Get involved in government

Local government offers ways for students to look beyond campus.

By Elisabeth McFarland Staff Writer

Participate — transform your ideas into action.

That's the message members of the town of Chapel Hill's government have for UNC students.

UNC students account for about 51 percent of Chapel Hill's total population.

"Students are bright, energetic and bring new ideas to the community," said Catherine Lazorko, spokeswoman for Chapel Hill.

Lazorko said students usually become interested in local government because of specific issues that affect them.

'The town has an opportunity to engage them and make sure they have a good way of expressing their viewpoint," she said.

Mayor Mark Kleinschmidt and eight Town Council members govern the town.

The mayor is elected for two years while council members normally serve four-year terms.

Linda Convissor, UNC's director of local relations, said the council controls many things that affect student life.

"Bus schedules, taxicab regulations, sidewalk construction are just a few," she said.

Council member Lee Storrow said there has never been a better time for young people to get involved in local government. Storrow graduated from UNC in 2011 and was elected to the council the same year.

As one of the youngest elected officials in the state, Storrow said he hopes students view him as a resource.

"We need to have a youthful representation in our community,"

For example, the council is currently looking into cell phones usage while driving and taxicabs.

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Catherine Lazorko. Chapel Hill spokeswoman

The council is considering new taxi regulations thanks to a petition from former UNC Student Body President Mary Cooper, who wanted to start a flat-rate taxi service.

The use of cell phones while driving is another concern residents brought to the council, after complaints about campus drivers causing accidents by talking on their cell phones.

Though the council approved a cell phone ban in March, an injunction is currently upheld against its implementation, which was set to begin June 1.

Social media is also a high priority for the town. Lazorko said the council was

one of the first governments to begin using social media in 2008. Chapel Hill has Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr and Vimeo accounts.

Residents can also sign up to receive weekly email updates from the town, based on their interests.

Even Kleinschmidt, who is a UNC alumnus, regularly updates his Facebook and Twitter.

"I encourage incoming students to get plugged in before they even arrive on campus," he

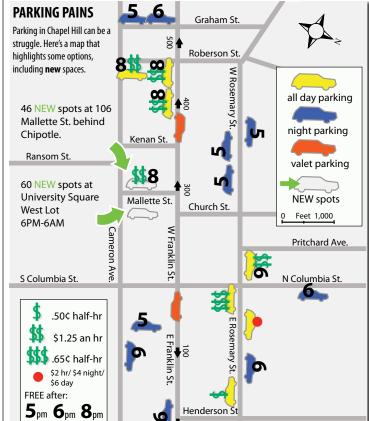
said. In short, the town wants your voice heard however it can be.

"Although college can feel like a bubble, you are really a member of the local community as well," said Convissor.

For more information on the Town Council and a list of all social media accounts visit the town's website, at www. townofchapelhill.org.

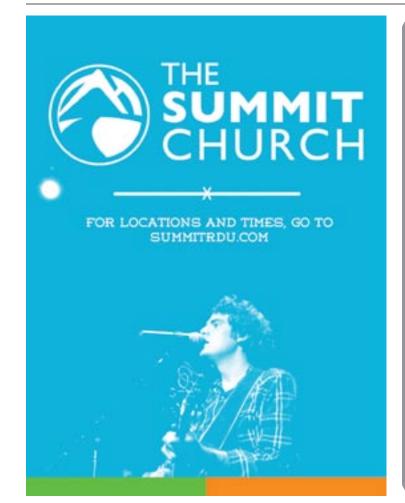
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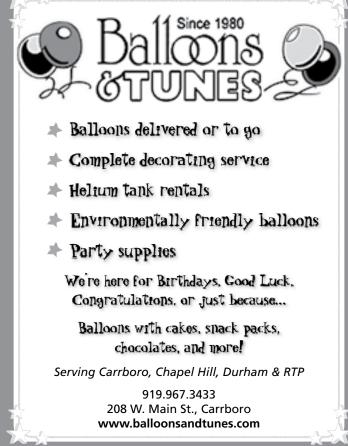
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