

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

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FROM THE EDITOR

Caution on housing

We ask our leaders to be forward looking about things, to take the next generation or two or seven into account when making decisions. But we also ask them to respond during times of crisis, and want to make sure that our society’s institutions don’t crumble and those in need are tended to.

That’s a tough balance to find during times like these when the economy is showing signs of life but is still dragged down by high unemployment, continuing foreclosures and tight credit.

For the past few years, local governments have been relatively frugal, putting off projects, deferring purchases and holding down personnel costs. In the year ahead, it will be tempting to be a little less frugal and move ahead with plans on pause.

But signs out of our national and state capitols are pointing to the need for caution. With leaders unwilling to tackle meaningful reform in either the tax code or entitlement programs, the discretionary budget at the state and federal level is being whacked at with a fervor unseen in recent times. And while this nibbling around the edges of our budget problems won’t change the long-term fiscal trajectory by much, it will have great impact at street level.

Among the early targets is federal and state support for local housing programs. These funds have been an important part of our housing strategy. They underpin attempts to keep a diverse housing base in a market that easily skews the other way. Affordability is not just some pie-in-the-sky goal, it is public policy that has seen concrete results. The partnership between local governments, the Community Home Trust and Habitat for Humanity has put hundred of homes in the hands of people for whom ownership was just out of reach. Most importantly, it has allowed people who work here to live here.

Now, with a hefty amount of affordable housing on the books, both organizations are faced with the difficult task of maintaining their investments so as to guarantee that they remain not just affordable, but attractive places to live.

The convergence of the looming loss of HOME and block grant money and the steadily increasing maintenance costs they face is why the leadership of the housing organizations appealed to the Chapel Hill Town Council Monday night to opt for a payment in lieu from the developers of the Aydan Court condominium project rather than add a dozen or so condos to their stock of housing.

Aside from the issue of whether condos have appeal to the families that are the main targets of the affordability program, the need for the funds is fairly clear-cut.

Given the environmental challenges on the site, Aydan Court still has a ways to go to win council approval. But the issue of whether to gather housing funds through payment in lieu or insist on affordable units onsite will continue to pop up as developments work their way through the boards of Carrboro and Chapel Hill.

Naturally, the towns should carefully weigh their options in every case. Given the times and the uncertainty over federal and state support, protecting the stock of housing we have could outweigh the need to increase it.

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A North Carolina you might not recognize

CHRIS FITZSIMON

Here’s a simple way to determine which side of this year’s budget debate you are on.

Do you believe the state should help a low-income single mother who loses a leg in an accident receive an artificial limb so she can walk again and take care of her children, or should we deny her that help to save money in the state budget?

The folks at the John Locke Foundation want to turn away the single mother and everyone else on Medicaid who needs a prosthetic or orthotic device to save \$2.8 million out of a \$21 billion budget.

Prosthetics are considered an optional service under Medicaid, but a survey in 2008 found that every state in the country except Mississippi provides them. The budget released this week by the Locke Foundation would add North Carolina to that list of one.

The Locke budget doesn’t stop there in Medicaid. It would eliminate dental services and vision care too, even transplants. If you are poor and can’t see or can’t eat or your kidney fails, you are on your own.

The folks at the Locke Foundation ironically call their spending proposal “Protecting Families and Businesses: A Plan for Fiscal Balance and Economic Growth” and boast that it would cut taxes in North Carolina.

It would definitely cut taxes – by denying direct services to thousands of families, not protecting them.

The far-right spending plan isn’t radically different from the ones the Locke Foundation has proposed in recent years that were largely ignored in the General Assembly. But the General Assembly itself is radically different this session, with new Republican majorities that have close ties to the Locke Foundation and other organizations funded largely by conservative businessman Art Pope, who also bankrolled much of the effort to get Republicans elected.

That means the Locke budget is likely to be considered far more seriously by the House and Senate budget writers this year, many of whom not only pledged not to raise taxes to address the budget shortfall but also promised to cut them.

And if lower taxes are all you care about, the Locke

Foundation budget can get you there. It would also change North Carolina into a state you may not recognize, with its recommendations to abolish Smart Start, which helps hundreds of thousands of children show up at school ready to learn, and to zero out funding for nationally recognized affordable-housing programs and efforts to help families facing foreclosure stay in their homes.

Thousands of teacher assistants would be fired because the Locke Foundation “experts” claim that having another adult in a crowded first-grade classroom helping children learn to read isn’t worth the investment.

There’s plenty more in the Locke slash-and-burn plan, much higher tuition for students at universities and community colleges and less funding to pay faculty to teach them. There are cuts to children’s health care, lifesaving HIV/AIDS drugs, even cuts to the program that helps rape victims.

There’s another way to balance the budget, of course, a much different way. It was outlined in front of the legislative building Tuesday by leaders of Together NC, a coalition of more than 120 nonprofit groups and service organizations.

The Together NC plan calls for a balance of budget cuts and new revenue to avoid the draconian cuts in the Locke Foundation proposal and renews the group’s plea for tax reform to overhaul the state’s outdated and inadequate revenue system.

The Locke Foundation routinely dismisses Together NC and its advocates for children, seniors and people with disabilities as all part of Raleigh’s “spending lobby” that lawmakers should ignore.

But that single mother who needs an artificial leg is not part of any lobby; she’s just one of hundreds of thousands of people the rigid Locke ideology would leave behind, all in the blind pursuit of tax cuts and shrinking the government they loathe.

Let’s hope the new legislative leaders come to their senses soon and rethink their allegiance to that callous and dangerous prescription for North Carolina.

Chris Fitzsimon is executive director of N.C. Policy Watch.

LETTERS

Build a Block

The Carolina Library Community is raising \$35,000 and 2,000 hours of labor to help build a Habitat for Humanity house this school year. This is part of the UNC Build a Block project. The project is a student-led initiative to build 10 Habitat for Humanity houses for university and UNC Hospital employee families during the 2010-11 school year.

When Habitat for Humanity of Orange County collected applications for their new housing site, 85 percent of the applicants turned out to be UNC employees. The people qualifying for Habitat housing have jobs but still cannot afford adequate housing. They put in sweat equity to help build their houses, in addition to working their normal jobs, and then they repay these mortgages.

I am personally volunteering to help the Library Community build a house because these applicants are my coworkers, neighbors and friends. I see their hard work every day on campus, I see their positive impact in the community and I want to see them in a house.

Ask anybody and they will tell you this is a really hard time to be fundraising. People are losing their jobs on and off campus, many people were already unemployed before and we are staring at massive budget cuts later this year. I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I know what’s happening now and what we can do to help.

Our next fundraiser will be a bingo night tonight (Thursday) from 6 to 9 p.m. in Century Hall at the Carrboro Century Center. All ages are welcome. Bingo cards will cost \$1 and we will be selling drinks for \$1 and snacks for \$0.50.

Come have some fun, win prizes from local businesses and please help us build this house.

LIZ GARNER
Member, Library Build a Block Task Force
UNC

Bicycle Friendly City

This fall, Carrboro received the League of American Bicyclists’ Silver Level Bicycle Friendly City award. We were the only town in North Carolina and one of only two in the southeast to receive the silver award. On Saturday, Bill Naspar, the director of the League’s Bicycle Friendly America program, will be on hand to present Carrboro with this award. The presentation will be at 9:00 a.m. at the Looking Glass Café. Bill will also be on hand afterward to discuss ways to im-

prove cycling in the community. I encourage everyone who bikes or who supports bicycling to come and join the celebration. Let’s enjoy the silver we have achieved and start thinking about how to get to gold!

HEIDI PERRY
Carrboro Transportation Advisory Board

Tablecloths and smiles

Every Tuesday evening, smiles appear on the faces of patients and their live-in caregivers on the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit of N.C. Cancer Hospital, the clinical home of UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center.

What delights everyone is the anticipated arrival of the “Dinners on Tuesday” meal donated by our area’s finest restaurants.

Community volunteers and hospital staff come together to make these nights special.

Tablecloths, flowers and homemade desserts grace the lobby area of the 4th floor suite, so that caregivers are provided a relaxing atmosphere and can chat with the families and friends of other patients.

Our restaurants deliver meals two weeks in a row to the hospital. We applaud them for their generous and delicious donations. The positive response by everyone involved has been overwhelming: owners, managers, their staff and delivery services.

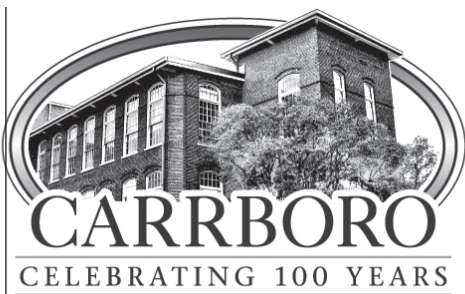
The program wishes to thank Acme Restaurant, Carrboro; Daniel’s, Apex; Honeybaked Ham, Durham; Maggiano’s, Durham; PF Chang’s, Durham; Piola, Chapel Hill; Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse, Durham; Shula’s 347 Grill, Chapel Hill; Spice Street, Chapel Hill; and Top of the Hill, Chapel Hill.

It’s wonderful to have such committed businesses in our community to support not only this program, but all programs for patients and families undergoing treatment at UNC.

LINDA KARP
Volunteer Coordinator
N.C. Cancer Hospital
BMT Buddy Program

LORETTA MUSS
Coordinator
N.C. Cancer Hospital
Patient and Family Advisory Board

DIANNE G. SHAW
Deputy Director of Communications
UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center



Come one!
Come all!

Consider this your official invite. Perhaps you’ve heard that the town of Carrboro is turning 100 next week. You may also know that the big celebration is set for Carrboro Day, which falls on May 1 – an extra-special event this year with more bands and fun and all things Carrboro.

But the town isn’t letting its birthday pass unnoticed. It’s on the flag after all. There’ll be plenty to notice, in fact, especially if you can make it down to the Carrboro Century Center around 7:30 p.m. on March 3.

That’s when the annual recognition dinner for all of the volunteers who serve on the town’s boards and commissions wraps up and the doors open to the public for an evening celebrating the town’s new status as a centenarian.

Carrboro Centennial Celebration!

March 3, 2011
7:30pm

Carrboro
Century Center

As one member of the Carrboro Board of Aldermen noted the other night, apologies in advance if you’re planning on heading to bed before 8 p.m., because the evening begins with the ringing of the Century Center’s bell 100 times.

Following the bell’s tones are remarks from our mayor and board of aldermen and Rep. David Price.

The Carrboro High School History Club also will be on hand to present some of their extensive research into the town that waited 96 years to have a high school with its name on it.

Poetry will also be in the mix, with former board of aldermen member and town Poet Laureate Jay Bryan leading a set of readings.

He’ll be followed by presentations and singing by a collection of school children from the town’s elementary and middle schools.

(We also have it on good information that there’ll be a few surprises during the evening. Our inside source described the fun and, well, you’ll just have to be there.)

The evening ends with enough cupcakes to feed a small town – or at least everyone who shows up – and a few heartfelt and no doubt resounding choruses of “Happy Birthday.”

The event is enough to get anyone in a festive mood and kicks off a season of celebration for the town.

We have a lot to celebrate and a lot to remember. We didn’t make it to 100 without a lot of people stepping up to make this a better place. A whole lot of those folks won’t be with us Thursday night, but they haven’t been forgotten as we enjoy their legacy – a little mill town anyone would be happy to call home.

So come by and join the celebration of Carrboro and all the people who have made it what it is today.

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:

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