



The sting of budget cuts

Neighborhoods brace for loss of libraries, schools, rec centers

BY CAITLIN COAKLEY

Thanks to budget shortfalls, Mecklenburg County facilities, such as recreation centers, libraries and schools, have found themselves on the chopping block.

In some neighborhoods, though, the impact is worse than in others. Some communities are losing multiple facilities, which could hurt real estate values and quality of life in those areas.

"It's extremely unfortunate, and I don't think it's good for the neighborhood to lose all of those amenities after they've worked so hard to pull the neighborhood up," Charlotte City Councilwoman Patsy Kinsey said.

One such neighborhood is Belmont. Classified as "threatened" by a 2004 Uni-

Progress point

The closing of libraries, recreation centers and schools in neighborhoods could lower property values and quality of life.



RUNNING OUT OF ROOM: Patrons use all the computers at the Plaza Midwood library on Central Avenue Wednesday. Residents of nearby Belmont neighborhood have begun using the library after theirs was closed because of budget cuts, putting more strain on the Plaza Midwood branch. The closing of libraries, schools and recreation centers around Charlotte has left some neighborhoods reeling. *Photo by Nell Redmond*

Please see **CLOSINGS** on page 8

Closing, relocating schools could affect property values

Progress point

One expert says losing schools could have an "instantaneous negative effect" on property values. Another expert says the uncertainty of the direction of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools may make Charlotte unattractive to business and industry.

BY SAM BOYKIN

With some public schools in the county set to consolidate or close after changes approved this month, many in the public are wondering about the impacts.

But the changes, such as shifting popular and high-performing academic

programs from one neighborhood to another, could affect more than parents and students.

Experts say the major changes set for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools could affect estate values, too.

"There's a strong connection between property values and schools," said Carol Lloyd, executive editor with GreatSchools, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that rates and reviews more than 200,000 public and private schools in the country.

"If a one-time star school starts losing ground, then those families that put ed-

ucation first, many of which are middle class and highly educated themselves, will move elsewhere," she said. "Property values in those areas drop, and the communities and towns where those people move, which likely have strong schools, will see their properties values go up."

It's a scenario that could play out in Charlotte as changes within CMS take effect in the 2011-12 school year.

This month, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education OK'd changes to more than 60 of the district's 178 schools.

According to CMS, the changes include closing 11 school buildings, consolidating students and programs at five schools, relocating two programs, expanding eight schools to prekindergarten through eighth grade and one to kindergarten through 12th, expanding one school to grades sixth through 12th, adjusting boundaries for 13 schools, providing targeted assistance to nearly 30 schools and creating two home schools and two magnet programs.

Please see **PROPERTY** on page 9

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Page 2