

EDITORIAL

The right attitude

There's not a lot of good news out of Raleigh on the state budget. But we can report one bright spot here in this community — the attitude of many university employees in facing the reality of tougher times.

As we note in this week's issue, university employees via their Employee Forum is pushing for flexibility in making cuts, particularly a plan to spread the pain around rather than cut positions.

If enough employees agree to share the burden by taking an hour or two's furlough (or whatever you want to call it) every couple of weeks, they can help their fellow workers keep their jobs.

This tactic, like our budget woes, would hopefully be very, very temporary and be used only after departments cut expenses and thoroughly studied other options for moving funds to keep jobs.

The chancellor and his senior staff should give strong consideration to the idea. With increasing enrollment and a growing university, this is not the time to trim positions.

The fact that the workers are willing to stand together to make sure that won't happen should inspire the leadership to do all they can to honor that spirit.

Missed opportunity

We'll not linger too long on the issue of the Town of Carrboro's failure to notify the media in the usual manner about last Monday's retreat attended by the board of aldermen and senior staff.

It is, in our opinion, likely true that human error and not a conspiracy caused email notices to not go out and the information not to be posted on the town's website. The only notice was a where-and-when memo posted on a bulletin board in the lobby at Town Hall.

The agenda for the meeting, an extensive review of the economic climate, was not available.

As a result, no members of the press attended the retreat and a four-hour meeting in which fiscal policy, social services strategy and the economy's impact on development was discussed came and went without independent review.

At *The Citizen*, we've reviewed our own procedures to make sure we don't miss something like this in the future. And we're pleased to report that in addition to offering an apology for the communication breakdown, town officials are checking their procedures as well.

We've posted the agenda, notes and other materials from the meeting on our website at carrborocitizen.com/main/2009/02/03/retreat-notes/. To further the public record, we invite those in attendance to post any comments on the items on our site.

Uncool

The late Jim Shumaker, longtime editor of the *Chapel Hill Weekly*, used to say that about every decade or so the paper had to run a major story proclaiming that "the village" is dead. We suppose that was the general point of the ruckus caused by notorious hipster and former economic-development director to the OC Ted Abernathy who told a group of local leaders that Chapel Hill has lost its cool. Headlines ensued. The town manager begged to differ.

The story ended there and, gladly, no actual cool people were harmed in the process.

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

EDITORIAL

Robert Dickson, Publisher
Kirk Ross, Editor
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Margot Carmichael Lester, Rich Fowler, Contributing Writers
Ava Barlow, Photographer
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ADVERTISING
Marty Cassady, Advertising Director
marty@carrborocitizen.com

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Key issues in connector roads review

DAN COLEMAN

As recently reported, the Carrboro Board of Aldermen will soon be reviewing the town's Connector Roads Policy. This policy, first adopted in 1986, has been a frequent source of contention over the past decade.

This is in part because, as residents of Wexford and adjoining neighborhoods recently pointed out, the policy fails in its stated goal "to disperse newly generated traffic and to give a sense of connectivity and unity to the town as it grew."

Carrboro's land-use planning seeks to follow New Urbanist principles, creating diversity, walkability, public spaces and emphasizing community. According to new urbanism pioneers Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, a fundamental tenet of this approach is that "streets within the neighborhood form a connected network which disperses traffic by providing a variety of pedestrian and vehicular routes to any destination."

Under this paradigm, residents of Wexford, Cobblestone, Cates Farm and Williams Wood were correct in pointing out that the proposed Claremont connector to Colfax would funnel cut-through traffic through their neighborhoods, damaging rather than improving any desired sense of unity.

While Carrboro policy calls for a "more intricate grid of smaller connector roads," efforts to achieve such a grid are stymied by piece-meal development of oddly shaped parcels, topographical features and the difficulty in making connections to established neighborhoods.



This has resulted in efforts to jury-rig connectivity onto neighborhoods that were not truly designed for it. It is no wonder that residents along the narrow and winding Tallyho Trail brace at the thought of the Colleton subdivision dumping scores more cars speeding along its length each day.

The other key issue raised by residents at the recent public hearings is the notion of streets serving as commons. Residents of several neighborhoods spoke of children playing in the streets, adults taking their exercise along them and all sorts of casual neighborly encounters being facilitated by pedestrian friendly streets. Their concerns are heightened when no sidewalks are available.

Destruction of such commons has marred the development of modern society. Urban historian Lewis Mumford examined how Napoleon III had the narrow alleys and cul de sacs that defined the neighborhoods of Paris replaced with the now familiar boulevards to facilitate authoritarian control of the populace. Social philosopher Ivan Illich described how the development

of roads designed to serve the automobile changed Mexico City from a place where the streets were a commons filled with vendors, meetings, coffee klatches and play to places where "people can circulate no more on their own. Traffic has displaced their mobility. They can circulate only when they are strapped down and are moved."

In the U.S., Robert Moses' destructive reshaping of New York's highway system is a matter of legend. Closer to home, Durham's Hayti neighborhood was sacrificed in the building of the East-West Freeway. While these historic cases may seem to dwarf the concerns of Carrboro neighborhoods, the lived experience of those whose day-to-day lives are affected is similar.

There are myriad examples of how *not* to do connectivity. The challenge for Carrboro is to focus on what works and re-tool our ordinances so they best meet our goals.

To do so, there are several issues for the board of aldermen to examine when this matter is reviewed: Paramount is to determine whether the intricate grid of small connectors will ever be attainable. If not, how can the town in fact meet the goals of dispersal, unity and connectivity in establishing connections between neighborhoods? How does the absence of sidewalks affect potential connections? And, finally, can we add a sense of respecting and valuing the life-ways of our established neighborhoods as a fundamental element in the Connector Roads Policy, recognizing when a road serves as a commons?

Dan Coleman is a member of the Carrboro Board of Aldermen.

FOR THE RECORD

Resolution of Appreciation for Rebecca Clark

The following resolution was passed by the Orange County Board of Commissioners at its meeting this week.

WHEREAS Rebecca Clark worked tirelessly to promote and provide social justice in the Orange County Community;

WHEREAS Mrs. Clark ensured the democratic process by registering countless individuals to vote, helping the house-bound and disabled to cast ballots and oversaw the voter rolls at the Lincoln Precinct for several decades;

WHEREAS Mrs. Clark was a pioneer who confronted racist hiring practices and broke down racial barriers in the workplace; and advocated for workers' rights for working class people throughout our community and particularly on the UNC campus;

WHEREAS Mrs. Clark instilled in the young people around her a passion for social justice, strong faith and community action;

WHEREAS Mrs. Clark was integral in uniting the Chapel Hill community behind Howard Lee and getting out the vote to elect him the first African-American mayor of a predominantly white Southern town;

WHEREAS Mrs. Clark utilized the political system and community action to truly improve the lives of the disenfranchised, the discriminated against and the downtrodden;

WHEREAS Mrs. Clark served as a beacon and touchstone for so many who today provide valued community and public service as elected officials, advocates and activists working for social justice;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Orange County Board of Commissioners hereby recognize Rebecca Clark and express great appreciation to Mrs. Clark for contributions she made during her long life.

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.

Letters to the editor
Box 248
Carrboro, North Carolina 27510

EMAIL:
editor@carrborocitizen.com

FAX: 919-942-2195

The message behind the talk of furloughs

BY CHRIS FITZSIMON

UNC system President Erskine Bowles wants the General Assembly to give him the authority to furlough university employees, a proposal that sent shudders through state government circles last week, a stark reminder of how bad the state budget crisis could become.

Gov. Beverly Perdue has so far avoided using the "F" word, and legislative leaders have resisted too, preferring to talk about hiring freezes and abolishing vacant positions to save money instead of forcing state workers to take days off without pay.

Recent history makes it likely that Bowles' plea for furlough authority is about more than getting what he calls "another tool in the toolbox" to help the university system handle the significant budget cuts that are coming.

Bowles has been trying since he became UNC president to create a personnel system at UNC that is separate from the system in the rest of state government. He first brought up the idea in 2006 after it was proposed by an advisory committee he appointed.

The idea didn't get very far after university employees made it clear they were leery of giving up their rights and protections under the State Personnel Act. Faculty members not covered by the act spoke out against Bowles' plan too in support of rank-and-file staff members.

Bowles appointed another task force the next year with the explicit mission to come up with ways that the university system could have more authority in human-resources decisions and management. The task force obliged, and in 2008 called on the General Assembly to pass legislation giving UNC officials more flexibility in personnel decisions, again sparking concern among university workers.

State lawmakers told Bowles that year that the proposal was too complicated to consider in the

If there's a problem with the State Personnel Act, lawmakers ought to debate it and fix it for everybody if it needs modification. There's no rationale for singling UNC out, no matter how much its leaders and wealthy supporters want special treatment.

summer short session, and Bowles didn't press the matter. Then the economy collapsed and former Gov. Mike Easley called for budget reductions in all state agencies, including the university.

Gov. Perdue has called for deeper cuts as the budget situation has worsened, prompting Bowles to ask for furlough authority, something no other state agency head currently has or has asked for.

Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight, a longtime supporter of UNC, appears ready to give Bowles and chancellors the go ahead to send people home without pay, telling the *News & Observer* that, "We should not be restricting their choices at a time like this."

The head of a faculty group at UNC says some staff members would take a pay cut to protect low-wage workers from layoffs. But Bowles wants to make that decision for UNC employees, regardless of how similar workers are treated in the rest of state government.

Furloughs of state employees may make sense as a last resort to balance the budget, though there are plenty of other alternatives, including tapping the state's savings account and using money from the federal stimulus package in the current fiscal year.

State lawmakers could use a combination of federal stimulus money, reasonable cuts and progressive revenue increases to avoid layoffs or furloughs in next year's budget.

If any state workers are furloughed, that decision needs to come from the governor as part of her emergency budget powers or the General Assembly in the legislation authorizing next year's spending.

Giving Bowles the authority to lay people off is not only premature, it's the first step toward allowing the university system to operate outside the rest of state government, something that Bowles and other UNC officials have long sought.

The perils of giving UNC special treatment are laid out comprehensively in an exhaustive study of university governance published in 2006 by the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research. The report says that claims by university officials that the current personnel system is too cumbersome and restrictive also can be made by every other state agency.

If there's a problem with the State Personnel Act, lawmakers ought to debate it and fix it for everybody if it needs modification. There's no rationale for singling UNC out, no matter how much its leaders and wealthy supporters want special treatment.

Chris Fitzsimon is the director of NC Policy Watch.