

Duke gets Durham's OK to transform university's Central Campus. But what's coming?

BY MARY HELEN MOORE

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DURHAM

Duke University got a large chunk of land rezoned this week, paving the way for a big redevelopment of its Central Campus in the coming years, though the university says nothing is planned yet.

The rezoning adds Duke's 155-acre Central Campus to the university's custom zoning district, a widely permissive category created for Duke and N.C. Central universities about two decades ago.

It's called "UC," and allows Duke to build nearly anything that could conceiv-

ably serve a college campus, from dormitories to utilities to hotels to stadiums.

"The primary benefit of the UC is it allows for planning and zoning elements — such as stormwater, parking, sidewalks, tree coverage — to be considered holistically at the campus scale, rather than on each building site," said Adem Gusa, director of planning and design at Duke University.

The vote passed the Durham City Council by 5-2 vote Monday night, with the city's two newest council members, Nate Baker and Chelsea Cook, voting against it.

Baker said specific plans should have come first. "UC is a privilege. It is a

very unique zoning district that allows great latitude to those who own land," Baker said. "I always seek planning before zoning."

It was the second time this year that the City Council heard the case, with leaders hesitant because the university has yet to say what it will do with the property.

But Mayor Pro Tem Mark-Anthony Middleton noted that the Planning Commission supported the rezoning 8-1, despite the lack of specifics.

"The UC designation isn't particularly controversial to me for a university," Middleton said.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO DUKE'S CENTRAL CAMPUS?

Central Campus is the area near Duke University Medical Center that is home to employee parking lots, a handful of buildings and lots of trees.

It spans from the medical center to just past Swift Avenue, and is sandwiched between Erwin Road and Duke Gardens.

Duke's development plan says Central Campus

may include "all uses under the zoning district," but promises not to build structures above 90 feet, or roughly eight stories.

UC zoning allows:

- Dorms and co-living
- Educational and research facilities
- Stadiums and auditoriums
- Hotels
- Hospitals, shelters and care centers
- Parks and museums
- Places of worship
- Utilities
- On this acreage, up to 50,000 square feet of restaurants and shops.
- A golf course, though Duke committed Monday night not to build one here.

Durham resident Mimi Kessler said Duke should build workforce housing on Central Campus.

"That is, the hourly people who work at Duke and in Durham," Kessler said. "Right there on Erwin Road. Employees can walk to the hospital."

The area for decades was home to student apartments, though the university tore them down in 2019.

The \$10 million shoring contract has incentives if the contractors — Wright Brothers Construction of Charleston, Tennessee, and Colorado-based GeoStabilization International — can finish the work by Jan. 4.

Engineers are still trying to figure out how to restore the land that once supported the eastbound lanes of I-40. Historic rain from the remnants of Hurricane Helene turned the Pigeon River into a torrent that wore away the earth below the highway. The guardrail and shoulder along the eastbound lanes fell into the river in several places. In some spots, the travel lanes themselves also disappeared.

The westbound lanes remain intact. But in at least one place, all that separates them from the river is the median barrier. Meanwhile, an alternate route, Interstate 26, remains closed after floodwaters knocked down twin spans that carried the highway over the Nolichucky River in Erwin, about 40 miles from the North Carolina line. Nagi says there's no timeline set for rebuilding the bridges and reopening the highway.

For now, NCDOT advises drivers wishing to go west toward Tennessee to take either I-77 north to I-81 near Wytheville, Virginia, toward Knoxville, or take U.S. 74 west toward Chattanooga.

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OPTIONS FOR TRAVEL BETWEEN THE TWO STATES

In North Carolina, I-40 is open as far as Exit 20, the Maggie Valley interchange with U.S. 276. On the Tennessee side, westbound I-40 opens at Exit 447, while eastbound traffic must get off at Exit 440, U.S. 321.

Tennessee DOT has begun converting the westbound lanes of I-40 to two-way traffic around its damaged section of the highway, between the North Carolina line and Exit 447, a distance of

about 4 miles, according to spokesman Mark Nagi.

TDOT hopes to finish the conversion by the end of next week, though drivers won't be able to go beyond the North Carolina state line.

Speaking with reporters, Gov. Lee called the Pigeon River Gorge section of I-40 "incredibly important." More than 26,000 drivers a day normally use what is the busiest route between the two states.

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Obituaries

Margaret Barefoot Hawley

February 26, 1956 - October 2, 2024

church choirs and played the piano beautifully.

In recent years, she was diagnosed with COPD and was dependent upon supplemental oxygen; yet she was still known for her generosity of spirit. Neighbors and friends knew her for her kindness, her smile, and her laugh. She led a simple life but shared whatever she could with others. She met people from all walks of life with sympathy, understanding, and grace, and never judged them for whatever circumstances they found themselves in.

She is survived by her daughter, Alicia Hawley Rich, her son-in-law, Eric, and her granddaughter, Evelyn ("Eva"), as well as her sister and brother-in-law, Janice and Sammy King, and her sister, Frances Jackson. She is also survived by five nieces and nephews and their spouses, four great nieces, and one great nephew.

A memorial service will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, October 12, 2024, at Skinner & Smith Funeral Home, 905 Erwin Rd. in Dunn, NC. Memorial contributions can be made to SouthLight Healthcare (<https://southlight.org/donate/>).

William Graham Champion Mitchell

December 24, 1946 - October 8, 2024

Raleigh, North Carolina - William Graham Champion Mitchell, aged 77, of New Bern, NC, passed away on October 8, 2024. Champ Mitchell was born in Wake County, NC, on December 24, 1946 to the late Burley Champion and Dorothy Ford Champion.

Champ received his Bachelor of Arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1969, served on Active Duty as a Naval Surface Warfare Officer, and then returned to law school at Chapel Hill. He received his Juris Doctor in 1975. During Champ's career as a corporate litigator, he was a Partner at Womble, Carlyle, Sandridge & Rice, Winston-Salem; and a Partner at Howard & Simon in Washington, D.C. His corporate career highlights include Senior Vice President for External Affairs R.J. Reynolds Company Nabisco; Executive Vice President R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company; Executive Vice President of Network Solutions Inc. At the time of his death, Champ Mitchell served on the Board of Directors of Research Triangle Institute International and ARGAN Inc. His service on the University of North Car-

olina Board of Governors was cut short by his first cancer diagnosis. He is survived by his wife, Etienne "ET" Mitchell; three children, William Graham Mitchell (Havila), Margaret Mitchell Flatley, and Morgan Benjamin Andreia (Jenna); and four grandchildren: Nathan Flatley, Allison Mitchell, Mason Mitchell, and Miles Mitchell; and his brother, the Honorable Burley Bayard Mitchell, Jr. (Lou). ET and Morgan would like to thank New Bern's medical community, particularly Dr. Michael Fugimagari. The outstanding care by numerous doctors and nurses at Carolina East Medical Center and Coastal Carolina Health Center enabled Champ to beat the odds for over ten years. Pruitt Hospice and Ms. Evelyn Saunders' care team eased his last days.

In lieu of flowers, Champ would prefer to be remembered through donations to the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Coastal Plain. A memorial service will be held at Christ Episcopal Church in New Bern, at 10:00 am on Friday, October 11, 2024 with a reception following at the Harrison Center. Online condolences to the family may be made at www.cottengeneralfuneralhome.com.