

January 23, 2008

NRG statement to Council – Agenda Item 2

Dear Mayor Foy and Town Council:

My name is Mike Collins, and I'm here to speak on behalf of the citizens group Neighborhoods for Responsible Growth (NRG).

The Carolina North concept plan shows a great number of improvements and changes from earlier drafts, many the result of listening to input from the community over the last year or two. The Biohabitats ecological assessment brought solid data to support building on the disturbed portion while preserving and in some cases restoring remaining areas of the tract. There is still much work to be done, but UNC is to be commended for listening to the community by incorporating ideas and concerns into the present concept plan. The goal of a comprehensive approach under which this huge development can take place seems closer than ever to reality.

Which brings us to the proposed Innovation Center. No one disputes the importance of innovation in the economic development of our state and community. But that concept is not what is at issue for us tonight. We are most interested in the impact on neighborhoods of whatever gets built. As concerned citizens, we would like to say a few words regarding the timing, placement, and development of this project.

While we acknowledge UNC's explanation for the urgency surrounding the start of the Innovation Center, we are concerned about the fact that this project feels rushed and has been brought to Council on the same day as the CN Master Plan - in fact, the original timing was to present the IC *before* the Master Plan. We are still awaiting the results of the Transportation and Fiscal Equity Studies. Data from these studies will undoubtedly affect and inform the Master Plan and, by extension, the Innovation Center. Talks have not even begun on a new zone for the tract. Why, when we are so close to becoming informed by these studies, should we rush to place the first brick before we have decided exactly what the house should look like?

Both the HWCC report as adopted town policy and the Leadership Advisory Committee's work established a well thought-out framework for how we might proceed. It is essential that the LAC Principles, the HWCC Report Principles, and the foundational studies apply to every project at Carolina North. If we exempt the IC from this and from later principles arising from the remaining foundational studies, it will set a poor precedent for a comprehensive planning and development effort.

In addition we urge the Council to look carefully to ensure that current zoning for the IC will protect the public from potential private uses which we understand would not be administered by UNC. For example, neighbors may be justifiably concerned about potential health hazards associated with some types of bioterrorism research.

We hope the Council will consider these issues carefully. We have come too far in the process to make a major misstep now.

Thank you.

Mike Collins, NRG, 967-4119