

Fiscally Irresponsible

Courtyard parking deck proposed
Plan would also add 19 apartments to complex

BY JESSE JAMES DECONTO, Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL - Someone may have finally solved the parking problem at The Courtyard.

A company called Franklin West, LLC has submitted a plan to renovate and expand the retail, restaurant and office complex at the corner of West Franklin and Roberson streets. The plan would add a 90-car parking deck and add stories to some buildings, including 19 new apartments.

Lousy Landlord

The Courtyard has faltered since Spender Young bought it in 2005. Young left contractors unpaid and refused to pay rent to P.H. Craig, who owns the back part of The Courtyard's parking lot due to a strange legal arrangement that goes back decades.

The Town & Others Tried To Help

Craig barricaded his portion of the parking lot, putting The Courtyard out of compliance with its permit and prompting local officials to intervene.

The Town of Chapel Hill reserved on-street parking spaces for Courtyard employees, Orange County provided space in its nearby lot for valet parking, and the Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership paid for mediation between Young and Craig.

Lousy Landlord

Still, businesses struggled.

The Stock Exchange, a consignment shop fronting Franklin Street, had already moved out early in Young's tenure after a sewer leak. 3Cups beverages, Sandwich, Baba Ghannouj Mediterranean food, Locopops and Bliss Boutique Bakery all came and went.

Meanwhile, Young went bankrupt and Wachovia foreclosed on the complex. County records list the bank's subsidiary NFPS, Inc. as the Courtyard's owner.

Franklin West LLC formed in March with John Weigle of Durham as the registered agent. The relationship between Wachovia and Weigle is unclear. Efforts to reach Weigle and architect Jonathan Wolk were unsuccessful.

The Courtyard's development permit requires 79 parking spaces, including 23 on Craig's land. The new on-site parking deck would eliminate the need to lease those off-site spaces.