

Residents question candidates about special-use zoning issue

By LINDSAY HAYES
Staff Writer

In an informal forum Saturday, members of the Northside Neighborhood Committee questioned the three mayoral candidates about the practice of granting special-use zoning.

The Chapel Hill Town Council has the power to grant special-use permits to property owners seeking to change the zoning of their property.

Town council members and mayoral candidates Julie Andresen and Jonathan Howes told the committee that they support special-use zoning.

The third candidate, retired automobile dealer David Lineberger, told the committee he wants to keep Chapel Hill "the Southern part of heaven." He entered the mayoral race to restrict the practice of granting special-use permits to rezone residential property for business and office uses.

About 10 Northside residents were present to question the candidates. Northside includes neighborhoods stretching from Rosemary Street to Umstead Drive and from Columbia Street to the Carrboro town limits.

Residents are threatened by devel-

opers who can buy large parcels of land and have them rezoned for a higher occupant density, said resident Estelle Mabry.

Andresen said she is in favor of granting special-use permits for some property. The special-use permit does not carry over to the next owner of the property, Andresen said. The property returns to its original zoning when the applicant of the special-use permit moves away.

Before granting a special-use permit, the council establishes conditions that the property and the owner must meet in relation to the surrounding area.

Northside is zoned R-3, which permits the area to accommodate single family, duplex and triplex homes, Mabry said.

"We don't want another Chancellor Square," she said.

Committee members said they did not believe special-use zoning could benefit a neighborhood. "It's a shotgun against every neighborhood," said committee member Bob Joesting.

Northside resident Catherine Ward said she felt that the neighborhood had to fight the town each time a

piece of property went up for sale in the area.

"We're tired of fighting," she said. "We want to live here. We want the area to be strictly residential."

Northside is the middle-class integrated neighborhood of Chapel Hill, Mabry said.

Howes said he also supports special-use zoning. An exclusive residential-use zone would probably not solve all of Northside's problems, he said.

Part of the town's comprehensive plan, he said, includes enlarging middle-class housing opportunities near downtown and revitalizing downtown.

"How many more people can live in Northside without degrading the quality of life here?" he asked the committee.

Andresen said council members thought special-use zoning could introduce buffer zones and transitions from commercial areas to residential neighborhoods. But she favors more restrictive controls on commercial permit zoning.

The committee members were concerned about the impact of Westcourt complex, a commercial



DTH/David Minton

Mayoral candidates Jonathan Howes (left), Julie Andresen and David Lineberger talk with residents and residential project proposed for construction on West Franklin and West Rosemary streets.

"The character of this area is changing," Andresen said. "The zoning is not well planned. The

council can't look at scale models of proposed buildings in context of existing buildings."

Chapel Hill Greenways Commission makes plans to develop new nature trails

By KELLY JOHNSON
Staff Writer

The Chapel Hill Greenways Commission plans to build four new greenways along town creeks for recreational purposes within the next eight to 10 years, said Jim Herstine, director of the Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation Department.

A greenway is a linear park that runs along a creek or river bed, Herstine said. These greenways are generally used for walking, biking and relaxing, he said.

The proposed sites for the greenways are along Booker, Bolin, Mor-

gan, Wilson and Battle Branch creeks, Herstine said.

These greenways are important for the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, said assistant town manager Ron Secrist.

They also help preserve the town's village atmosphere, he said, and serve as a convenient internal network for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles, he said.

Anne Loeb, member of the Chapel Hill Greenways Commission, said she wants the greenways to connect parks and schools where possible.

"That's particularly good for child-

ren whose parents don't want them out on the highway," she said.

The Tanyard Branch greenway has already been completed, Loeb said. This greenway, which is part of Bolin Creek, was completed in 1985, she said.

Secrist said the funds for the greenways come from the town's capital improvements program, money the Chapel Hill Town Council allocates annually for specific projects.

Each proposed site for a greenway comes before the town council for approval, Secrist said, and most of

the sites are approved.

The cost per mile for a greenway can range from \$500 to \$10,000 or more, Herstine said.

The cost depends on whether the greenway is a bike or nature trail, Loeb said. The Tanyard Branch was completed by volunteers in one day, so the cost was minimal, she said. But the town's public works department had to complete work on some steps of construction.

Most of work on the Battle Branch project will be completed by the Boy Scouts, Herstine said. As Eagle Scout candidates, the scouts will work on

the greenway as their community service project.

Nature trails require cutting and clearing branches along the path, cleaning the area and marking the greenway, Loeb said.

Bike trails are more expensive, requiring additional work to pave the paths, she said.

"People worry that (a greenway) decreases property value, but they've found it increases the value," Loeb said.

Herstine also said the greenways system is "seen as a positive influ-

ence." He said that local property appraisers and developers realize that recreational use increases the value of property.

The original idea for the greenways system was introduced in the 1970s, Loeb said. The town appointed a task force, and in 1985 they completed their final report proposing possible greenway sites, Herstine said.

The greenways program is supported by a state statute authorizing local governments to reserve a certain amount of land for recreation, Herstine said.

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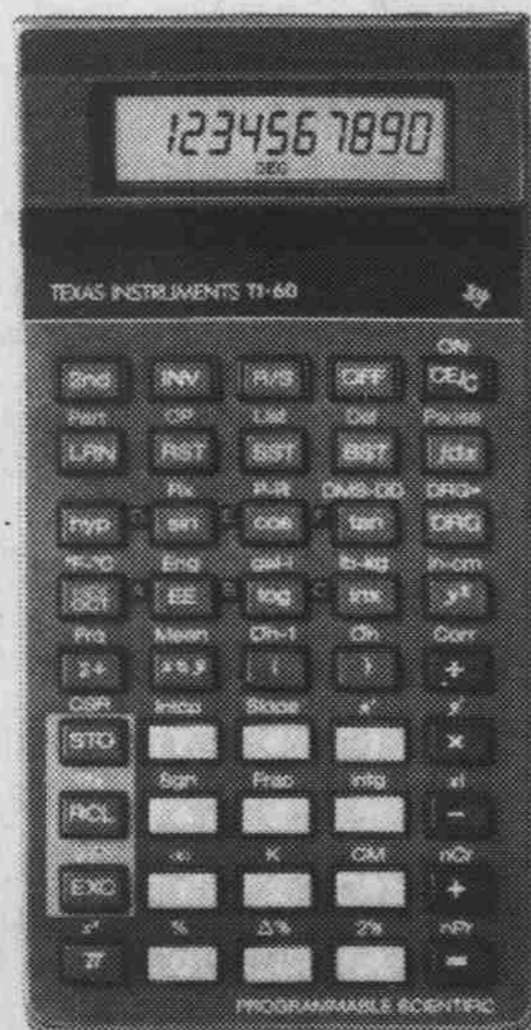
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