

## FOR THE RECORD

## Redesign in Raleigh

The “elect” has now been removed from Gov. Beverly Perdue’s job title, and the office furniture has been rearranged. The governor hauled her own desk into her new office the other day and situated it by a window. Let’s hope this arrangement affords her a better view of the state than her predecessor’s.

Over the past five months, in a series called *Breakdown*, we’ve reported on the collapse of our state’s mental health care system and its impact here in Orange County. We awaited Gov. Perdue’s selection of a new secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services with both apprehension and hope. Her choice of Lanier Cansler leaves us with both.

Cansler, a CPA, is a former Republican state legislator from Buncombe County and a former deputy secretary of the department he will now head.

As a legislator, he either co-chaired or served on several committees related to health and human services, was named 1998 Outstanding Legislator by the North Carolina Mental Health Association and was given the 1999 State Representative Leadership Award by the North Carolina Council of Community Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Programs.

But as deputy secretary of the DHHS from 2001 to 2005, Cansler helped preside over mental health care reform measures that have largely led us into the disastrous state of affairs with which we’re now confronted.

Moreover, as a partner in Cansler Fuquay Solutions, Cansler most recently represented Computer Sciences Corp., which last month won a \$265 million contract to create and then operate a Medicaid billing system for the state. He resigned his position upon being named to the DHHS post. He also has worked as a lobbyist for ValueOptions, the company hired by the state to review and process all Medicaid claims and as a lobbyist for The Arc of North Carolina, a service provider for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Mental health care advocates from across the state were split in their reaction to the selection of Cansler. Some say he’s a very capable man who’s genuinely concerned about mental health care issues and can help lead the department out of its morass.

Many others, however, are legitimately concerned about Cansler’s connections to those who provide services and support to the state. They question why, at a time in which charting a new course in the provisioning of these services is absolutely critical, Perdue would perpetuate the revolving-door routine by selecting a lobbyist.

The most fundamental truth we’ve learned in researching and reporting mental health care reform in North Carolina is that in order to create an effective system, all concerned voices must be heard. Too often, mental health care professionals – the psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and others who directly interact with those coping with mental illness – have been shut out of the decision-making process.

And, to a greater extent still, the consumers of mental health care services and their families have been ignored.

In order to win trust and respect, Lanier Cansler must prove from the get-go that he’s receptive to the perspectives of all parties involved.

To read the stories in The Citizen’s seven-part mental health care series, go to [www.carrborocitizen.com/main/breakdown](http://www.carrborocitizen.com/main/breakdown)

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## Is this well-managed growth?

MARI WEISS

I am a new Carolinian. Since moving to Chapel Hill/Carrboro, I have learned a great many things. The first thing I learned was that my house was <not> located in Chapel Hill but in a town, heretofore unknown to me, called Carrboro.

I have also learned that, unlike living in Los Angeles, my voice matters. I have attended Carrboro town meetings where I have been permitted to address the different boards, and I have even had a column printed in a local newspaper. This is all very exciting and gratifying to me, to live somewhere that I actually feel I can make a difference.

Upon moving to Carrboro, I went on the town’s website and was very excited about what I read. Their mission statement says that they value pedestrian safety and walkability. They also say that they are known for their well-managed growth.

There are two projects coming up before town government that, if approved, will be in direct contradiction with their mission statement.

Those projects are known as Colleton Crossing and Carolina Commons. As proposed, both developments would connect to a dead-end road in the Highlands called Claymore Road and add a thousand more car trips per day through the neighborhood.

The Highlands is a housing tract of 100 homes. All the roads in the Highlands are 20 feet wide, with no sidewalks, curbs, gutters or lights.

The original builder, Ron Weber, who still resides in this 20-year-old tract, says that the roads are at capacity now. Our roads are called sub-collector roads and were only meant to carry traffic from 38 to 100 homes.

The Highlands has two through streets: Claymore Road and Sterling Bridge. Claymore Road connects to Rogers Road and is a dead-end to the west and Sterling Bridge connects to Claymore Road and Homestead.

All pedestrians must walk in the street. We have six school bus pickups and drop-offs a day. Chapel Hill High School students who live in the Highlands or Fox Meadow walk along a new sidewalk on Homestead to Sterling Bridge, which is a designated school walk zone with no sidewalks.

All of the residents of the Highlands walk, bike, exercise or play in the streets. We even have homeowners’ meetings and block parties in the street. One resident occasionally shows movies on the side of his house.

UNC owns the land where the proposed road and the tract known as Carolina Commons are to be constructed. UNC is a national leader in pedestrian safety through the UNC Highway Safety Research Center and the Injury Prevention Center. Their own studies show that more pedestrian injuries occur with increased traffic volume and no sidewalks. Statistics show that there are many preventable child pedestrian fatalities on the same type of roads as ours. I am curious how UNC will serve as a role model for ensuring pedestrian safety when their new tract provides for 10-foot-wide walking trails and a playground while removing the only place for our neighborhood children to play – the streets.

The road that they are proposing to connect to the Highlands will be constructed through the woods of Bolin Creek, beginning at the tract called Carolina Commons and extending northward to a landlocked area to be called Colleton Crossing. Friends of Bolin Creek are against this road and it is in direct opposition to the Carrboro land-use ordinance, which states that no construction or grading is to occur in a flood zone. The terrain is thick with trees, is uneven and has a very steep grade. I cannot imagine the cost of grading and paving such a road or the ecological toll it may take.

And yet, I have not heard of one penny being put aside by UNC, the developers or the Town to improve the roads of The Highlands to put in sidewalks, curbs, gutters or lights.

Although Carrboro is pushing for “connectivity” of its neighborhoods, why vehicular connectivity? Why not connection by bike paths and walking trails? We fear for the safety of our children.

My only hope is that Carrboro recognizes the dangers of this kind of haphazard planning and comports with its mission statement of valuing pedestrian safety, walkability and well-managed growth.

Mari Weiss is a resident of the Highlands neighborhood.

## High-speed Internet must be a part of Carrboro’s infrastructure

BY BRIAN RUSSELL

People who live, work and visit Carrboro love the free wireless Internet. But the Town of Carrboro’s wireless is a victim of its own success. I’ve heard from a lot of people who have problems with it and wish it worked in their homes. Fact is, the area the wireless signal covers is too small, the connection is unreliable and the bandwidth is too little. Now is the time for the Town of Carrboro to take the next step. I propose the town support the construction of fiber optic Internet connections to buildings within the downtown business district.

The idea of building a fiber optic network in Carrboro isn’t farfetched. Matter of fact, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC DOT) and the Town of Chapel Hill are already working on it. The Town of Carrboro and the Town of Chapel Hill share an old copper-wire traffic-signal system. Last year, the Town of Chapel Hill budgeted \$50,000 toward a joint investment with NC DOT to replace this old signal system with fiber optics. One strand is planned for traffic signals and another is for the town’s use. Little has been publicly discussed about this project, which is slated for completion in 2012.

The small size of Carrboro’s downtown makes the cost of extending the network practical – primarily because the distances from traffic signals to local businesses are short. Right now, the Town of Carrboro rents the signal system from the

Town of Chapel Hill. If Carrboro isn’t a full partner in this resource, they may not have the power to build our future access. Supposedly, the NC DOT is trying to squeeze the Town of Chapel Hill for more money to build a fiber loop. Now is a good time for Carrboro to put in.

There’s already a large customer base for high-speed Internet service in Carrboro. We have five planned new construction projects, including a mixed-use hotel, office and retail space. Public safety organizations like rescue, fire and police also could use the bandwidth, not to mention other creative and talented people. Fiber optic Internet can provide reliable upload and download speeds in excess of 100 Mbps. We can do a lot with that!

Diversifying our community’s tax base to relieve stress on property tax has been a goal for years. One way to do that is by enticing new businesses to move here and convincing existing ones to stay. A major bit of bait can be fiber-speed bandwidth for data and voice. Now is the time to invest in building the last mile of high-speed infrastructure in Carrboro. Not later, after the recession has killed development projects. Not after the Town of Chapel Hill gets around to doing something, but now on the cusp of major national infrastructure projects promised by our new president-elect.

Brian Russell is founder of Orange Networking, [orangenetworking.org](http://orangenetworking.org)

## LETTERS

## Dear commissioners

For years we have been receiving *Waste Matters* from the county which had good ideas and creative thinking on waste management.

I am distressed that only [Commissioner Pam] Hemminger is courageous enough to be open minded on this very serious issue.

Please consider more open minded and efficient ideas for dealing with the waste produced in this county. We have a reputation for being forward thinking in this county! Let’s set a good example for the rest of the state — the whole country even!

We have so many people in this county who are well educated, creative thinkers.

Let’s make the most of our resources!

COLLEEN GILBERT  
Bingham Township

## What’s the hurry?

I think the Orange County commissioners need to gather more knowledge and weigh more feasible options before settling on the Howell property for the waste transfer site.

I encourage them to solicit vendor proposals for disposal services for six

to 12 months or longer. I think they must search for alternative sites using community input.

And, we need to focus on sites that are zoned commercial/industrial and near truly major highways (I-85 or I-40).

Why the big hurry to grab this unsuitable site, which will desecrate a big part of our rural area? There is something terribly wrong with rushing forward with this.

BARBARA JANEWAY  
Carrboro

## TRIBUTE

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field.

I’ll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to even talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase each other doesn’t make any sense.”

— Rumi —

Eric Edwin Diener died unexpectedly on December 29, 2008, in Montgomery, Alabama. Eric spent most of his life in the Chapel Hill/Carrboro area and lived in Asheville, N.C. for the past four years with his wife and two dogs. This is a collection of sentiments from Eric’s community. We are deeply saddened by his loss and write this tribute to celebrate his life.

“You entered my life and evoked in me an eruption of emotions I never felt before. You surrounded me with unconditional love and security in this life we lived together. You taught me the patience and understanding necessary to make our marriage work. You were called away from me to another place far too early, but you left an everlasting imprint on my heart and my being.

“Rest in peace, my love!”

—Laura Dominkovic

“He was a wonderful, loving son, husband, dog lover and friend to many, and he left a positive and valuable impact on our world.”

—Pam and Tom Diener

“In many ways he was kinda like a big brother to me. He was a few years older than me, and the way life would have it seemed like he would experience something first in life and then end up sharing those experiences with me.

And I was definitely always for the better because of it.”

—Mick Daniel

“Eric put himself at service to people. That took many forms, such as working to support a Waldorf School, mentoring a teenage boy in trouble, being engaged with so many community projects, living and farming in Croatia, becoming an exceptional builder, and being kind to his friends.”

—Jeff Dotson

“Most importantly, Eric was always there for his friends. From a barn raising to a briss, Eric always remembered the importance of connection and community.”

—Steve Bradley

“Our homeowners, staff and board appreciated Eric’s diligence. The Rosemary Place Townhomes stand as testimony to his skill and commitment to provide high-quality homes.”

—Robert Dowling — Orange Community Housing Land and Trust

“Everything just fell into place, but I think that’s mostly in part to Eric. I immediately felt so comfortable with him and trusted him thoroughly.”

—Client of Eric’s building company

“I appreciated his thoroughness, his hard work and his sense of idealism.”

—Emerson Waldorf School

“Eric taught me about forgiveness, openness, community, and love. I am grateful for these gifts.”

—Michelle Johnson

## UBUNTU Eric.

I am because you are. We are a better community because you were part of our community.

Please visit Eric Diener’s memorial website at [www.imorial.com/ericdiener](http://www.imorial.com/ericdiener) to view and write a tribute or share a memory.