

FOR THE RECORD

Spotty at best

This has certainly been a hard week of work for those charged with keeping roads clear and travel safer during the recent spell of bad weather. Given the predictions of another jolt of winter for this coming weekend, it doesn't look like there will be much rest.

Along with the other key public-safety functions, keeping roads clear and passable, especially major thoroughfares, is a prime mission for local government and the local operations of the state Department of Transportation.

It is something of a habit for those from areas much more accustomed to this kind of weather, and much better provisioned to handle it, to kvetch about the devastation even a small snowfall wreaks on schedules. And it is something of a habit among those who grew up in the "let it melt" era, when the towns pretty much shut down until the sun did the work, to not expect much.

This is changing, and for good reason — our community is not nearly as compact a place as it once was. Neighborhoods are more spread out and places of employment are scattered about as well. Employees and students at UNC are coming in from all directions, and access in and out of the park-and-ride lots is all the more critical.

Each storm is a learning experience. We now see much better pre-storm work on the roads and, for the most part, the recent storm showed that a better-coordinated effort between local and DOT crews can quickly free up the main roads.

But as many residents know, once we get to the secondary roads the record of recovery from a major winter event is spotty at best. On some roads, shady spots, areas with poor drainage and steep hills remain slick and hazardous long after the storm has passed. This is a long-standing problem that ought to be addressed.

The condition of the secondary roads is one of the key factors used to determine when schools reopen. Local commerce is also greatly affected when employees can't get to work and customers can't get to the stores and eateries. There is also a safety issue: If you can't get out of your neighborhood, chances are that fire and EMS crews will have a hard time getting to you if you need them.

Some towns are much worse in this department than others. As many commuters learned this week when they got to Raleigh, having the interstates and highways clear doesn't help if the roads are a mess not far off your exit.

Part of the task of dealing with the storms takes place long beforehand. Towns have to have the equipment, supplies and contingency funds to adequately deal with storms and disasters.

But when the time comes, there has to be a willingness to see the job through. Scrimping on snow removal, clearing sidewalks and dropping extra sand on slick spots is penny-wise and pound-foolish. Closed stores and businesses running on limited schedules means less revenue for the private and the public sectors.

We applaud all those who have been working steadily to free us from winter's icy grip. And we encourage leaders in all towns of the Triangle to review plans and policies to see to it that the crews are well-equipped and well-staffed and fully supported in taking the fight well beyond the main roads.

Kudos

Thanks to all the restaurants, clubs, musicians and merchants who have rallied to do what they can to help the people of Haiti.

The events and the outpouring of donations have shown the true heart of our community. Last week, Mediterranean Deli pledged a full day's receipts and was packed from open to close. Hearts for Haiti are dotting the interior of the Orange County Social Club. Car's Cradle and Local 506 are hosting another round of benefits this week. In addition to raising funds, these efforts serve as reminders that even though the disaster has moved off the front page the need for assistance has not waned.

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

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Paying to lobby public officials for the public

CHRIS FITZSIMON

It has been hard to miss the headlines in your local paper about your city slashing the budget or your county commissioners scrambling to find cuts to respond to last year's revenue shortfall or to compensate for the cuts the state has imposed.

Local school systems laid off teachers, increased class size and closed in-school health clinics. Cities and counties slashed services, laid off workers and delayed many construction projects.

Budgets have never been tighter, we are told, yet local governments across North Carolina continue to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to hire lobbyists in Washington to influence Congress, where people we elect are supposed to represent us.

The federal lobbying reports filed in the last few days show that 25 cities and counties in the state hired lobbying firms in Washington in 2009. Mecklenburg County spent \$150,000 and Winston-Salem and High Point both spent \$120,000. And it's not just the bigger cities.

Wilson also spent \$120,000 on a lobbyist. Ayden hired one for \$40,000. So did Ahoskie and Washington County.

Most of the local governments paid The Ferguson Group to represent them. The individual lobbyist they hired was Deborah Bryant, who ran the state's Washington Office from 1993-99.

UNC campuses have also struggled with budget cuts, reducing class offerings, postponing hiring professors, expanding the size of many classes. They have raised tuition too, forcing families to pay more to send their children to college in the middle of the worst economic crisis in 75 years.

But like local governments, UNC schools have managed to find the money to spend on lobbying. UNC-Chapel Hill hired its own lobbyist

governors are frequently seen in the legislative building. Some of them are there every day as paid lobbyists for private interests too.

In 2009, 37 local governments in the state paid lobbyists to patrol the halls of the Legislative Building. The lobbyists are not full-time. They are hired guns with a long list of clients. Most of them are former members of the House and Senate.

So far, no member of the board of governors who is also a corporate lobbyist has been hired as a lobbyist by a local government, but that confusing day is surely coming.

The local governments that use our money to influence our lawmakers include big cities and suburbs like Cary and Concord. But small towns are playing the game too, places like Woodfin, Weldon and Louisburg.

Here's something for local officials to think about when they are deciding which employee to lay off or which services to the community to end or reduce:

Maybe they could rely on the people in Congress and the General Assembly who are elected to represent them to speak out for their issues in Raleigh and Washington and stop asking the rest of us to pay for people to lobby our own government.

Chris Fitzsimon is executive director of NC Policy Watch.

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LETTERS

Carrboro misguided

It gives one pause: An alderman elected by the vote of less than 10 percent of the Carrboro electorate gets a quarter-page in *The Citizen* ("Getting our bearings toward making things better," 1/28/10) to promote an agenda that has been discredited and whose perpetrators are in the process of losing their jobs and being prosecuted. It's as if *The Citizen* thinks that the other 90 percent of Carrboro-ites might be interested in his outdated and misguided opinion.

You have to love the irony of James Hansen being greeted in Chapel Hill by snow and temperatures in the teens.... Despite revelations of data exclusion, data destruction, manipulation of simulations, suppression of conflicting hypotheses, just plain bad science and bad scientists just plain behaving badly and maybe even criminally, the new-ice-age/global-warming/climate-change adherents continue to worship at the altar. My favorite finding of the stonewalled, manipulated data from NASA and James Hansen is: "It's as if Minneapolis stopped reporting and its average temperature was extrapolated from readings in St. Louis." Ever been to Minneapolis in the winter?

As far as Carrboro's record on the environment, let's review:

Carrboro's aldermen and women finally got cardboard into the recycling mix last year, but they continue picking

up yard debris (otherwise known as composting material) and transferring it to the landfill, where it is turned into composting material and resold to the homeowner (who placed it on the street for pickup in the first place), who takes it back home. They are also proceeding to pave over as much of Carrboro as they can with unnecessary sidewalks and a paved path through the Adams Tract. They have successfully created a myriad of bicycle lanes that cyclists shun in pref-

erence of the roadway. Implementation of their "connectivity" policy results in less connectivity and more unnecessarily driven miles per year. And their idea of beautification is to populate the side of the roads with signs, signs, everywhere a sign; most of which are unnecessary and a distraction.

In a world where NASA is now a climate research organization and the Department of Transportation is providing funding for environmental projects, I guess it makes sense that Carrboro aldermen and women are the voices of environmentalism. I can't wait for Transition Carrboro-Chapel Hill's "big bang"; bound to be as trite and predictable as the clichés describing it.

GORDON COOK  
Carrboro

Support group starting

I am the mother of a daughter who has fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). Since adopting her 15 years ago, I have done everything that a mother can do to help her child, but our lives remain an incredible daily struggle. In this light, I am starting a support group in the Triangle to bring together other caregivers of children with FAS with the intention of meeting once a month.

It is my hope that we can not only help each other but also help educate the public about this problem that affects too many children worldwide, as well as in our own community. FAS is often misdiagnosed or undiagnosed. FAS, which develops due to prenatal alcohol exposure, represents a cluster of symptoms often including developmental delays, poor coordination, small motor-skill difficulties, impulsivity, mental retardation, short attention span, frequent "melt downs," poor hygiene, learning difficulties, poor social skills and seizures, to name a few.

You may contact me at kathyhotelling@embarqmail.com or 265-3390. Location and day/time of the group will be determined by the majority of interested caregivers.

KATHY HOTELLING  
Pittsboro

Join CHPD for community conversations

CHRIS BLUE  
ASSISTANT CHIEF

Starting this weekend, the Chapel Hill Police Department plans to undertake a unique approach to hear about our community's expectations of us. Beginning on Feb. 6, we will hold a series of community conversations to hear how we are doing as an organization. Each session will last no more than two hours and will be managed by an outside facilitator. The input will be used to develop a strategic plan aimed at improving the community-oriented policing program in Chapel Hill.

We're hoping that residents, merchants, students, and other community stakeholders will attend one of the sessions to help us think about the following questions:

1. What first comes to mind when you think of the Chapel Hill Police Department?
2. In what ways is the Chapel Hill Police Department active in your community?
3. Are there additional ways you want the Chapel Hill Police Department to serve your community?

"We hope that you will join us as we begin this important work. We'll supply the coffee and doughnuts."

4. If you think there is a gap between what you want from the Chapel Hill Police Department and what you get, how can we work together to close that gap?
5. What else would you like the Chapel Hill Police Department to know or do?

The conversations will be held on the following dates at the locations shown below:

Saturday, Feb. 6, 10 a.m. — Chapel Hill Public Library

Tuesday, Feb. 9, 7 p.m. — United Church of Chapel Hill

Saturday, Feb. 13, 10 a.m. — St. Thomas More Catholic Church

Thursday, Feb. 18, 6 p.m. — Har- graves Community Center

We hope that you will take advantage of one of these opportunities to let us know how we are doing as your police department and how we can better meet the expectations that you have for us. We invite you to join us in talking about our relationship with the community and we are committed to renewing some of our long-held community relationships and forging some new ones. If you would like to attend one of the public conversations, please RSVP to outreach@townofchapelhill.org

If you can't attend, please send any comments to the same email address.

We hope that you will join us as we begin this important work. We'll supply the coffee and doughnuts.

LETTERS POLICY

Letters should be no more than 425 words in length and must be accompanied by the author's name, address and contact information. We will publish one letter per author per month. Lengthy letters written in longhand will mysteriously become lost. Emailed letters are preferred. That said, send your letters to:

Letters to the editor

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