

Carol Woods—a community for the aged

by Joni Peters
News Editor

Carol Woods Retirement Center—an innovative and ambitious project geared towards "full life care" and the concept of "re-retirement"—may by the end of this month, have one less obstacle blocking work on initial construction of its proposed 250-unit facility.

According to local businessman Sandy McClamroch, the state of North Carolina will deliver a verdict "hopefully within the next few weeks" on whether to allow the retirement center to build its own sewage disposal facilities.

But for the past four years, retirement center planners have failed to achieve any significant advances beyond the planning stages.

Carol Woods is the pet project of Chapel Hill Residential Center, Inc. The corporation consists of local citizens interested in developing retirement facilities for area residents, especially residents who, though originally retiring to Chapel Hill from other parts of the country, now find it necessary to leave the community and seek out a rest home.

The proposed hundred-acre site of Carol Woods is located about four miles northwest of UNC. Despite its proximity to the University and to Chapel Hill, the Board of Directors of Chapel Hill Residential Retirement Center, Inc., were told they would not be allowed to "tap on" to the town's already over-taxed sewage disposal facilities.

"(It was) decided that we would have our own (sewage disposal) plant—in real simple terms, an over-sized septic tank," explained Board of Directors President Sandy McClamroch.

The sewage facility would require 22 of the center's hundred acres.

Last May, a state engineer inspected the center's proposed site and told McClamroch and other Board of Director members that a decision on whether to allow sewage plant construction would be made sometime this summer.

McClamroch said he could foresee no



problem in obtaining state approval of the sewage plant plan.

Monetary problems have also plagued Carol Woods. Lack of cash has been a four-year headache for Board of Director members, since 1972 when the community was first conceived.

"The economy was against us," said John Harkness, Board of Directors Secretary. Harkness, a retired Chicago businessman who has lived in Chapel Hill for the past thirteen years, is credited with developing the idea of a retirement center in Chapel Hill.

McClamroch also cited the problems posed by lack of cash. "(Four years ago) we

had no money, just a bunch of good ideas. Also, it was about that time that long-term mortgage money was simply not available," he explained.

The former Chapel Hill mayor pointed out the retirement center's expensiveness.

"This is a big undertaking," McClamroch said. "It (cost) will be in excess of ten million dollars."

Construction of the center's 250 or so cottage-type living units is expected to run at least six million dollars.

The center's "central core"—to include dining, recreation, medical and entertainment facilities—will require

another several million.

To help coordinate the planning of such an expensive endeavor, Chapel Hill Residential Retirement Center, Inc. signed a contract last November with PHP Management Consultant Services.

Since then, the Indiana-based firm has secured other key groups vital to the planning of Carol Woods—architects, developers, a construction company and a mortgage brokerage firm.

Though a vital prerequisite to seeing Carol Woods become a reality, some of the contracts have also braked the center's progress in some areas.

"One condition in the contract with the builders is that we pre-sell at least 50 per cent of the first living units," said McClamroch.

The units will range in price from 15 to 50 thousand dollars.

Despite the myriad problems that Carol Woods planners have had to contend with over the last four years, McClamroch, Harkness and others see the facility as a long-overdue necessity.

"There are no first-rate retirement homes in this area," John Harkness, one of Carol Woods' most staunch supporters, pointed out. "People move down here to Chapel Hill when they're 65 or so. They want to retire and live here the rest of their lives—that's what we (he and Mrs. Harkness) wanted to do."

Harkness explained that many of the people who retire to Chapel Hill to buy homes and set up new lives eventually face problems caused by age-related infirmities.

Taking care of their homes and yards are chores that "become burdensome" for Chapel Hill's retirees after about 10 or 15 years, Harkness explained.

"Retirees would like to "re-retire" and not leave Chapel Hill. They want very badly to stay here—the only way to do this is to build a retirement center."

Carol Woods, with its "full life care" emphasis, would "keep a lot of good people in the area," said McClamroch, as well as benefit the town by creating jobs for Chapel Hill citizens and university students.

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