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MEMORANDUM

From: Bill Webster, Planning and Development Manager
Date: November 14, 2018
Subject: Fordham Boulevard Sidepath Project - Response to September 21, 2018
Communication from Little Ridgefield Neighborhood

On September 21, 2018, some residents of the Little Ridgefield neighborhood communicated with Chapel Hill Town Council and staff to request that the Town stop work on the Fordham Boulevard Sidepath project.

Information about the project can be found on the project website at:

<https://www.townofchapelhill.org/town-hall/departments-services/parks-and-recreation/planning-and-development/fordham-boulevard-sidepath-project/-fsiteid-1>

The sidepath project consists of two segments. The first portion would replace the current 1,800 ft. path from Cleland Drive to Ridgefield Drive with a modern facility that would meet national and State standards for a multi-purpose pedestrian and bicycle trail. The second portion would be construction of a new 1,700 ft. multiuse path from Ridgefield Drive to Willow Drive. As proposed, the new portion of the path is entirely within NCDOT's right of way. No easements or new right of way are needed to construct the new section of path.

The Town was originally awarded funding through the Safe Route to Schools (SRTS) program in FY16. Since the time the original funding was awarded NCDOT discontinued the SRTS funding. However, the Town was subsequently able to secure funding through NCDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) requiring a 20% local funding match. On April 5, 2017, the Council authorized the Town Manager to execute a contract with NCDOT for design and construction of the sidepath. NCDOT will provide \$446,400 and the Town is responsible for the required match of \$111,600. We have hired planning and engineering firm Kimley-Horn to design the project. Kimley-Horn was selected in part because they are knowledgeable in both roadway design and design of multi-modal paths.

In March 2018, Town staff notified nearby residents that design of the project had started and that a neighborhood meeting would be held in the future. We recently reached the 30% stage in development of design drawings. We held a meeting on August 22, 2018. Approximately 19 people attended.

At the public meeting we heard these major areas of concern:

- The project would result in a loss of vegetative buffers between homes and Fordham Boulevard
- Safety of users would be compromised as they cross neighborhood access roads – Ridgefield Road and Willow Drive
- Safety of users would be compromised attempting to cross Fordham Boulevard to access University Place and other destinations.

MOBILITY AND CONNECTIVITY PLAN (AND EXISTING SEGMENTS)

The Chapel Hill Mobility and Connectivity Plan (2017) calls for multi-modal sidepaths along both sides of Fordham Boulevard from Europa Drive to South Columbia Street. The side path on the south side of Fordham Boulevard has already been extended further east to Memorial Cemetery, connecting to future bike and pedestrian improvements along Old Durham-Chapel Hill Road via the cemetery service road. As development occurs in the corridor, pieces of this multi-modal path are being constructed.

The map below shows the Fordham Blvd side path network including the built segments, segments that are approved or under construction, and the segments that are planned but unfunded in the Mobility and Connectivity Plan. The subsequent section describes the geographic location of each segment in more detail.

The path system has been completed in the following locations:

East/South Side of Fordham Blvd

- Cleland Drive to Ridgefield Drive (Note: this section is decades old and is in poor condition. Part of this project is to upgrade the path to modern standards).
- Ephesus Church Road along Service Road to Hillstone development (under construction).
- North end of the DHIC Greenfield Place development from Memorial Cemetery to the Sheraton Hotel.

West/North Side of Fordham Blvd

- Portion of Eastgate Shopping Center from the main access road to the southern property line in front of Chipotle

The path system has been planned, approved, or is under construction in the following locations:

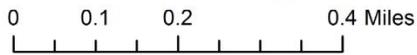
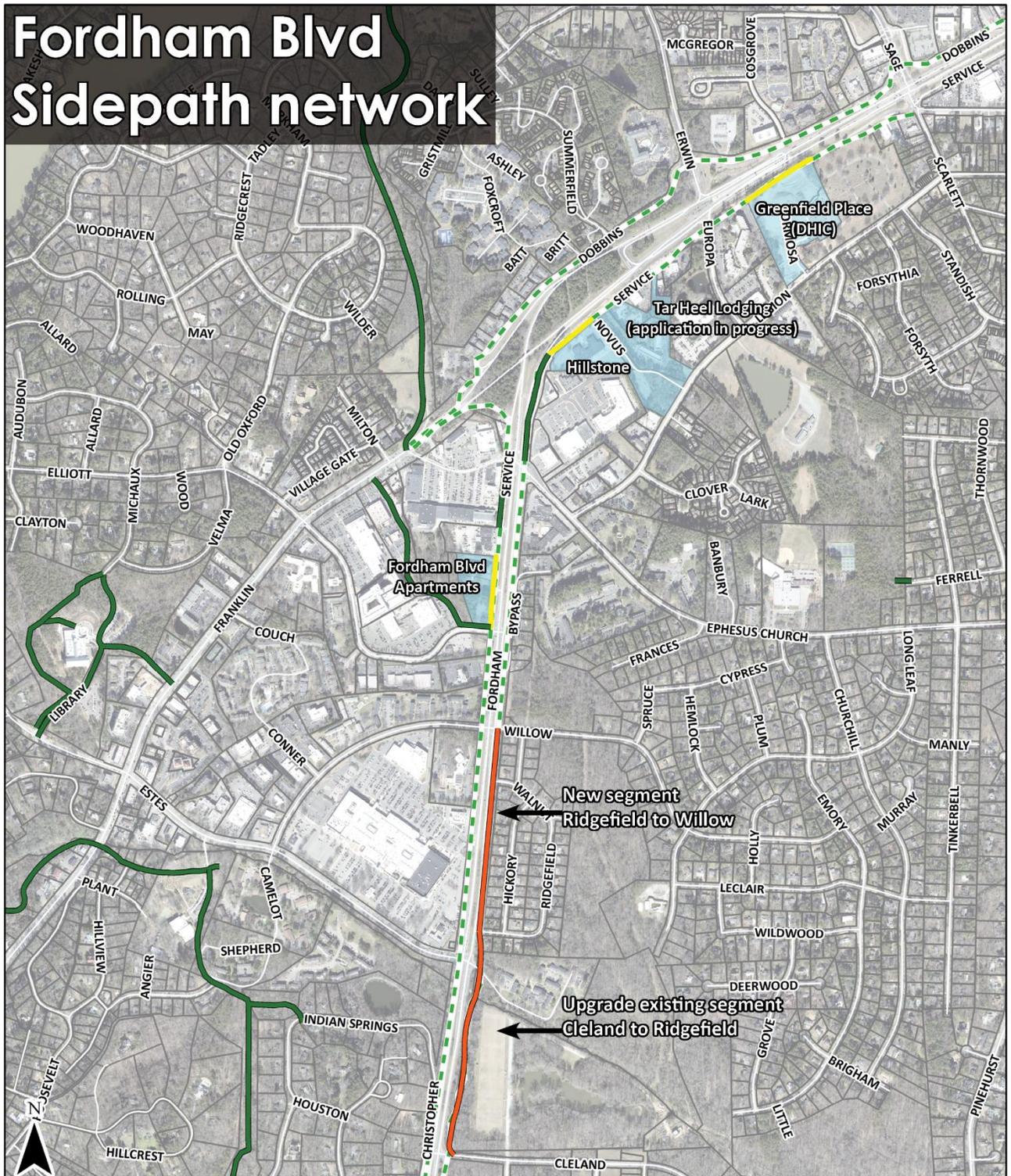
East/South Side of Fordham Blvd

- Hillstone development from Service Road in Rams Plaza to Hong Kong Buffet

West/North Side of Fordham Blvd

- Elliott Road to Mariakakus Plaza known as the Fordham Blvd Apartments (under construction)

Fordham Blvd Sidepath network



Map prepared by Planning and Development Services
 Town of Chapel Hill
 October 22, 2018

- Town Project: improve and extend sidepath
- Existing Greenways and sidepaths
- Sidepath: approved or under construction
- Planned Fordham Sidepath Network

As properties within the Blue Hill district apply for redevelopment we expect the sidepath system to continue to fill in, especially in the northeast corridor from Elliott Road to the east.

In order to extend the sidepath to areas not expected to redevelop in the near term we have submitted this project to the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) to enter into the North Carolina State Prioritization Process (SPOT). The proposed project to extend and fill in gaps in the sidepath network is consistent with local and regional plans and the DCHC MPO has agreed to submit this project for prioritization. We will learn if this project will receive funding in spring 2019.

NEXT STEPS

We have reviewed the comments received at the public meeting and have instructed Kimley-Horn to develop a more detailed design that addresses the issues raised at the public meeting. We anticipate that if the project moves forward it will do so roughly in the following manner:

1. Develop more detailed drawings and hold another public meeting, most likely in early 2019
2. Complete the design by the summer of 2019
3. Hold an additional public meeting for final review
4. NCDOT approval of final plans
5. Council approval of construction bids
6. Construction in 2020

LITTLE RIDGEFIELD NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNICATION

The September 21, 2018 communication to Council and staff included a request that the project be stopped due to safety issues and presented some recommendations. We have highlighted a few of the main points of the communication and have provided responses:

Neighborhood Communication: We are disappointed the Town has not arranged for further opportunities for public dialog regarding this plan, and we request that Council not move forward with plans to extend the multi-use path until additional public comments have been received and satisfactorily addressed, and alternatives carefully considered.

Response: The project will not go to construction based on current planning. It is our intention to address all of the safety (and other) issues raised by the neighborhood. We have always planned additional meetings and in our communications with the neighborhood have offered to meet with concerned residents at any time. However, it is important that we move forward with the design in order to address the safety issues presented by the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Communication: We argue that the safety challenges associated with the proposed multi-use path render the path in conflict with the town's vision of creating "safe and comfortable corridors that link neighborhood parks, employment centers, business districts,

transit stops, and other destinations” (Town of Chapel Hill, 2017, p. E-1). Maintaining the existing multimodal facility along Hickory Drive, which requires virtually no investment from the town, more closely aligns with the plan’s intent. We respectfully request the town consider this alternative in the context of the plan and in light of the safety challenges presented by this particular corridor.

Response: We anticipate an increase in use of the Fordham Boulevard multi-modal sidepath system as the disparate segments begin to merge. We believe that the Fordham sidepath system will eventually function much like the sidepaths along NC 54 at and near Meadowmont. Those paths are heavily used and have performed well and safely since they were installed. We believe that signing people through the neighborhood would create a different set of safety concerns at the intersections. In addition, once in the neighborhood there are no sidewalks or bicycle facilities. There is likely no room to provide any safety facilities.

Neighborhood Communication: We would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss these alternatives, the evidence supporting our safety concerns, or anything else regarding the proposed path at your convenience.

Response: We will share the neighborhood’s communication with our design consultant. We believe the best time to discuss these issues is after our consultant has had time to review the document and revise the design. We plan on holding additional meetings, and these issues can be addressed at the next public meeting after further design work and review by NCDOT.

Neighborhood Communication: A Council member asked how much money would have to be returned to NCDOT if the project were abandoned at this time.

Response: The non-local funds spent on a project that is not completed must be returned. We estimate that the amount will be at least \$76,500. This is the amount invoiced by Kimley Horn as of this time.