



**Town of Chapel Hill  
Town Council Interviews  
January 2010  
THEMATIC SUMMARY**

On January 8 and 15, 2010, The Lee Institute conducted interviews with all members of the Chapel Hill Town Council in order to prepare for the upcoming annual retreat. The interviews explored elements of a successful retreat as well as the 2009 Town goals. Questions asked included:

1. How would you define a successful retreat?
2. a. Based on the past retreats, are there any changes you would like to see for this year, for example, schedule, staff roles and participation? Friday night? Saturday? (For incumbents)  
b. What logistics and activities have you found to be successful in your experience for planning retreats? What are your ideas for this Council retreat? (For new Members)
3. As a member of the Town Council, where have you seen the Council work well together? Where have you seen the Council work well together when there were dissenting opinions and ideas? How could those experiences help the Council during the retreat and in future settings?
4. Using the 2009 Town goals (have a list for each person to review prior to the interview), what do you see as important for 2010 goals? Are there specific action items you would like to see as a part of any goal?
5. What should I know that is important to facilitate your retreat successfully?
6. What other ideas and suggestions do you have that will add to the success of the retreat?

Council members expressed a broad range of opinions on both successful retreat elements and the status of 2009 Town goals. Themes did emerge and are outlined below, beginning with successful retreat elements and then themes related to priorities for 2010 which are organized around the six areas of the 2009 Council Goals Report Card.

### **Successful Retreat Elements**

- Council members should discuss how to work together before discussing specific goals. Members noted the importance of developing relationships among the Council. This had added significance given the number of new members on the Council. An example of a typical response was “talk with each other and have relationships.”
- Everyone being heard is important. Most Council members expressed the desire to have all members participate in the retreat. Additionally, having “honest, not political, conversations” was expressed.
- Council should have a clear vision of work goals for 2010 and understand why the goals are being addressed. Having awareness of and agreement on Council priorities for the year will position the Council and Town for success in the coming year. Specific comments included “leave with a top tier of work,” “everyone on the same page” and “realistic goals, measureable results and achievable goals.”

## 2009 Council Goals Report Card

- **Goal #1: Steward Organizational Development**  
Several members discussed issues related to employees. Specific topics mentioned included employee benefits; concerns about possible cuts; creating space for discussions on benefits; and expanding policies to be more “cutting edge” – shared positions, flex time, flex schedules. Additionally, the question of how the Council can be successful working together was raised with a range of individual responses. The overall theme was to understand background, communicate well and listen for differences and focus on ideas and issues.
- **Goal #2: Champion Downtown**  
Three areas came up repeatedly across the interviews: parking, streetscapes and panhandling. While there was agreement on the importance of these issues, there was a wide disparity on how the issues should be addressed.
- **Goal #3: Continue Focus on Land Use, Transit and Development**  
Two areas of focus were identified: acting on the Sustainable Community Visioning Task Force recommendations and the related area of the Council considering how, or if, the Town should grow. There was a desire for a plan with a timeline for the Council to delve into the substance of the Task Force report and identify specific steps to take. The issues of density, transit-oriented development, retail and commercial development, and green development all connect to how the Town should grow.
- **Goal #4: Maintain and Improve Community Facilities and Services**  
The Library expansion project was the one priority mentioned by Council members. Comments ranged from requesting a general update to identifying particular issues on the project.
- **Goal #5: Improve Town’s Fiscal Condition**  
Council members identified the tax rate and Town boards and commissions as two areas of focus. On the tax rate, several Council members mentioned the residential/commercial ratio and increasing commercial development. Whether to increase the tax rate was also mentioned with no consensus. The boards and commissions comments focused on the number and qualifications of community members serving.
- **Goal #6: Plan Ahead for Carolina North**  
Two contradictory areas of focus were raised: taking this goal off the Report Card and creating opportunities for the public to weigh in on the plan.

Overall, there was general agreement that the goals represent the Town’s issues. There is also the opportunity to build on the substance of the goals, adding the reasons behind the goals, metrics and setting priorities on the action steps. Further, the themes from the interview were compared with the City Manager November performance discussion with the Mayor and Council. There is a consistent alignment with expectations for economic development; Town growth; downtown development including parking and panhandling; increased focus on communication with citizens; continued staff development; and the efficiency of the process for public comment and development review. There was also strong consensus on the success of Carolina North in 2009.