



THE HERALD-SUN | CHRISTINE T. NGUYEN

James Moeser prepares to announce that he will step down as UNC's chancellor during the annual State of the University speech on Wednesday.

Moeser's exit and Carolina North

Speculation's on in town on what gown change might bring

BY DANIEL GOLDBERG

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CHAPEL HILL — No one can be certain what kind of impact James Moeser's imminent departure as chancellor of UNC Chapel Hill will have on Carolina North, the most monumental item on the town-and-gown to-do list.

But interested parties on the town side are thinking about it — and moving forward, with the June 30, 2008, date supplied Wednesday by Moeser in mind.

"It may have a tremendous impact or it may have very little," said Chapel Hill Town Councilman Bill Strom. "It's hard to speculate."

Strom characterized the town's relations with UNC as "strong" and praised Moeser's "remarkable leadership" and commitment to environmentalism and green building standards.



STROM

However, Strom thinks a new chancellor has the opportunity to define "once and for all what the university wants to do with Carolina North. That has remained foggy to this point. Once clarity and certainty is offered up, we can continue to collaborate and achieve our mutual interests."

Chapel Hill Town Council candidate

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Will Raymond has monitored the planning process from the start and worries that some of the hard work may be undone.

“As far as the new chancellor — including the search for him — I am concerned that the process started by the LAC [Leadership Advisory Committee] will slow down,” Raymond wrote in an e-mail. “We already see the town and UNC treating the LAC process as over — not something that was meant to evolve and strengthen.”

Raymond wondered whether the search for a new chancellor “might create an inertia that is difficult to overcome.”

“Process aside, it already seems that UNC is leaping forward with their plans. Some of the concerns about Carolina North were moderated, somewhat, by Chancellor Moeser’s own commitment to work a win-win solution. Hard to say, especially given the new makeup of UNC’s BOT [Board of Trustees], if a new chancellor will extend those commitments.”

Drastic or not?

The Board of Trustees’ recently elected chairman is Roger Perry of East West Partners, the development



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James Moeser bows to the audience after the annual State of the University speech on Wednesday.

company that created Mead-owmont. Some observers see Perry as well-suited for making the university’s vision for Carolina North a reality.

Raymond is specifically concerned that a more hard-line chancellor would appeal to the state Legislature to override the town of Chapel Hill’s zoning authority over the Horace Williams tract, giving the university power to move forward with Carolina North free of the town’s permitting process. It’s a town-and-gown nuclear option that has been mentioned in recent days on some local political blogs.

Cam Hill didn’t seem braced for anything that drastic.

“I just don’t think it will change that much,” said the town councilman and LAC member. “The things the chancellor has weighed in on, he did it in such a public fashion that it’s going to be hard to go back on those things.”

Councilman Jim Ward has served Chapel Hill during the tenures of two chancellors — Moeser and his predecessor, Michael Hooker — and said the relationship between Chapel Hill and UNC during those times was about the same.

“I think it’s equally important for us to have a good relationship with the Board of Trustees,” Ward said. And since the BOT serves staggered four-year terms, the body is “always in flux.”

In other words, the town of Chapel Hill — which itself is set up to nurture changing personnel and new approaches — is accustomed to working through change.

“We need to continue to recognize that common ground [between the town and university] is considerable and not allow competing goals to handicap our ability to work together,” Ward said. “The bottom line is, what is good for the town of Chapel Hill improves the quality of UNC in terms of the student experience, and creates a successful public-private partnership with Carolina North.”