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## Citizen Involvement Key to 'Overlay District' Success

by Randy Voller

The Town of Pittsboro is working on an "Overlay District" for the historic downtown area that will serve as a guidepost for future development in and around Pittsboro's Main Street District.

On Monday, May 14th, the Town hosted an informational session on the "Overlay District" and on May 29th the Town held a public hearing on the concept.

On the 29th, dozens of citizens, business owners and downtown property owners packed Town Hall to provide input to the Town Board and Town staff on the proposed "Overlay District".

Liz Cullington made her feelings known about downtown vitality when she said that "This town could use a little more nightlife... we're going to have to fix more than awnings if this is going to work."

While local attorney, Chris Lee, who has a Hillsboro Street office and lives near downtown, spoke to the issue of walkability when he said, "We need to keep it pedestrian friendly." Lee also proposed better handrails for the steps leading to the street.

Town Planner Jeff Jones fielded questions from the policy makers and the public alike as he explained how and why the proposed ordinance came into being and its potential value as public policy.

According to the proposed ordinance, its purpose is to establish a Downtown Overlay District that will encourage a vibrant small-town urban core that:

- acknowledges and reflects the Town's historic character;
- stimulates a pedestrian and bicycle friendly

environment while providing transit and individual vehicular accommodations;

- reflects the community's artistic heritage;
- promotes the area as a hub of commerce, civic, cultural, and governmental activity;
- fosters a wide range and mix of uses including retail, office, restaurant, entertainment, service, financial, and high-density residential;
- attracts and fulfills residents and visitors alike;
- integrates and sustains accessibility and inclusivity; and
- cultivates economic growth that complements and expands the unique character of Pittsboro.

The Town is considering the regulations to encourage small-town urban vitality by excluding certain activities which have a negative effect on the public realm such as motor vehicle dominated or non-pedestrian oriented design or uses.

As a board member of Main Street Pittsboro and the chair of the economic vitality and revitalization committee, I commend the elected officials and staff on their effort to provide policy and planning structure and guidance in the form of an "Overlay District for a designated area around Downtown Pittsboro."

Main Street Pittsboro has discussed this idea at length and generally favors its passage and implementation.

While considering the implementation of the district, it is important for policymakers and the public to note that the Main Street District, which is encompassed by the proposed overlay district, has approximately 149 discrete parcels, with a tax value on the land of \$12,430,772; a tax value on the improvements of \$30,390,011 for a total tax value of \$42,820,783.

In contrast, the projected tax value of the mixed use projects north of Town known as Mosaic I and Mosaic II, are in the hundreds of millions of dollars, which means that the proposed new developments north of Town will provide a much greater share of sales tax revenues and ad valorem tax revenues to the Town's coffers than the current mix of uses in the Main Street district today.

With this financial reality in mind, the approval and implementation of the new "Overlay District" should be mindful of the types of uses it wants to foster and encourage as well as the type of uses it would prefer to see located elsewhere in the Town or County.

Ultimately this planning tool and policy is about the quality of life of our community.

This means that in the decision-making process the Town should consider among its list of criteria for whether a use in the Overlay District should be encouraged or discouraged: job creation, potential tax revenue from sales taxes and property taxes, potential social equity and the potential for the sustained prosperity and vitality of the Downtown area.

The decisions that the Town will make on this matter on June 11th will reflect who we are today and what we as Pittsboro want to become tomorrow.

This is in effect a bit of vision statement.

To that end, it is imperative that citizens and stakeholders alike become familiar with the potential list of restricted uses and weigh-in by attending the Town Planning Board meeting

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## Restorative Justice Offers Opportunity Rather Than Punishment

by Sarah Cooley

"It's not a person's mistakes which define them—it's the way they make amends." — Freya North

Teenagers often make mistakes, and sometimes those mistakes get them in trouble with the law. When someone breaks the law, they have to face the consequences. What if the consequences for delinquent youth focused less on punishing them and more on helping them take responsibility for their actions while making amends for the damage they caused? This less punitive approach is known as restorative justice and is the approach that the Community Service & Restitution Program at Communities In Schools Chatham County (CISCC) uses. The restorative process seeks to repair the harm by involving the entire community in rehabilitating offenders and holding them accountable for their behavior. CISCC's Community Service & Restitution Program is led by Coordinator Jeremiah McCaffity and Program Assistant Bieisy Santiago. Youth in the program are referred by the Department of Juvenile Justice, are between the ages of 10-17 living in Chatham County, and have committed non-violent crimes as first-time offenders.

The first step is completing a comprehensive intake. In addition to assessing the youth's risk to the community, Jeremiah and Bieisy have a chance to learn about the youth's hobbies, interests, schedule, and family life. A vital part of the intake includes establishing an Individual Service Plan that maps out how the youth will fulfill their court-ordered service and/or restitution commitments. Each person's plan is thorough and includes specific and measurable goals, dates for regular Work Site visits, dates for progress reviews, and a well-developed exit strategy. Once the intake is complete and the plan is in place, the youth are placed in one of our 13 partner Work Sites throughout Chatham County, based on their interests and availability.

Youth might not be thrilled about having to do community service hours, but every effort is made to pair them with Work Sites that will provide them with the most personal



Youthful offenders clean a Chatham barn as part of the Community Service & Restitution Program at Communities In Schools Chatham County.

growth and the best possible outcomes for the community at large. Some youth like working with animals. Others prefer working outside harvesting food from local gardens. We are grateful for the partnerships with our current Work Sites as they provide diverse opportunities for youth to integrate into the fabric of their communities while being exposed to resources they might not otherwise have access to. Our current Work Sites are:

- Chatham Habitat for Humanity's ReStore
- Chatham Trades Inc.
- Communities In Schools Chatham County
- Community Lunch at St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
- Chatham County's Health & Wellness Committee Garden
- Happy Hills Animal Foundation Inc.
- Piedmont Farm Animal Refuge

- Small Museum of Folk Art
- Take and Eat Food Pantry
- Virginia Cross Elementary School
- West Chatham Food Pantry

An advantage of implementing the restorative justice model on our county's youth is that the benefits are observed well after the community service and/or restitution has been satisfied. When deliberating with his peers about what sentence to give a youth defendant in Teen Court, "John" recently said, "I think we should give the maximum number of hours. Maybe (s)he'll enjoy the community service work and want to continue doing it. I enjoyed mine. Mine was fun." In addition to "John" enjoying giving back to his community, he was great at it. His Work Site was Virginia Cross

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## Students Get a Head Start Paddling Down the River of Life

by Joe Jacob

Have you ever heard of the expression that life is what happens while you are making plans. Well, it certainly wasn't my plan to get into the canoe and kayak business. My plan was to be a mechanical engineer until I met college physics. Then, I switched majors and went into pre-med. I thought I wanted to heal people until I realized that some of my patients might die and that would be very hard for me to accept. With one semester left in school to obtain a bachelor's degree in zoology and physiology, I took a marine biology course. The idea of spending time in shorts and working on boats and beaches was very appealing to me. That turn in my life went nicely until I found myself at public hearings advocating wilderness protection for some of the places I was studying while my professors were selling their souls to the highest bidders. That is when I coined the term biostitutes.

Lucky for me, The Nature Conservancy recruited me to help in its efforts to protect natural diversity; animals and plants, their habitats and the ecosystems they need to survive. I worked for The Nature Conservancy for 20 years until I realized I was a workaholic and something had to change. Some friends of mine who introduced me to whitewater canoeing on the Nantahala River in western North Carolina started renting canoes as a side business. It looked like fun, so I traded my tie for shorts and with canoes, paddles, PFDs (Personal Floatation Devices), and a very old telephone company van, I got into the river recreation business. That was 30 years ago.

It is too late for me, but now you can get a degree from Brevard College in Wilderness Leadership and Environmental Education. Young people can skip 50 years of finding out

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