



Mayor Mark Chilton consults with Carrboro police Officer T. Kennedy (left) and Officer T. Coyle on how to handle the situation.



Demonstrators march down West Weaver Street before the occupation. PHOTO BY ROBERT DICKSON

OCCUPATION FROM PAGE 1

The building, which previously housed the WCOM radio station and Community Realty, was sold by Weaver Street Market to Revco, a subsidiary of CVS Caremark, in 2010. CVS has proposed a two-story development on the property, including a CVS on the ground floor, which will be considered by the Carrboro Board of Aldermen this spring.

What went down

During Saturday’s demonstration, the doors to the empty building were standing open, but none among several of the occupiers questioned would or could say how entry to the building was gained. Inside the building, banners reading “Occupy Everything” and “Capitalism Values Suffering” had been hung, and the words “Carrboro Commune” and an anarchist symbol had been painted on the wall. About 20 people were inside the building. Carrboro police and Mayor Mark Chilton were on the scene within an hour of the occupation. Chilton entered the building with police and asked the protesters to leave. They refused. Meanwhile, police prevented a Domino’s Pizza deliveryman from delivering a pizza that demonstrators had apparently ordered. Protesters responded with cries of “Free the pizza!” Police also confiscated a generator that

had been brought to power the building. Several hours after his first request, Chilton again asked that the occupiers leave the building. “As the mayor explained, you are breaking and entering right now,” Carrboro police Capt. Walter Horton said. “We have given everybody an opportunity to walk out and leave without any charges being pressed, but if you remain in this building you are subject to arrest.” Chilton and Horton then left the building to a chorus of boos, while someone in the crowd yelled out to Horton, “Many cops have killed themselves. Why don’t you?” Soon after Chilton and Horton left, the group slowly began to vacate the building, carrying out extension cords, pamphlet holders, pieces of wood and pots and pans containing various food items. Though the occupiers did heed the warnings of the police and leave, they did not go quietly. A verbal exchange erupted on the sidewalk in front of the contested building, as a member of the group who identified himself as Johnny Moran gave statements to the press while arguing with the mayor. Moran said the group was taking back the building to turn it into a community center for the town that could potentially host a free school for children or provide free health care. “Because I make barely above minimum wage, because the only thing between me and get-

ting evicted is two months rent, I am sick of living in a society like this,” Moran said. He added that the cops were acting as an army of greed and wealth, saying it was their fault some people are barely surviving. “Every time a hungry family can’t get what’s in that grocery store over there, there is one army between them and the food they need,” he yelled out to the crowd. “You are trying to give my police department a bad name,” Chilton told Moran. “You are full of crap.” Chilton asked Moran to explain to him his views, but Moran refused. “I am an anarchist,” he said. “That means I don’t have dialogue with the government or police.” As the argument came to an end, Moran assured Chilton that the group would be back soon. “The worse things get, the more we will do,” he said. Once everyone had vacated the building, police officers blocked the entrance to prevent re-entry. The demonstrators chanted, “F*** the pigs, we don’t need them, all we want is freedom, freedom,” as the police surrounded the building and later chained the doors. Reactions Though separate events, members of the community can’t help but draw comparisons between the occupation and the incidents of Nov. 12-13 at the former Yates Motor Co. building on West Franklin Street in Chapel Hill, which concluded with a police Special Emergency Response Team raid in which officers brandished long rifles and detained those on the side-

walk outside the entrance of the building before rushing inside. Sharon Harmon was at the Carrboro Century Center when she came outside and saw the protesters and police across the corner. “I think that they have two completely different views of reality,” she said. “I think people on both sides have legitimate concerns.” “I admire the courage of the anarchist to actually demonstrate some concern, but I also should say that I have a great deal of admiration of the police for keeping calm in this situation,” she continued. As with the Yates incident, Occupy Chapel Hill/Carrboro released a statement on Monday saying that the occupation was not an agreed-upon action of its general assembly. Some of those who have identified themselves with Carrboro Commune have also identified with the Occupy movement. Carrboro police Chief Carolyn Hutchison said she believes that some of the people involved in the occupation could have been involved in the Yates building occupation, though the two incidents “are two completely separate situations.” “It was a very volatile and difficult situation, and I don’t think we could’ve had a better outcome,” she said. Hutchison said there were no arrests made regarding the incident and that no charges related to the occupation will be brought because police told demonstrators that if they left they would not be charged. “We gave our word,” she said. “They took the property. We took it back to restore order.” “There was enforcement action out there. The enforcement involved the departure of the people that were breaking the law,” Hutchison continued. “If the goal was to secure the property, we did that.” However, Hutchison said, it would be incorrect to assume that there would be no arrests if

the weapons that the police department has available. “I want us to reassess what we have,” he said, “for us to really put into question whether we need that.” Slade said he also would like to see the community have a discussion about private property. “It’s not written in any biologic sense that as humans we have to have any relationship with property or space,” he said. “I think that’s one of the valuable contributions that this group is making to the community as a discussion.” But, he added, “Given the law and how it is at the state level, we’re required to enforce that law.” “My suspicion is that ... we do live in a culture that doesn’t question private property and that enforcement of it is what most people want, and so to be responsible in this position, I’d have to reflect that,” Slade said. “If somehow the majority of people in town were questioning vacant spaces and recognizing that that was a form of violence too ... there may be discretion in the timing of when we enforce.” Carrboro Commune has announced that the group will conduct “guerrilla gardening” at the site on March 17, in which the property will be turned into a community garden. At a meeting called by the group on Sunday, Maria Rowan said that years ago the community envisioned what it would like to see at the North Greensboro Street property, and that none of the ideas proposed included a CVS. “I think the laws and politics that have allowed this piece of land to be taken out of community control and taken into corporate control” are the problem, she said. Center Street resident Jeff Herrick, who is married to board of aldermen member Michelle Johnson and has opposed the proposed CVS development, said he was concerned that the actions of the occupiers may have negatively impacted the work of residents opposing the project. “A lot of their information is not completely informed,” he said, adding that he hasn’t seen the demonstrators at the many town meetings regarding the project. “It’s very boring and it’s not as exciting as taking over a building, but that’s the way it works in Carrboro.”

Staff writer Rose Laudicina and publisher Robert Dickson contributed reporting for this article.

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