

The Honorable Pam Hemminger  
Mayor of the Town of Chapel Hill  
405 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
Chapel Hill NC 27514

Nov 18, 2018

Dear Mayor Hemminger:

We are residents of the Little Ridgefield neighborhood and are writing to express our concerns regarding the proposed Fordham Blvd side-path extension and regarding the Town's handling of public input in this matter.

On Sept 22, 2018, 27 members of the Little Ridgefield neighborhood sent a memorandum to you, Town Council members, Chairpersons of the Parks, Greenways and Recreation Commission and the Transportation and Connectivity Advisory Board, as well as to several members of the town staff. This memorandum spelled out in detail concerns the neighborhood's residents have over the safety of the proposed side-path extension.

On Nov 14, 2018, Bill Webster posted a response to that memorandum on the Town's website: <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/town-hall/departments-services/parks-and-recreation/planning-and-development/fordham-boulevard-sidepath-project>. We believe Mr. Webster's response does not adequately address the arguments presented in the residents' memo; specific examples of this are provided at the end of this letter. We hope you will take the time to look over our concerns. If you agree they warrant further consideration, we would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss them in person at your convenience.

Briefly, we argue in the memo that, while we support the goal of enhancing connectivity for bicyclists and pedestrians, the proposed side-path extension will not provide adequate safety for pedestrians and bicyclists traveling along Fordham Blvd, and will introduce new risks of serious, if not fatal, crashes between motorists and side-path users.

There are alternatives that will improve safety, including (a) converting Hickory Drive to a shared street, and (b) reallocating space along the Fordham Blvd corridor in order to ensure there is sufficient right-of-way to install a safe multi-use path with minimal conflict and/or substantially reconfiguring the intersections of various side streets at Fordham Blvd. The memorandum explains the first option in detail.

As stated in the memorandum, the residents of Little Ridgefield request the opportunity to speak with the Town about these concerns *before the project advances*. Based on the response received on Nov 14, it is clear the Town intends to continue with the side-path planning effort first, and consult with the public later. This seems to us to be the wrong way to proceed; the town should take the time to consider whether the project is capable of meeting best practices guidance for safety before spending taxpayer money on it. In the years since this extension project was first proposed, knowledge of best practices for pedestrian and bicycle safety has evolved. Safer, less expensive alternatives are now available. It's time to take a fresh look at this plan, *before* additional resources are invested.

We, the undersigned, would appreciate the opportunity to explain the neighborhood's concerns in person.

Furthermore, we again request that the Town and the consultant not invest additional public funds on the planning and design of the proposed side-path until acceptable alternatives—including the shared-street alternative presented in the residents' memo—are fully explored and until the public has had an opportunity to voice their concerns about the various alternatives. In the interest of ensuring public funds

are used in the most responsible, efficient manner possible, and in light of new knowledge on best practices for pedestrian and bicycle safety, we also request the Town examine whether unspent funds allocated to this project could instead be spent on a safer, more cost-effective alternative that better meets the goals of the original project.

Finally, in recognition that the proposed project is not a greenway, but is instead a complex multi-modal safe-routes-to-school transportation facility located adjacent to a major thoroughfare, we request that the Town consider re-assigning the project to the Town's Long Range and Transportation Planning Division.

Given that the project was originally intended as a Safe Routes to School project, it is imperative that the Town make a concerted effort to evaluate whether the route is, in fact, safe.

Thank you very much for your time.

Respectfully,

Tabitha Combs & Tom Craven  
418 Hickory Dr.

Philip Page  
416 Hickory Dr.

David Schwartz  
415 Ridgefield Rd.

Alyson & Richard Scoltock  
410 Hickory Dr.

Kim Stahl  
431 Ridgefield Rd.

CC: Maurice Jones

Enclosure

## Concerns over the town's Nov 14, 2018 response to the Little Ridgefield Multimodal Safety Memo

1. The response “highlighted a few of the main points” in the Little Ridgefield residents’ memo. In fact, the response avoided the strongest arguments supplied in the memo, copy-and-pasting and refuting general passages from the memo’s introduction and conclusion rather than addressing specific points in the body of the document.

In particular, beginning at the bottom of page 4 of the Town’s response, the following excerpt is pasted from the residents’ memo:

***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.*

The Town’s response to this passage follows:

***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.*

This response addresses the comparison between the path along NC 54 near Meadowmont and the proposed Fordham Blvd side-path. For the majority of its route, the NC 54 path is designed as a greenway, rather than a side-path. Uncontrolled conflicts are eliminated thanks to the tunnel under 54; the few remaining conflict points are at signalized intersections. On Fordham, however, the existing path already has one uncontrolled conflict point (at Estes); the proposed extension adds 2 new uncontrolled conflicts (at Ridgefield and Walnut). Chapel Hill has an enviable network of greenways. The proposed side-path, however, is not a greenway, and should not be designed as such. It is a multi-modal transportation facility. To say that the Fordham side-path will function well because the NC 54 greenway functions well signals a lack of awareness of the serious safety concerns that must be addressed when side-paths intersect side streets adjacent to major highways.

Furthermore, the residents recognize the town’s concern with respect to encouraging pedestrian and bicycle traffic on Hickory (as restated in the response above). Pages 2-3 of the residents’ memo provides references to FHWA and NACTO guidance, as well as academic literature, that clearly describe the conditions under which shared neighborhood streets provide a safe walking and bicycling environment for travelers of all ages. The relevant section of the memo includes an explanation of why Hickory Dr. meets these conditions, even without dedicated sidewalk or bicycle facilities. We encourage Town staff and leaders to re-examine this passage, and to consult with local and national experts on the appropriateness of shared streets as part of a complete pedestrian and bicycle network.

2. The Town’s response fails to mention the residents’ concerns about how the proposed multi-use path will ensure safety for users at conflict points with Ridgefield, Walnut, and Willow. A promise to “share the neighborhood’s concerns with the design consultant” inspires little confidence, given the consultant’s dismissal of these concerns at the public meeting in August. We ask that you take a second look at these concerns, starting on page 3 of the residents’ memo. We understand that the consultant may be aware of these concerns, but even the most experienced of pedestrian and bicycle

planning consultants would not be able to adequately address these concerns within the available right-of-way and/or without substantial changes to the existing intersection geometries.

3. Finally, the residents asked that the Town not proceed with the design phase of the proposed path until it has taken the time to evaluate the concerns and alternatives they have put forth. The town's response to this request, pasted below, indicates that the town is unwilling to consider alternatives, and unwilling to seek further public input until additional expenditures in support of the existing proposal have been made. We believe waiting until after the consultant has billed additional time revising the current design without first fully considering safer, lower-cost alternatives represents an inappropriate use of public funds.

***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.*