

Democracy North Carolina

1821 Green St., Durham, NC 27705 • 919-286-6000 or 489-1931 • democracy-nc.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 11, 2003

CONTACT: Bob Hall, 919-489-1931

Burden of Running for Chapel Hill Town Council Falls Increasingly on Candidates Themselves

- **2 of 3 council candidates relied heavily on own money to run**
- **Top spenders for council have had 69% success rate since 1995**
- **92% of council candidates since 1995 have been white**

Local elected officials make many sacrifices in order to be public servants: reading volumes of information on issues, attending long meetings late into the night, and there's always the prospect that no matter how they vote on an issue someone is going to be unhappy.

According to a new report from the non-partisan watchdog group Democracy North Carolina, yet another burden is likely to fall on candidates running for the Chapel Hill town council – they're probably going to have to spend their own money in order to mount a campaign. The study of campaign spending trends by candidates for Chapel Hill town council found that 2 of 3 council candidates since 1999 have had to give their campaigns significant amounts of their own money. In fact, more than 1 in every 5 dollars spent by council candidates since 1999 originated from the candidates themselves.

“Candidates for the town council shouldn't have to go into personal debt simply because they are participating in our democracy by running for public office,” says Peter Walz who conducted the report for Democracy North Carolina. “Without a meaningful alternative, such as public financing, candidates increasingly will turn to spending their own money.”

The report also found that if a candidate was among the top four spenders (vying for one of four available seats) in a council election since 1995, they had a 69% success rate in capturing a seat. Also, 12 of the 16 winners since 1995 have spent more than \$6,000, while only 2 council winners since 1995 have spent less than \$3,000, both of whom were incumbents. The current Chapel Hill town council spent an average of \$7,971 in their campaigns for council seats.

“The privately financed system is forcing qualified candidates to choose between dropping out, getting beat, or going into personal debt,” said Walz. “Those are not the options candidates should face.”

The report also notes that council candidates since 1995 have been overwhelmingly registered as Democrats and white. According to voter registration records, more than 92% of the candidates are white and 77% are registered Democrats. A report earlier this year on the Chapel Hill mayoral race found that 98% of major campaign donors in that contest are white.

The town council is currently considering a petition by Chapel Hill citizens for a “Voter-Owned Elections” program, which would provide a public financing alternative to council candidates who accept strict spending and fundraising limits.

###

Democracy North Carolina

By Peter Walz, April 2003

Study of Trends in Campaign Finances For Chapel Hill Town Council Since 1995

The following is a report by the non-partisan, non-profit watchdog group *Democracy North Carolina* regarding elections and campaigns for the town council of Chapel Hill since 1995. Peter Walz, Community Organizer for *Democracy North Carolina*, conducted this report. This report follows *Democracy North Carolina's* report in February 2003 regarding spending trends in the mayoral campaigns in Chapel Hill since 1995. The town council is currently considering a petition by Chapel Hill citizens for a "Voter-Owned Elections" program, which would provide a public financing alternative to council candidates who accept strict spending and fundraising limits. Senator Wib Gulley of Durham has introduced Senate Bill 760 in the state legislature, which would grant local governments such as Chapel Hill the authority to enact public financing programs.

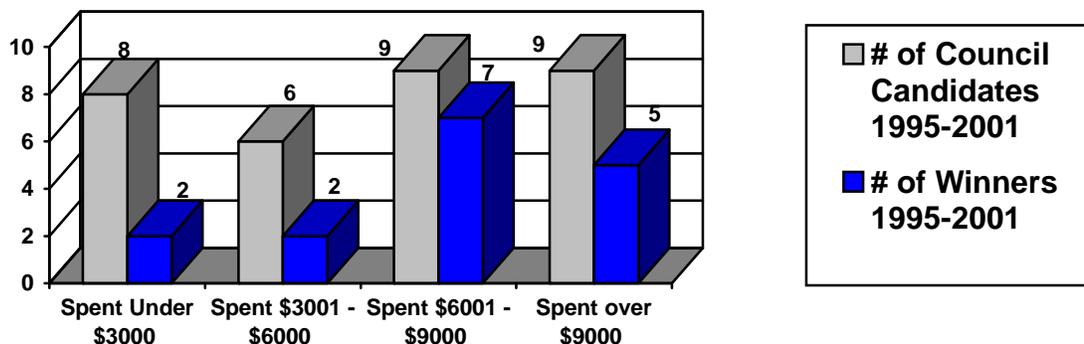
Trends in Campaigns for Chapel Hill Town Council:

Council Candidates Dig Deep into Own Pockets:

- 2 in 3 council candidatesⁱ since 1999ⁱⁱ gave significant amounts of their own money to their campaigns. More than 1 in every 5 dollars spent by council candidates since 1999 originated from the candidates themselves (\$28,704ⁱⁱⁱ out of \$130,214 spent in those two elections).
 - Top givers to their campaigns: In 1999 Madeline Jefferson loaned her campaign \$5,450 of \$7,709 spent in an unsuccessful bid, while Julie McClintock loaned her campaign \$5,265 of \$11,272 spent in her unsuccessful bid to retain her council seat.
 - 44% of the council candidates in 1999 and 2001 spent or loaned their campaigns at least 30% of the total amount they spent.

Top Spenders Find Success:

- If candidates finished as one of the top four spenders in their council election (covering 1995-2001 elections), they had a 69% chance of finishing as one of the top four vote-getters and thus winning a seat on the town council.
- Since 1995, candidates who spent under \$6,000 were much less likely to win than candidates who spent over \$6,000. Only 4 of the 14 candidates who spent under \$6,000 won a council seat. 18 council candidates have spent over \$6,000 (9 of whom spent over \$9,000) and 12 of them were winners on Election Day.



Council Candidates Very Homogeneous:

- 92% of council candidates^{iv} since 1995 are white and 77% are registered as Democrats according to voter registration records. Edith Wiggins and Larry Daquioag are the only non-white candidates to mount meaningful campaigns. The only other campaign by a non-white candidate was that of Franklin Bowden, who filed as a candidate in 1997 but was eliminated from the study because it was determined that he did not mount a meaningful campaign under the study criteria. Lisa Everett is the only candidate currently registered as a Republican to run for the town council since 1995. While she spent only \$225 in her 2001 campaign, she garnered 2,180 votes to finish in 7th place.

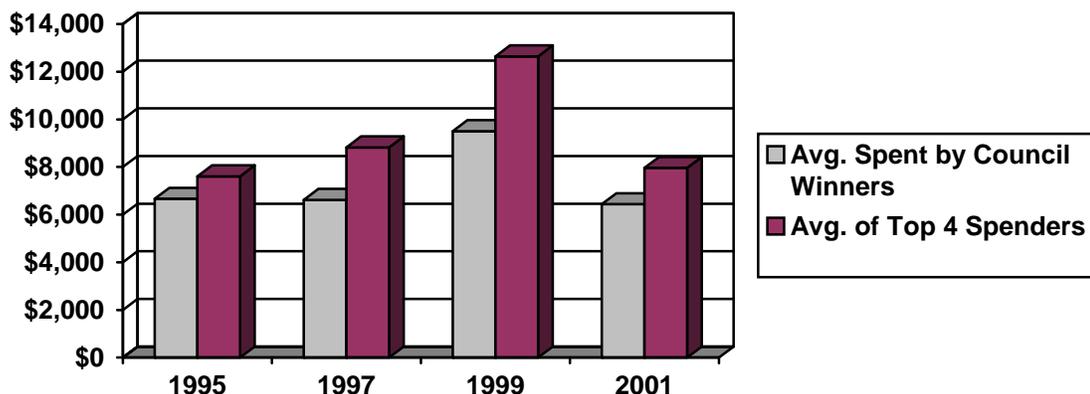
Current Council Trends:

- The current council spent an average of \$7,971 in order to win their seat on the council. The most spent by a sitting council member was \$11,620, spent by Jim Ward in 1999. The least amount spent by a sitting council member was \$4,048 by Ed Harrison in 2001.

Spending Averages Since 1995:

- Spending for the town council unquestionably spiked in the 1999 race whether looking at the average spent by the top spenders (\$12,640) or by winners (\$9,504). The 2001 race may have been much less expensive because of the historic amount of money spent in the mayor's race (over \$50,000 between two candidates). The lower spending could also be attributed to the \$200 limit on contributions, which the council passed after the 1999 election. Regardless, a council candidate will continue to have to spend thousands of dollars in order to win a seat on the council. *(All figures are in 2001 dollars, unless noted otherwise.)*

- The average amount spent by the top four spending candidates was:
 - i. 1995: \$7,608
 - ii. 1997: \$8,824
 - iii. 1999: \$12,640
 - iv. 2001: \$7,963
- The average amount spent by council winners was:
 - i. 1995: \$6,668
 - ii. 1997: \$6,618
 - iii. 1999: \$9,504
 - iv. 2001: \$6,438



Odds and Ends:

- Since 1995, the candidate who spent the least money running for council (and still be deemed a meaningful candidate under the criteria of the study) was then incumbent Jim Protzman, who in 1995 appears to have spent only the \$5 filing fee. He finished 6th and lost his seat on the council.
- The candidate to spend the most money running for council was...also Jim Protzman. He spent \$16,317 in 1999 and finished 6th, failing to regain his seat.
- The challenger (non-incumbent) candidate to spend the least and win a seat is current council member Ed Harrison who spent \$4,048 to place third in the 2001 race. The challenger to spend the most and win is Jim Ward who spent \$11,620 to garner first place in 1999's council race.
- Joyce Brown spent \$1,799 in 1997, the least amount by any winner for the town council since 1995.

Study Conclusion:

“Candidates for the town council shouldn’t have to go into personal debt simply because they are participating in our democracy by running for public office,” says Peter Walz who conducted the report for Democracy North Carolina. “Without a meaningful alternative, such as public financing, candidates increasingly will turn to spending their own money.”

“The privately financed system is forcing qualified candidates to choose between dropping out, getting beat or going into personal debt,” according to Walz.

ⁱ The study eliminated candidates who were deemed not to run meaningful campaigns for the town council even though they had filed as a candidate. Candidates who were eliminated did not file a campaign expense report or spent less than \$500 AND received less than 10% of the total possible votes they could receive. Four candidates were eliminated from the study following these criteria.

ⁱⁱ The 1995 and 1997 information on loans to campaigns could not be studied because the Orange Board of Elections has destroyed those records.

ⁱⁱⁱ All figures in the study have been adjusted for inflation to 2001 dollars unless otherwise noted.

^{iv} Candidates who ran more than one campaign in the 1995-2001 study period were counted only once. Thusly, Larry Daquioag and Edith Wiggins were the only non-white candidates to mount meaningful campaigns as defined by footnote i. A total of 26 people have run for town council in 32 campaigns from 1995-2001. Race and party information are based on current voter-registration records.