN COUNCIL MEMBER ON PROPOSED CAMPAIGN FINANCING CHANGES

However, members of the committee who drafted the proposal are eager to get it finalized so that those considering running for office in 2009 can plan accordingly.

The initial resolution asked for a public hearing on May 12, but a closer look at the agenda for that business meeting revealed an already-busy evening.

Town Attorney Ralph Karpinos proposed pushing back the hearing to May 14, the same night as a budget hearing. The amended date passed with ease.

Every step taken with the voter-owned elections program is being observed by communities around the state who are interested in implementing similar programs, council member Mark Kleinschmidt said.

Asheville and Greensboro are waiting for the legislative approval they hope will come following Chapel Hill's experimentation, he said.

"A lot of folks are looking to take some version of what we've done here and do it themselves," Ward said.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Aldermen to consider trail expansion funding

BY JEFF WOODALL
STAFF WRITER

Plans to expand the Bolin Creek greenway trail into Carrboro will move forward tonight if the Board of Aldermen accept funds needed to begin planning.

The proposed greenway, a multi-purpose park trail, could be backed by federal funding and would extend the trail north along Jones Creek.

"Greenways encourage people to be more physically active, and they promote the walkability of communities," said Brendan Moore, facilities administrator for Carrboro.

"Once they are completed, they also serve as a way for people to get from one part of town to the other without using a car."

A funding request for the planning and construction of the greenway, along with another at Morgan Creek, was first submitted by Carrboro in 2003.

The request was promptly approved, securing about \$1.45 million in local funds from the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization and from the federal Surface Transportation Program.

Nationally, with rising gas prices and other health and environmental issues, greenways are experiencing an upswing in support.

"People really want to have ways to bike and walk around their communities," said Tanja Wiant, communications coordinator for the East Coast Greenway Alliance,

ATTEND THE MEETING

Time: 7:30 p.m. today
Location: Carrboro Town Hall
Info: www.ci.carrboro.nc.us

a group that aims to create an "urban greenway" from Maine to Florida.

Even larger metropolitan areas, such as Boston, are planning more greenways based on the popularity of others, Wiant said.

The Bolin Creek greenway expansion project is a joint effort between towns to extend the existing trails.

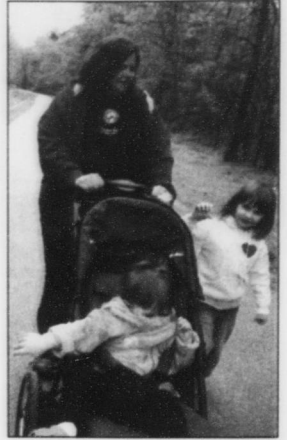
Adena Messinger, transportation planner for Carrboro, said communities slated for construction on the northern side of Homestead Road are trying to incorporate the greenways into their community designs.

Both the Bolin Creek and Morgan Creek greenways would be set in place to connect to those already in Chapel Hill.

Once completed, these initial trails could find their way into the downtown areas of Carrboro and Chapel Hill.

Philip Duchastel, a member of Carrboro's Greenways Commission, said he thinks an increase in safety and traffic organization could be reached if Weaver Street were used for greenway purposes.

"We have bike lanes in Carrboro, but once you get toward Weaver Street and the downtown, they just disappear," he said. "This is a big problem for families riding."



DTH/JULIE TURKEWITZ

Heidi Wolin walks on the Bolin Creek greenway with her nieces Isabel, 4, and Stella, 1. The trail might be approved for more funding tonight.

Duchastel also said he opposes the extra parking structures the town plans to build for the greenways.

He said a way to eliminate the need for the parking structures would be to connect the greenways more directly to residential areas.

"We want people to easily be able to walk and cycle to the greenways and have them connecting and interconnecting residential areas."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

TOWN COUNCIL

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Several council members questioned the wisdom of making the change only a few weeks after Stage 3 restrictions went into place.

"Why not wait a while?" council member Bill Strom asked.

Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation Director Butch Kisiah told the council that his department will lose about \$350,000 if Stage 3

restrictions remain in place.

Reservoirs are 70.4 percent full, but water levels still are the lowest that they ever have been at this point in the year.

"It is not risk free, but we can go back to more stringent restrictions in very short order should the need be there," OWASA board member Mac Clarke told the council.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

ECONOMY

FROM PAGE 3

North Carolina in shortfall status, according to an N.C. budget office spokesman.

An expected slowdown in consumer spending also could have an impact.

Sales tax growth, a major source of state income that reflects consumer confidence, was 3.6 percent from July 2007 to January 2008. That number is below the state average of 5.8 percent, but above the forecasted 2.9 percent.

North Carolina has missed some

of the negative effects of the national housing crisis, another factor in the national downturn.

The South saw an average 5.4 percent drop in home values between 2005 and 2007. During that same period, the Raleigh-Cary area was up 4 percent, Durham rose 5.6 percent and Charlotte increased 3.3 percent.

While North Carolina has not experienced serious economic problems from the current credit crunch, rural areas are still facing the economic problems they did before anyone began talking about sub-prime loans, said Harvey Goldstein, a UNC professor of city and regional planning.

"This state is still in a long period of transition to a knowledge-based economy," he said.

Senior writer Amy Eagleburger contributed reporting. Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

BUDGETS

FROM PAGE 3

uses in major areas. Miami saw a 5.7 percent decrease in property values between 2006 and 2007, and the Tampa area saw a 12.2 percent decrease.

Kentucky has a budget deficit estimated at \$900 million for the next two years. The state enacted a 3 percent higher education funding cut in July 2007 and has since added an additional 3 percent cut, according to the University of Kentucky fiscal office.

Preparing for potential cuts

The effect on UNC-system funding for this academic year is not expected to be significant. With the economic downturn expected to continue through 2009, the real crunch will be felt when the budget for the 2008-09 school session is created.

"We're going to make it through this year fine," said Rob Nelson, UNC-system vice president for finance.

"We'll have to see what kind of impact the economy has on our budget for the next fiscal year and the year after that."

On some system campuses, about 70 percent of academic funding comes from the state's general fund.

So far, the fund is doing fine, thanks largely to prudent estimates of growth, said an N.C. budget office official who asked to speak for the office as a whole.

According to a fiscal research report released in February, general fund revenue stood \$140 million ahead of its \$11.1 billion target. Collections were running 1.25 percent better than expected.

Gov. Mike Easley will present his 2008-09 budget to the legislature the first week of May, and Nelson said he expects the UNC-system's budget to shrink.

The key, he said, is working with the N.C. General Assembly on getting funds directed to the Board of Governors' priority areas: giving funding to campus safety, faculty salaries and research, increasing the number of teachers and nurses and contributing to North Carolina's economic expansion.

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Interactive Theatre Carolina and the UNC Law School present:

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