

# Town of Matthews implements hiring freeze

BY CAROLYN STEEVES

**MATTHEWS** — The weakened economy has caused many towns and cities throughout the country to tighten their spending plans. Last month, Matthews joined them. The town issued a financial contingency plan naming four steps the town is undertaking to preserve its stability. The steps may seem at odds with other goals of the town, but officials are confident that the weakened economy is a road block and not a dead end.

The steps included putting “all currently funded, but not expended” Capital Improvement Projects on hold, with the exception of the Weddington Road sidewalk project. Also implementing a hiring freeze for all town positions, excepting sworn police officers and fire fighters or positions where interviews have been conducted and conditional offers have been made. All non-essential travel and training is on hold and other expenditures have been frozen.

Roughly a year ago Matthews released a strategic economic development plan for the town. One of the provisions in the plan was to hire an Economic Development Director.

“At the moment, the position of actually hiring an Economic Development Director is on hold,” Annette Privette Keller, Matthews communication director, said.

However, a new Assistant Town Manager comes on board at the end of the month. Keller said that he has some economic development experience, so can perform some of the duties an Economic Development Director would.

“Even though we’ve frozen the Economic Development Director position,

we’re going to use the new Assistant Town Manager to get the office up and running,” Town Manager Hazen Blodgett said. He said that getting the office up and running would include creating a Web site and other steps mentioned in the strategic plan.

Neither the downturn in the economy, nor the hiring freeze have put the kibosh on promoting economic development in Matthews. “The economic development plan has to go forward,” Keller said. “(Matthews officials) feel very strongly that this is not the time to eliminate it, it’s got to happen.”

She pointed out that the town had not planned on hiring the director until January, so the freeze does not throw them off track too badly.

“It’s like everything else, when something happens and maybe you don’t have that extra amount of money that you thought you’d have... you have to just get creative,” Keller said.

Blodgett pointed out that there is not much development in this economy right now, so this is a time to plant the seeds for economic development.

“It is an opportunity to get our house in order so that when things turn around, which, particularly in this metropolitan area it’s only a matter of time, we’ll be poised to work with whatever project comes forward.”

In the mean time, Blodgett is monitoring the revenue forecast. The contingency plan is in effect until January 2009 “or, if events warrant, prior to that time.”

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