

The 'other' shortage looms right around the corner

By Bruce Border

Confronted with yet another water shortage this summer, the residents of UNC and Chapel Hill alike are paying the costs of the poor planning, judgment, and management of those persons years ago who failed to provide for the community's future water needs, despite their authority and responsibility to do just that. So as the level of University Lake subsides, another problem symptomatic of past and present indecisiveness looms ahead this fall—namely, the shortage of on- and off-campus parking space for the University's faculty, staff, and students.

Adequate parking, or lack thereof, has perennially plagued the University within recent history. This seemingly unique campus dilemma has had its effects on Chapel Hill and Carrboro as well. The huge influx of automobiles annually from students and others accounts for most of the parking problems this area has had to cope with; thus the parking problem is one which necessarily involves the entire community.

Essentially, the parking problem is one in which demand far exceeds available supply in the short term. Given this situation, whatever the possible solutions, choices must be made which will entail costs—costs to consumers, costs to the environment and community. Failure to weigh various costs in proposed solutions and to decisively act upon them will not solve the parking situation.

Rationing of scarce parking spaces by high prices of parking permits has been used as a temporary solution to the problem. In attempting to lower demand for permits in this manner, however, the root of the problem has been left ignored, perhaps with the hope that it would disappear.

Another tactic in easing the parking crunch has been in establishing a municipal bus system in order to provide an alternative means of transportation. Advocates affirm that the bus system cuts demand for on-campus parking, preserves the village character of downtown, and provides much needed off-campus transportation for students and staff alike. In view of these benefits, bus supporters feel the system must continue if the community is not to suffer in the long run.

The bus system, coupled with price-rationing, purchase restrictions, and other measures, is not without burdensome costs to some groups, however. University personnel who commute from Durham cannot be bused in—at best, these persons can park their cars at off-campus lots and then travel the remaining distance by bus. The financial bill of the present system has stirred tension and worry between and among town and University officials, further clouding the parking issue and preventing proper decision-making.

Lessons gleaned from past experience point toward the fact that these measures alone will achieve little long-term good unless parking spaces are equitably and efficiently allocated, and secondly, unless the problem of supply and demand are eliminated from the picture. Perhaps demand for parking will continue to outstrip supply; if so, then allocation becomes paramount in any future policies.

One method of allocating space could be achieved by a lottery system whereby all students, staff, and faculty desiring permits would be assigned numbers which would then be randomly drawn in distributing parking permits. These freely transferrable

permits could then be obtained by those later desiring permits on the open market, as in housing spaces for dorms. True, the problem of supply would remain, but at least everyone would have an equal chance in purchasing permits from the University.

Quotas for faculty, staff, and students could be set to satisfy their particular needs within this system. No matter what policy is pursued in this regard, faculty and staff needs must be met sufficiently to insure routine University functions. Furthermore, students living off-campus (since on-campus housing can accommodate only 8,000 of some 20,000 students) should receive priority over those car-owning students on or near campus. Whatever group there may be, a priority system must be established to equitably allocate available space to those desiring parking permits.

What about the future parking situation? Planned construction of the central library, along with prohibition of parking on streets within one mile of campus, will further decrease the supply of parking spaces in the next two to three years. The cost of building parking decks, maintaining or even expanding the bus system, or simply doing nothing remains prohibitive to many persons seeking a solution. Until the automobile goes the way of the dinosaur, the parking dilemma will remain with us. For now, the only thing the University, Student Government, and town can hope to do is to pursue a fair, effective parking policy aimed at alleviating the situation in the long run.

Let us above all not allow the parking dilemma to overwhelm our duty to provide for the future needs of our community, as has all too often been the case in the past.

Bruce Border is a Junior Philosophy/Economics major from Waynesville, N.C.

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