

In the 1990s, Hillsborough Street was a flourishing college street full of bars, activities and restaurants. Now, the iconic Pantana Bob's has been replaced by Stanhope Apartments. A casual drink while bowling at Western Lanes has been replaced with Target and smoke shops. The college's natural social hub has been stripped bare.

"Hillsborough needs more social activities for sure," said Lex Diaz, 19, a NC State sophomore. "We should be putting money into having things like skating rinks."

Chris Post, NC State alumnus and co-owner of Hillsborough Street's Mitch's Tavern, attributes the decrease to new city ordinances and prolonged construction. Construction of the Hillsborough Street roundabouts throughout the 2010s made it difficult for off-campus students to access many businesses. House owners behind the street asked the local government for noise ordinances and reduced street parking. By the time COVID-19 came, the last remaining businesses had no choice but to back out.

Hillsborough Street remains the only area in Raleigh enforcing paid parking until 8 p.m. compared to the city standard of 6 p.m. Post has reached out to the city government to install a parking validation system to support local business, but efforts have seemed to fall on deaf ears.

"When I was at NC State... you went to Hillsborough Street. It had all the dance clubs, bars and things like that," Post said. "The roundabout project killed a lot of Hillsborough Street businesses, and the lack of parking that no one seems to want to do anything about."

Mitch's Tavern has been able to thrive despite the culture shift over the past half-century. Post credits this achievement to the original owner, Mitch, for adapting and maintaining the culture of the historic tavern.

“A student at State right now, their grandparents and their parents went to Mitch's Tavern. Now they're going to Mitch's Tavern. It's just passed down through the generations.”

A junior at NC State, Zack Banis, 20, has concerns beyond the party scene, but the community as a whole. “It's not that I just want bars, I want a college community outside of the weekend. Raleigh hasn't built the unity that other schools have.”

With incoming regulations on vape and THC products, current smoke shops may become new real estate opportunities for developers. Over this past year, Hillsborough Street has gained community-focused businesses such as Ebisu, Crumbl and Raising Cane's. With The Goat bar scheduled to reopen on Western Boulevard this coming year, there is hope for a Hillsborough Street bar renaissance as well.