

Showdown expected on proposed athletic center

By MIKE SHARSKY

A showdown is brewing over the proposed \$21 million UNC Student Athletic Center, because residents of Mason Farm Road, where UNC wants the center built, object to its construction.

Thomas W. Lambeth, chairman of the UNC board of trustees, says the trustees have approved the site known as the Baity property on Mason Farm Road and an architect is being selected to draw up preliminary designs for the structure.

Area residents are furious. "This is a slap in the face of Dr. Baity," said Colonel Wesley Egan, Mason Farm resident. The late Dr. Baity was head of the World Health Organization and was highly regarded by all who knew him, according to Egan.

When Baity sold UNC the 37-acre tract, he was told by the University that no athletic complex would be built on the land, and that the probable use would be an addition to medical buildings, according to several neighbors living near the Baity property. Egan said Baity then convened a neighborhood meeting and told residents about UNC's proposal. Other residents have confirmed this meeting.

Egan said that since then residents have had "no influence whatever" in the conception and planning of the center. "To be a resident in this neighborhood is to be nobody," Egan said.

The Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen must approve the building before construction can begin. Alderman Jonathan Howes said the board cannot act until a formal proposal is introduced at the board's next public hearing in September; a delay in the proposal would put off any decision until December.

A contract for preliminary design must be part of the proposal, so the aldermen can judge whether the building qualifies for a special land use permit. This permit is designed to protect Chapel Hill residents from damages by large indoor buildings.

Mike Jennings, planning director for the board, gave four provisions a structure must meet to receive the permit.

First, the building must not adversely affect the public health and safety. Second, it must meet all applicable town and state ordinances. Third, the building must not cause property values to decrease. Fourth, the structure must be in general harmony with the area.

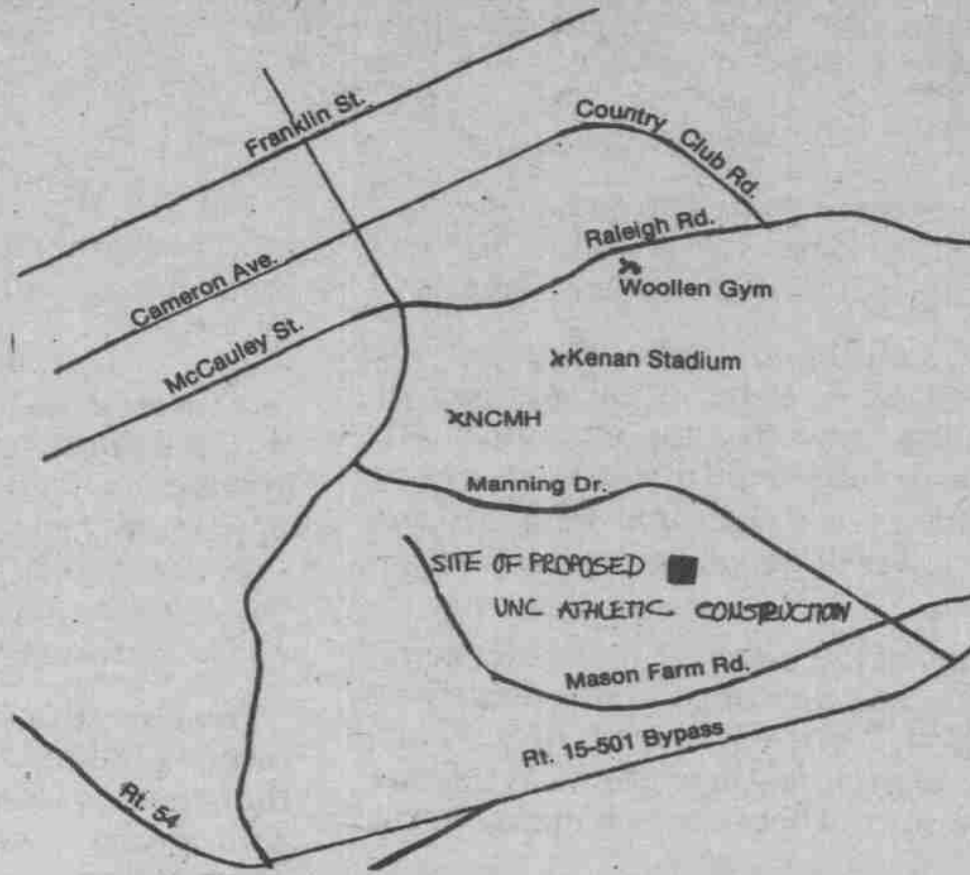
Jennings expressed concern that traffic will be a major problem for the center. He said his understanding is that the center calls for 2,500 parking spaces in the first stage, with a projected total of 6,000 available spaces. He said that if the center draws a capacity crowd, parking would be as difficult to find as it is now for events at Carmichael.

In that case, the special permit's protection would force parking overflow back to the campus, where some kind of shuttle-bus service would be required to transport people to and from the center.

The Chapel Hill aldermen are aware of the center's conflict with residents' sentiments and the permit's requirements.

Alderman Bev Kawalec said that most of the board feels that the center is needed. She said she agrees that the choice of the site is questionable, primarily because of traffic.

Alderman Ed Vickery said he is against granting the permit. "I don't think the board should give its approval. I think it's



incompatible with the neighborhood." He said, however, that if the board does not approve the Baity site, "UNC might do the same thing they did with the press building, which is to go to the General Assembly and get an overriding decision."

Alderman Marilyn Boulton expressed the opposite view. "This is not as devastating as people think. People think this is another Greensboro coliseum, but it's not," she said. At the public hearing to decide if the center should receive the permit, "there will be some aldermen who are now against the complex, who will find negative judgements," she said.

The question arises amid all the public sparring over the center's suitability as to just why it's needed at all.

Gordon Rutherford, UNC planning director, said the reason is obvious to any Carolina basketball fan. Carmichael is outdated, he said. "The demand for seats far exceeds the supply," he said.

Rutherford said he regrets the "coliseum image" and sees the center as much more than a mass-seating structure. He said he hopes to be able to supply an excellent recreational and intramural facility for all UNC students perhaps by using movable seats. A swimming pool, wrestling facility, practice basketball court, trophy rooms and locker rooms are currently envisioned.

In spite of strong neighborhood sentiment that UNC has broken its oral promise that no athletic center be built, and in the face of the aldermen's questions about the facility's compatibility with the special land use permit, UNC is moving ahead with its plans.

John Temple, vice-chancellor for business and finance, says he expects a preliminary design to be approved within two or three months.

Group protests hospital actions

By CHUCK BURNS

The Southern Orange Action Project charrette (French for gripe session) ended Friday with two committees lashing out at employment practices of UNC and North Carolina Memorial Hospital and the Chapel Hill Housing Authority.

The charges were made during reports given by the five committees—education, senior citizens, social services, employment, and public housing. The committee reports mentioned major problems and gave recommendations for solving those problems.

The employment committee report, given by Harold Foster, concentrated on the employment problems at UNC and North Carolina Memorial Hospital. Foster mentioned the increasing harassment and lack of training for unskilled, poor and black workers. He said the committee had decided to send a list of grievances to the state employment office, and if that didn't work, to organize and hold demonstrations.

The housing authority's executive director, Al Stevenson, headed the list of grievances by the public housing committee's report, said Birdine Edwards. The report charged that the executive director had willfully lied to the tenants' organization. She said the report recommended that the executive director be removed from his position in September 1978 if he did not make some effort to show concern for the tenants.

Chapel Hill Alderman Robert Epting represented Mayor James C. Wallace at the charrette. He said he was chagrined when he heard some of the remarks against the housing authority. He said he would like to see more tenants on the housing authority.

"If there is no legal problem, I see no problem in increasing the number of housing authority members to have more tenants involved," Epting said.

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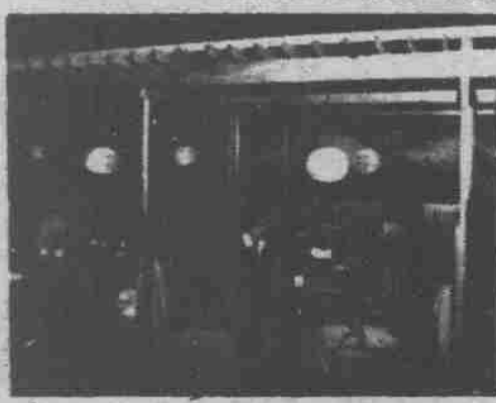
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