

Carrboro board votes to alter W. Main Street

Plan would accommodate cyclists

BY CHELSEY DULANEY
STAFF WRITER

A plan to reconfigure a main Carrboro road could mean safer conditions for pedestrians — if it is approved by the state.

The Carrboro Board of Aldermen unanimously approved a proposal Tuesday to pursue reducing a stretch of West Main Street from four lanes to three with turn and bike lanes.

But the road is maintained by the state, and the plan must be approved by the North Carolina Department of Transportation before the town can proceed, Carrboro Mayor Mark Chilton said.

"It would be up to them to decide how the road would be striped, but they tend to take our thoughts into consideration," he said.

The town has not yet submitted the plan to the NCDOT, said Steve Abbott, a spokesman for the department.

The proposal will go through a process of meetings and reviews to decide if the plan is safe and in the best interest of the town, he said.

"If we don't think it's safe, we won't approve it," Abbott said.

Chilton said the restructuring of the stretch of West Main Street between Weaver Street and Hillsborough Road would ideally be done when NCDOT repaves the road, which happens every few years.

Abbott said the road is not on schedule to be repaved in 2011.

The plan would provide the town with an almost cost-free way to add in more safety options for cyclists, Chilton said.

"It's a very inexpensive way to create new bike lanes," he said. "We'd just be reassigning pavement

"The more people we have walking around paying attention, the better it is for business."

SARA GRESS, N.C. CRAFTS GALLERY

that's already there."

Chilton said studies have shown this plan could result in fewer accidents and overall safer conditions for pedestrians and cyclists.

"It will probably mean that motor traffic will be forced to drive closer to the speed limit, which I think is a positive," he said.

The stretch of road designated in this plan usually sees about 5,000 trips a day, and traffic usually isn't a problem, Chilton said.

Carrboro resident Forrest DeMarcus said he supports the plan, but has concerns about how traffic would be on Saturdays, when Carrboro holds a farmers' market next to Town Hall.

"Farmers' market days are the most traffic around here," he said. "But being Carrboro's main road, I think it's wise to accommodate their cyclists."

Sara Gress, owner of N.C. Crafts Gallery on West Main Street, said she also would like to see the portion of the road become friendlier to walking traffic.

"I'm all for more pedestrian and bike traffic on this side of town," she said.

"I think the more people we have walking around paying attention, the better it is for business."

Contact the City Editor at city@dailytarheel.com.

GROUNDHOG WAS RIGHT



DTH/JESSICA APPLEBAUM

It looks like Punxsutawney Phil was right. Spring arrived in its full glory in Chapel Hill today. Students, including senior English major David Hutcheson and sophomore English major Luke Wander, took advantage of the nice weather by reading and tanning in Polk Place on Monday afternoon. Wander said that he is in the play *Under Construction* and is used to having his shirt off publicly so he was perfectly comfortable in the quad.

LIBRARY

FROM PAGE 1

would end in a parade of thank you's," said Aaron Nelson, president and CEO of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce.

Residents were not only concerned about the cost but also the

principle of moving the library to a mall, said Melissa Cain, executive director of the Chapel Hill Public Library Foundation.

She said the town considered the cost concerns and the more sentimental concerns in its research after the permanent relocation was initially proposed by mall owner

Madison Marquette in November.

"There just wasn't a fit," Cain said. "And just like a house of cards it started falling apart."

Residents and council members alike said they were glad the town went through the decision process.

"I have never been happier and prouder to live in Chapel Hill," said council member Sally Greene.

"And never been more proud to sit in this table."

Stancil said the library renovation is expected to be finished by fall 2012.

Contact the City Editor at city@dailytarheel.com.

TOWN GOWN

FROM PAGE 1

credited with keeping the area's historically low unemployment rate far below the national average during the recession.

And of the University's more than 12,000 employees, about 4,300 live in Chapel Hill.

"When they make cuts, it's affecting people who live here," Kleinschmidt said.

Thorp said he and Kleinschmidt have met multiple times, most recently Monday, to discuss the different effects the budget cuts could have.

Thorp said the University helps to support the town through sharing the costs for public events, paying property taxes and, most importantly, through participating in the Chapel Hill Transit system.

"But the biggest impact for the town will be if the University has to continue to shrink — if there are fewer people paying rent or fewer people investing in town businesses," he said.

"If there are any layoffs, then obviously the town will be affected if employees have to move to find employment elsewhere."

Kleinschmidt said he has been talking to mayors of towns who host other UNC system schools to discuss ways to prevent potentially damaging cuts.

He said he has set up a conference call with host-town mayors next week and will also discuss the issue at the North Carolina Metropolitan Mayors Coalition winter meeting on Feb. 24 and Feb. 25.

Greenville Mayor Pat Dunn said her city has already started preparing for the repercussions of possible cuts at East Carolina University.

Dunn said the University is one of the area's largest employers in addition to the health care industry.

"At this point we don't know exactly what the impact is going to be," she said. "But we are conscious of the economy in 2011, and we are adopting a conservative budget to be able to meet the needs of the citizens of our city."

Kleinschmidt said the effect of the budget cuts on the Chapel Hill economy are hard to predict, but changes could be seen if fewer people are spending or living in town.

He also said he does not know how the potential layoffs could affect the town. But as the main supplier of the local workforce, layoffs from the University could drastically affect employment in Chapel Hill.

"It's not that we get 'X' amount of dollars from the University," Kleinschmidt said. "It has indirect impacts."

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