

# RESPONSES TO COMMENTS RECEIVED AT FORDHAM BOULEVARD SIDEPATH PROJECT MEETING HELD AUGUST 22, 2018



The following suggestions and comments were received at the August 22, 2018 meeting held in University Place. At the time of the meeting drawings were at the 30% level.

Nothing in this response should be construed as a guarantee or a promise at this time.

Many of these issues will require further study, additional design will be necessary, budget issues considered, and permits secured. Throughout the process NCDOT must approve each step and will likely have its own concerns and comments that will have to be addressed. We expect that the project design will evolve and change as we move along. Persons on the project email list will receive updates and new information as the project moves forward.

## **Existing Sidepath Reconstruction**

Everyone who addressed the issue supported the reconstruction of the existing trail. Several speakers asked that the oversized bollards on either end of the bridge be replaced with standard size bollards for safety reasons.

**Response (Bill Webster, Parks and Recreation Department, Project Manager):** It is our intent to replace the oversized bollards with a standard size bollard.

## **Alternative Option Proposed by Attendees**

Most people in attendance did not support the construction of the proposed new segment from Ridgefield Drive to Willow Drive. They offered instead a proposal to sign pedestrians and bicyclists through their neighborhood using Hickory Drive.

**Response (Bill Webster, Parks and Recreation Department, Project Manager and Kayla Seibel, Transportation Planner):** Town staff and consultants explored this as an alternative. However, we have decided to proceed with the current design (sidepath along Fordham Boulevard) for the following reasons:

1. As the Fordham Boulevard sidepath system becomes interconnected we expect pedestrian and bicycle use to increase. There are plans to extend the sidepaths for the entire length of Fordham Blvd. /US 15-501, from S. Columbia all the way to Europa Drive. That process is well underway in the adjacent Blue Hill development district to the north of Willow Drive. Much of the sidepath system is already constructed, is underway, or is in the near-term planning stage.

2. Hickory Drive has no sidewalks and appears to have no room for sidewalks. We believe that in the long run we cannot invite increasing numbers of pedestrian and bicycle users onto a street without dedicated bicycle or pedestrian facilities.
3. Several neighbors stated that cars enter and leave the neighborhood at high rates of speed. We believe we can design safe crossings of these streets near Fordham Boulevard, but would have no control over safety of pedestrians walking in the street because of the lack of room for safety enhancements.
4. Our agreement with NCDOT is specifically for a sidepath on the east side of Fordham Boulevard within NCDOT's right of way. If the scope of the project changes we will not be able to use the federal funds currently allocated to this project and will have to reimburse NCDOT for design funds already spent.

### **Safety Concerns**

Several speakers pointed out that automobiles entering and exiting Ridgefield Drive and Walnut Street usually do so at high speed, which would endanger anyone crossing those streets near the intersections with Fordham Boulevard. This was a major concern for many people in attendance.

Several speakers stated that the major crossings of Fordham Boulevard should be made safe for pedestrians before any trail is built.

One speaker suggested that the trail be elevated into tree level.

**Response (Kayla Seibel, Transportation Planner II):** As we move forward with design for the sidepath we will include mechanisms for traffic calming and safe crossings where the trail intersects with roadways. It is too early in the process to determine exactly what those improvements will be. However, the Town's consultant Kimley-Horn has expertise in the field of roadway design, NCDOT requirements, and design solutions for safe pedestrian/bicycle transportation. We expect them to fully analyze options and to make recommendations that will allow us to build facilities that emphasize safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

We fully appreciate and support the need to make all aspects of pedestrian and bicycle transportation along and across Fordham Boulevard to be as safe as possible. As Fordham Blvd. becomes a more multi-modal facility, Town staff will continue to work with NCDOT to explore improving the existing crossings and adding new crossings where feasible. We recently made a request to NCDOT to improve the crossing at Estes Drive and Fordham Blvd., and expect to begin discussion on that in the next month or two. We are currently in the design stage of a new pedestrian crossing of Fordham Boulevard at Elliott Road.

### **Loss of Landscape Buffer**

This issue was shared by most participants. Speakers noted that the current buffer between the ROW (Right of Way) and nearby homes is a dense stand of either bamboo or cedar depending on exact location. To complicate the matter there is a Duke Energy easement immediately adjacent to the ROW in which only low plantings can be installed.

One speaker noted that the illustrated schematic plan did a poor job of showing what the after effect of any construction would look like. He noted that the schematic drawing did not accurately show the amount of space available for landscape planting.

Several speakers stated that they do not currently have fences between their homes and the NCDOT ROW.

One speaker stated that any loss of trees would expose the remaining trees near the property lines to increased wind and thus increase the danger of falling trees to adjacent neighbors.

One speaker stated that if the project moves forward the Town should explore construction of a sound-absorbing barrier to reduce Hickory Dr. residents' exposure to traffic noise.

One person expressed a concern that trail users would upset her dogs which use her backyard.

**Response (Bill Webster, Parks and Recreation Department, Project Manager):** We agree with the speakers that this is a key issue that must be addressed in as proactive a way as possible. The Town will work with the design firm to explore all possible ways to mitigate the effects of reduced landscape buffering between the road and the homes on Hickory Drive. We are searching for alternative sources of funds that could be used to address this issue. Neighbors can expect to be included in future conversations about the best way to minimize the effects of buffer loss.

We agree that the current schematic plan does not accurately reflect what the area would look like once the buffer is partially removed. Town staff have asked the consultant to redo the illustrated schematic to better reflect the after-effect of the construction. The updated illustration will be posted on the project website.

### **Use Funds Elsewhere**

Numerous speakers suggested that the funds earmarked for this project be used elsewhere.

**Response (Bill Webster, Parks and Recreation Department, Project Manager):** As noted above, these are federal funds that can only be used for this project.

### **Incorporate Play Areas into the Design**

One speaker suggested that small play areas be designed along the path.

**Response (Bill Webster, Parks and Recreation Department, Project Manager):** Once the path is built, the Town can explore the feasibility of installing small play areas and/or art installations along the path. Any such improvements within NCDOT right of way would have to be approved by NCDOT. At this time we do not know if NCDOT would approve any such improvement. We would likely not install anything that would increase the width of clearing behind homes. There are no funds available for this idea in the current project scope.

**NEXT STEPS:**

We will continue to work on the design of the project and expect to make changes based on the comments received so far. As soon as we achieve the next level of design we will share that design with everyone on the email distribution list and we will place updated design plans on the project website.

Please feel free to comment by contacting me at [bwebster@townofchapelhill.org](mailto:bwebster@townofchapelhill.org) or 919 968-2819. I prefer email because I will then have a written record of your concerns, but I am also very happy to discuss these issues on the phone or in person.

Bill Webster, Project Manager  
Chapel Hill Parks and Recreation