

Fighting A Peaceful War for our Future

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A local community is often loosely defined as a social group whose members live in a specific area, possess common interests, share a government, and frequently have a common cultural or historical heritage. The towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro have grown into a community together through many decades and many evolutions. However, more changes may be required of what is often called “The Southern Part of Heaven,” if we wish for our community to remain successful and to have a sustainable future. There are several issues that I believe are important enough to the community at large to deserve major changes in our actions and views. These issues are the increasing population of homeless men and women, the unequal treatment our Hispanic immigrant population is receiving, and the planned development of Carolina North. All of these issues can be resolved with a reasonable amount of effort by our community and local government. However, attitudes towards these issues must also change in order for the situation to truly begin to be resolved.

The increasing amount of homeless men and women in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro community is a serious problem. Not only is this problem negatively affecting the opinions tourists to the area may have, but those living in poverty receive little compassion from those who are permanent residents here. From performing community service by preparing, making, and serving meals at the Inter-Faith Council (IFC) Shelter, I have seen the excitement that these people experience from receiving just a single meal. Although the homeless in our community can receive meals for free, they are still homeless. A large percentage of the people are battling addictions and other mental illnesses that have ruined their lives, and have insufficient resources to help them cope with these serious problems in their lives. These people have been lowered to sleeping in

doorways, on benches, and in back alleys. The IFC Shelter is able to provide a sanctuary to some, but the Shelter is not able to help nearly enough people. If the community could change their attitude into one of empathy, rather than of disgust and scorn, these people might have a chance. These people should be given suggestions as to how to obtain the skills needed to be employed, and should be given fair medical care when it is needed. As was mentioned earlier this year at a Town Council meeting, between one-fourth and one-half of the homeless population are war veterans. How can we turn our backs on those who were willing to die for our country?

An example of unequal opportunities can clearly be seen in the Hispanic population in our community. The Hispanic immigrants who come to our towns are simply trying to improve their lives and the lives of those in their families. While these people are trying to achieve citizenship in our country through amnesty, they have to work here. Unfortunately, they are being discriminated against and are being treated rather unfairly while trying to integrate themselves into our society. Many of them are not fluent in English, and are looked down upon for that reason alone. The Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School System has an extremely successful English as a Second Language (ESL) Program, but I think that this would also be effective if it was offered in the community to Hispanic adults. Being able to fluently speak English would increase these people's chances of obtaining and maintaining jobs, as most English-speaking bosses prefer employees who speak the same language. When given equal opportunities, I believe that Hispanic immigrants will be very beneficial to our community, both socially and economically.

Carolina North is a development project currently planned to be established in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Area. The idea behind Carolina North is an extension of the UNC-CH campus that is as environmentally-friendly and sustainable to our community as it can be. Many members of our community are against the development of Carolina North. Their reasons are that Chapel Hill has already become overdeveloped, and that Carolina North would only add to this problem. I agree that Chapel Hill and Carrboro have experienced a substantial amount of development, however I think that Carolina North would provide a model for future development projects since it is so environmentally-sound. I think that it is important for everyone to see how advantageous Carolina North would be. Building Carolina North should definitely be a project that all members of our community agree on.

Clearly there are actions that can be taken to help Chapel Hill-Carrboro to have a sustainable future. As a community, we should constantly work for social equity, environmental stewardship, and economic prosperity. By helping certain minorities in our community, we can improve their lives and our overall social equity. The development of Carolina North shows our interest in environmental stewardship, and should be encouraged. A homeless population that is increasing in our community should be helped, not ignored, and although many groups are trying now, they do not have enough of an impact. To help the homeless we need strength and effort to give them resources they desperately need. If we want our community to be sustainable, every plant, animal, and human needs to be considered as an equal part of it. I want our future to be sustainable, and I want my children to look back on our efforts with pride.