

Sandy Cook

From: Carol Abernethy on behalf of Cal Horton
Sent: Thursday, November 17, 2005 11:58AM
To: 'campaign@willraymond.org'
Cc: Bill Thorpe; Laurin Easthom; Bree Bean; Bruce Heflin; Cal Horton; Catherine Lazorko; Emily Dickens; Flo Miller; Ralph Karpinos; Sabrina Oliver; Sandy Cook; Toni Pendergraph; Bill Strom; Cam Hill; Dorothy Verkerk ; Ed Harrison; 'Edith Wiggins'; 'Jim Ward'; Jim Ward (w) ; Kevin Foy; Mark Kleinschmidt ; Sally Greene (w)
Subject: Email petition RE: Request to open up Council list-serv to citizens

A copy of your email message has been forwarded to each Council Member and to senior staff members.

Carol Abernethy
 Exec. Asst., Manager's Office
 Town of Chapel Hill

-----Original Message-----

From: campaign@willraymond.org [mailto:campaign@willraymond.org]
Sent: Thursday, November 17, 2005 11:41 AM
To: Town Council
Subject: Request to open up Council list-serv to citizens

Mayor and Council,

The Council currently receives timely, summarized information on the status of our Town via the Council list-serv.

Besides receiving flash reports on our boards, notifications of meetings, ongoing status of our departments, they also receive all the comments and complaints our citizenry sends onward for resolution. These comments provided a invaluable "realtime" gauge of problem areas within our community.

Chapel Hill has made a commitment to opening up our governing process, to go beyond the strict legal requirements of our State's open records laws and provide as much transparency in the governing process as practically possible. As a citizen that routinely uses our Town's online assets to research material on issues facing our community, I'm quite aware of the current limitations of our online implementation of that commitment.

Two of the greatest problems we have are timeliness and accessible breadth. Until lately, to discover if the agendas, minutes, notes, etc. of both the Council or our advisory boards are available, you had to "poll" each individual web location to find out if, maybe today, the information you need is available. In addition, there's generally not an executive summary, equivalent to the flash reports, available online. You have to laboriously open each PDF and scan the notes to see if there's any relevant information to pursue. The recent addition, on the website, of an email notification system for Town News and the release of the Council's agendas doesn't come close to the current Council list-serv capability.

As a candidate for Council, I was placed on the Council's email list-serv which immediately halved the amount of time I had been spending researching current Town activities. Instead of "polling" for reports that might or might not be posted to the web site, they were emailed to me in a timely fashion. The executive summaries allowed me to quickly triage reports for relevancy. The comments and complaints, not currently available online, provided a "realtime" feel for the status of our community. And the "push" nature of a email list allowed me to dispose of my research in "bite size" pieces instead of trying to digest the huge chunks that are intermittently posted to our Town's website.

If I had known of the list before my run, for the sake of completeness and efficiency, I would have asked to join it years ago.

I ask that my former access to the Council list be immediately restored and, further, that a process be created so that other interested citizens can also join this list or any

other lists, like the Town Manager's, so they may also have "bite size", timely access to the summarized information that drives our leadership's decision making process.

Finally, there's no technical or legal impediment to adding a citizen to this list. The list-serv is available now; no additional development is required, no additional resources needed. The contents of this list are currently available under our State's open records laws. And while archiving the contents of the list on the website is a great idea, and something we should've done years ago, it is NOT A SUBSTITUTE for membership on the list-serv.

I ask you move forward on this matter tonight to preserve our Town's commitment to open governance, to lower the bar to participation by our citizens and to increase the timely flow of information to our community.

Thank you,

Will Raymond