

FOR THE RECORD

A few things to keep in mind

As has been reported, a formal complaint has been filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency alleging a pattern of environmental racism on the part of local governments in the matter of the Rogers-Eubanks neighborhood. Such a complaint is serious business and should be thoroughly and properly addressed. The review of this complaint and the process for resolving the dispute will take time and move at a federal pace. At the same time, the community has to move forward in a number of areas to settle questions about the future of the landfill, our solid-waste strategy and, most specifically, the siting of a waste transfer station. Now, with the complaint in the mix, there is an extra layer of legal caution about each step, and we’ve already seen a reluctance to discuss the matter on the part of local officials. This is unfortunate, because it comes at a time when the dialogue was beginning to yield results. There has also been a considerable amount of work done by a committee of residents, elected officials, landfill management and others to try to find a solution to the concerns of the Rogers-Eubanks neighborhood.

This newspaper, mainly through the efforts of contributing editor Taylor Sisk, has devoted close to 25,000 words to this issue in an attempt to add to the record the kind of background and context necessary when weighing an issue of this kind. The community, we believe, was inching toward a consensus to take the existing landfill off the table as a site for the transfer station. Now that seems unlikely. Not because it is any less the right thing to do, but because it may affect the outcome of legal proceedings. It is in everyone’s best interests to get all parties back to the negotiating table again, to try to nail down once and for all a package of amenities for the Rogers and Eubanks roads community and an agreement about the future of the landfill property. Resolving that is a critical step in devising a new long-term strategy for disposing of our garbage. We need to consider alternatives to the strategy of shipping our waste out of the area, including an aggressive effort to reduce the amount of garbage we each produce in the first place. We need to be thinking, building and planning for our future. But first we must find a way to reach an agreement on what to do about our past.

A month for reflection and learning our nearly lost histories

Tomorrow we start Black History Month and with that a month of opportunities to learn more about the history and culture of our community. We’ve spotlighted a few of those opportunities in this month’s edition of *MILL* and we encourage you to consider a visit to the ArtsCenter, where starting Feb. 8 there will be photos, scrapbook excerpts and other items on display featuring Carrboro and Chapel Hill’s historically black neighborhoods. Fortunately, interest in preserving the heritage of these neighborhoods has grown over the past several years and the work of students and volunteers with the ArtsCenter’s “Hidden Voices” project has helped accelerate the recovery of a fading history. The significance of starting a month-long review of black history on Feb. 1 should not be forgotten. On that day in 1960, four black students at North Carolina A&T sat down at a whites-only counter at Woolworth’s in Greensboro. Though the tremors caused by the Greensboro sit-ins were felt around the South and indeed the world, this community, so close to the epicenter, saw our first sit-in just 21 days later.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Landfill open letter

*Editor's note: following is an open letter to the board of county commissioners.*

Dear Commissioners: Congratulations for reversing your earlier decision to unilaterally select the Eubanks Road area as the site for the new waste transfer station. That change of heart was a step in the right direction. You are now embarking on a critical phase in the history of Orange County — the selection of the next waste-handling site. The future of this system is in your hands. The history of environmental racism regarding this issue is well established. It is time for you to break this cycle. I urge you to remove the Eubanks Road area from any possible site consideration. Immediately and without reservation. Please make it clear to the consultant that this area is not to be considered in any way, that it is to be part of the exclusionary criteria. By re-opening the siting process, you have shown the courage to admit that the original selection of Eubanks Road last March was flawed. For this, I am grateful and proud of you. It would be a very big mistake not to explicitly exclude the Eubanks Road area from the new search. You need look no further than your recently tendered notice from the EPA regarding the U.S. Department of Justice complaint of environmental racism to achieve a full understand-

*“I urge you to remove the Eubanks Road area from any possible site consideration.”*  
— John Kramer

ing of this fact. So, I urge you to continue your demonstration of fair and just actions regarding the new waste-handling site. Follow the wise and righteous actions of the City of Greensboro, and remove the current landfill area from further consideration. A process that uses selection criteria to steer your choice towards Eubanks will not go unchallenged. As you may remember, the last time a “landfill search” was done many years ago, Eubanks Road was initially off the table, until in the 11th hour “site 17” on Eubanks road was presented as the “best choice.” At that time, Duke University outsmarted Orange County and shut down that site. The whole thing melted and, magically, more room was found at the existing landfill. *We do not need nor will we allow another site 17 type study.* There is no such silver bullet available to you now.

I am hopeful that you will do the right thing this time. A lot of people are watching you, and are counting on it. I wish you the best.  
**John Kramer**  
Carrboro

Ask the restaurants

In your “Town’s taco trucks in jeopardy” article on Jan. 24 article, Mayor Mark Chilton and Board of Aldermen member Jacquie Gist [said they] don’t understand why a complaint was filed against trucks selling prepared food from parking lots. Gist writes, “I am worried by the real possibility that hard working entrepreneurs who are adding to our community could be put out of business and have their livelihood threatened. It is un-American and certainly un-Carrboro. If Carrboro cannot offer a welcoming home to immigrants trying to achieve the American Dream, then maybe I don’t know Carrboro as well as I think I do” The Taco Stands are *not* an immigration issue. The Taco Stands are *not* an entrepreneurial issue. The Taco Stands are a public health and a business licensing issue. May I suggest that Chilton and Gist interview some of the real entrepreneurs, local business owners of Carrboro restaurants, and ask them how they feel about the fact that there are two sets of zoning and public health standards when it comes to serving food in downtown Carrboro. They might ask about the *livelihood of local business people* who have invested substantial tangible and permanent assets into

downtown Carrboro. Fitch Lumber, Johnny’s Sporting Goods and Cliff’s Meat Market *parking lots* are not licensed and inspected as restaurants, period. They don’t have to install costly HVAC systems, restrooms, pay overhead for rent or phones. (Whom do you call if you are in the ER with possible food poisoning?) Full-functioning restaurants are the center of community life in Carrboro, but they live on the edge. They are faced with high employee costs, high rent costs, high food costs and very high construction costs. They must then survive on a slim margin ... take-home salary is minimal. Interview the owners of Glass Half Full, Tyler’s, Spotted Dog, Southern Rail, Elmo’s, Panzanella or Weaver Street Cafe and ask them how they feel about a competitor setting up shop next door who faces almost no start-up and maintenance costs. Gist’s and Chilton’s comments were irresponsible and a slap in the face to existing, locally owned small businesses. It’s time, long overdue, for the Carrboro Board of Aldermen to end their arbitrary attitude toward zoning laws. They need to stand up for local businesses that pay taxes and support the long-term viability of Carrboro. Please stop pandering to imaginary issues and face those that strengthen our local economy.  
**Ken Mills**  
Carrboro  
p.s. I did not file the anonymous complaint.

Crime and civility in Central America

ROBERT DICKSON

Our family’s Honduran holiday vacation was feeling like anything but a holiday. Our bags had first been reported as late, then later, then stolen from the truck on which they had been sent from San Pedro Sula to La Ceiba. “Hijacked” was the term used. And I had contracted the Honduran version of the two-step. Now I was back at The Mall (that’s what everyone called it — just like here) in La Ceiba, sitting in the back of a van in search of a bank to convert my check from Taca Airlines for the stolen luggage from limpiaras to dollars. And lest I forget, the driver spoke no English and my Spanish is pretty much limited to what it takes to order certain adult beverages. My previous trip to The Mall had been the evening before when I was shopping for underwear and a bathing suit in a mob of post-Christmas sale-crazed Hondurans, Spanish versions of *Walking in a Winter Wonderland* and *Jingle Bells* filling the air. One of the reasons I travel to places like Honduras is for strange cultural experiences. The Mall, however, looked and smelled like every other mall and was full of the same sorts of stores. This experience was just plain unpleasant. So now I returned, only to find that the bank had closed at 2:00, and it was now 3:15. It was Saturday afternoon and the parking lot was near gridlock.

Our driver was attempting to extract us from this mess when an elderly lady backed into his brand new van. Both drivers emerged and the expected arguing and arm-waving ensued. I sunk down into my seat as my two-stepped stomach kicked it up into a rumba. Then things really got weird. After the argument came to a quicker-than-anticipated conclusion, our guy, who’d I guess was 25 to 30 years old, backed up and let the lady who smacked him back out. We followed her as she led us on a circuitous trip through the streets of La Ceiba. It turned out she was leading us to another branch of the bank so we could hopefully exchange our checks. The bank branch was only a drive-through that wasn’t about to perform a complicated financial transaction, so I figured we’d soon be delivered back to the lodge where I could ease my gastronomical problems with a cold cerveza. Wrong. As we pulled up to a house not far from the bank, our now-familiar lady emerged, cane in hand, and proceeded to get into the front seat of the van. Turns out she spoke very passable English, having lived in Miami for a long time while working as an airline stewardess. She said she knew the young man’s employer and that he “wasn’t very nice.” So we were all off to the body shop to see what could be done to keep the bad boss from coming down on our young driver

for damaging his new van. Soon I found myself standing in the dirt driveway of a La Ceiba body shop. It could have been a back lot in Carrboro except for the incredible bright-orange flowering tree (where’s Ken Moore when you need him?) and the fact that it was maybe 85° F on December 29th. The damaged bumper wasn’t hurt much at all; really, barely a scratch. But the young Honduran driver was obviously intent on his eagle-eyed boss not being able to tell that anything at all had happened. So the bumper was rubbed and polished, the lady paid the body-shop man and we all rode off into the heat of the afternoon, chatting away as if we were the best of friends. As we returned our new friend to her home, she insisted that we come to her house Monday morning so she could escort us to the bank. She said that while the lines were always long, she was allowed to go to the front because of her age. We explained that our schedules wouldn’t allow us to do this, so we’d just take our Honduran checks home with us and let our bank sort it out. She seemed a bit disappointed, but I really wasn’t sorry to have to miss another trip to the bank. As we parted, our driver and the lady kissed each other in that way that so many cultures enjoy but that we *norte americanos* seem to find overly familiar. I just watched and tried to imagine such civility as two folks in-

*“Lost luggage proved no match for an experience with a higher order of civility.”*

volved in an accident at our local version of The Mall kissing each other. When we were delivered back to our digs, the young man refused to take any more than the agreed-upon price, even though most of the afternoon’s excitement was due to our need to find a bank. He looked sheepish when I stuck a tip in his hand but laughed out loud when I used sign language to indicate he should spread some dust on the freshly polished bumper so it would match. He was laughing as he drove away. Lost luggage proved no match for an experience with a higher order of civility. My stomach and I both felt lots better about our Honduran holiday, and cold beer never tasted finer.

*Robert Dickson is the publisher of The Carrboro Citizen.*

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