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MEMORANDUM

From: Bill Webster, Planning and Development Manager
Date: January 14, 2019
Subject: Fordham Boulevard Side Path Project - Response to Issues Raised at a Meeting in Town Hall on January 4, 2019

On January 4, 2019, eleven residents of the Little Ridgefield neighborhood met with Town staff to present a list of concerns related to the Fordham Boulevard Side Path 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>

Neighborhood representatives presented concerns in four major categories:

- Process, especially as it related to neighborhood engagement
- Safety of users
- Impact to the neighborhood
- Larger context and goals of the project

Specific issues within these larger areas of concern were heard and recorded. Each issue has a staff response based on our current thinking and understanding.

The residents proposed alternatives to the side path project. Discussion of those alternatives can be found at the end of this document.

PROCESS

Concern: Attendees asked that the Town revisit the entire concept and consider the possibility that the project is not worth the cost that must be incurred to build the path. They asked the Town to consider the possibility that the project has too many safety issues, will overly impact adjacent residents, and will serve very few people. A related concern is that the Town will proceed with the project, even if it proves to be a bad idea, because of the financial investment already made.

Response: We have reviewed and discussed the issues raised at the meeting, the previous public meeting, and in writing. We continue to believe that this project can be built in a manner that addresses safety concerns, that neighborhood impacts can be satisfactorily mitigated, and that the

project will provide significant public benefit. For fuller explanations of each of these broad issues see the more detailed responses below.

Concern: Attendees stated that the project was started and continues to proceed without being completely transparent and without due process. For example, work started on the surveying work prior to notification of the neighborhood.

Response: The Town is committed to acting in a transparent and open manner throughout the life of the project. We agree that formal notification of the project did begin after the survey work. However, this is common for many projects because we cannot answer even basic questions from adjacent residents without a survey in hand. Following is a summary of our efforts to communicate information about the project:

- Initial communication with the neighborhood was by mail in March 2018.
- Since the initial mailing we have updated the neighborhood via email at each critical step.
- A public meeting was held on August 22, 2018. Approximately 20 citizens attended.
- Every relevant document has been posted on the project website, including this document.
- We responded to a request for a special meeting, which was held on January 4, 2019.
- At the request of a neighbor, the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission will address the issue in January 2019. We provided notice of the meeting through the project email list.
- The Transportation and Connectivity Board will review the project on February 26, 2019. The neighborhood will be given notice of the meeting.
- We are available to discuss the project with individual residents.
- We plan on holding more public meetings as additional plans and information are developed.

Concern: How will the community continue to be involved?

Response: Town staff are committed to continue to meet with residents and discuss the project going forward. We are currently developing a plan for additional meetings that will involve our design consultant. In the near term we continue to offer an opportunity to discuss the project with individual residents.

Concern: Town staff and consultants are encouraged to visit the neighborhood to see what happens now.

Response: The Project Manager, Transportation Planner, and consultant have visited the neighborhood to investigate various issues. All plan on making more trips to view local traffic patterns. The Police Department will gather speed and volume data on Ridgefield Road.

Concern: The consultant and the Town have a financially vested interest in development of proposed pathway instead of exploring alternatives. There is a concern that if the Town spends additional money paying the consultant then the staff will be less willing to abandon the project because we'll have to reimburse NCDOT.

Response: The design consultant works on a contract basis for the Town and in that role does not direct the flow or direction of the work. Town Transportation Planning staff and the Project Manager review all of the work produced by the consultant and provide direction to his work. We have asked the consultant to evaluate the suggestions and concerns developed by the neighborhood. This work will add cost to the project, but it is a cost that we believe is essential to a satisfactory outcome.

The Town has no financial incentive to spend limited funds on a project for which we believe there is little benefit. If at some point we believe that the project is not viable or useful we would have no hesitation in recommending that the remaining funds be used for a different project. We would have objections to the idea of returning and losing funds for an active project that we believe would benefit the community.

SAFETY

Concern: If built as currently proposed the path would be unsafe for a number of reasons. The neighbors identified several issues including:

- The proposed trail would add new points of conflict, especially at Walnut Street and Ridgefield Road.
- Northbound, right-hand turns off of Fordham Boulevard would be too dangerous for trail users crossing the roads. Most right-hand turns are made at high speeds.
- There are limited sightlines.
- There are limited opportunities to address these issues within the right-of-way that is available.

Response: We appreciate the detailed safety analysis presented by the residents and it is our intention to address them in any future updated design. As a reminder, the current drawings are only at the 30% level and have much room for change and improvement. We have asked our consultant to address each of the neighborhood's safety concerns and to use best practices to design the path for the intersections near Fordham Boulevard. We will not construct any path that we believe presents unusual safety concerns for users.

Concern: The Town's Project Manager doesn't have experience with roadway projects.

Response: The Project Manager is teamed with the Town's Transportation Planning office and the design consultant, both being experts in highway design issues. All significant decisions and recommendations will be made by this team, through consultation with other Town staff and NCDOT experts.

Concern: The Town's liability exposure will increase.

Response: The goal is that the design be based on best practices, resulting in the same level of liability exposure as any other pedestrian/bicycle project. It is the highest priority of the Town to design the safest possible facility given the constraints on the ground.

CONTEXT

Concern: What are we trying to achieve with the proposed pathway? Does the proposed pathway really achieve greater connectivity and encourage pedestrian and bike mobility? All of the expansion of the sidepath system is on the west side of Fordham. That's where the Town should concentrate its efforts.

Response: 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 map below shows the Fordham Boulevard side path network including the built segments, segments that are approved or under construction, and the segments that are planned but currently 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:

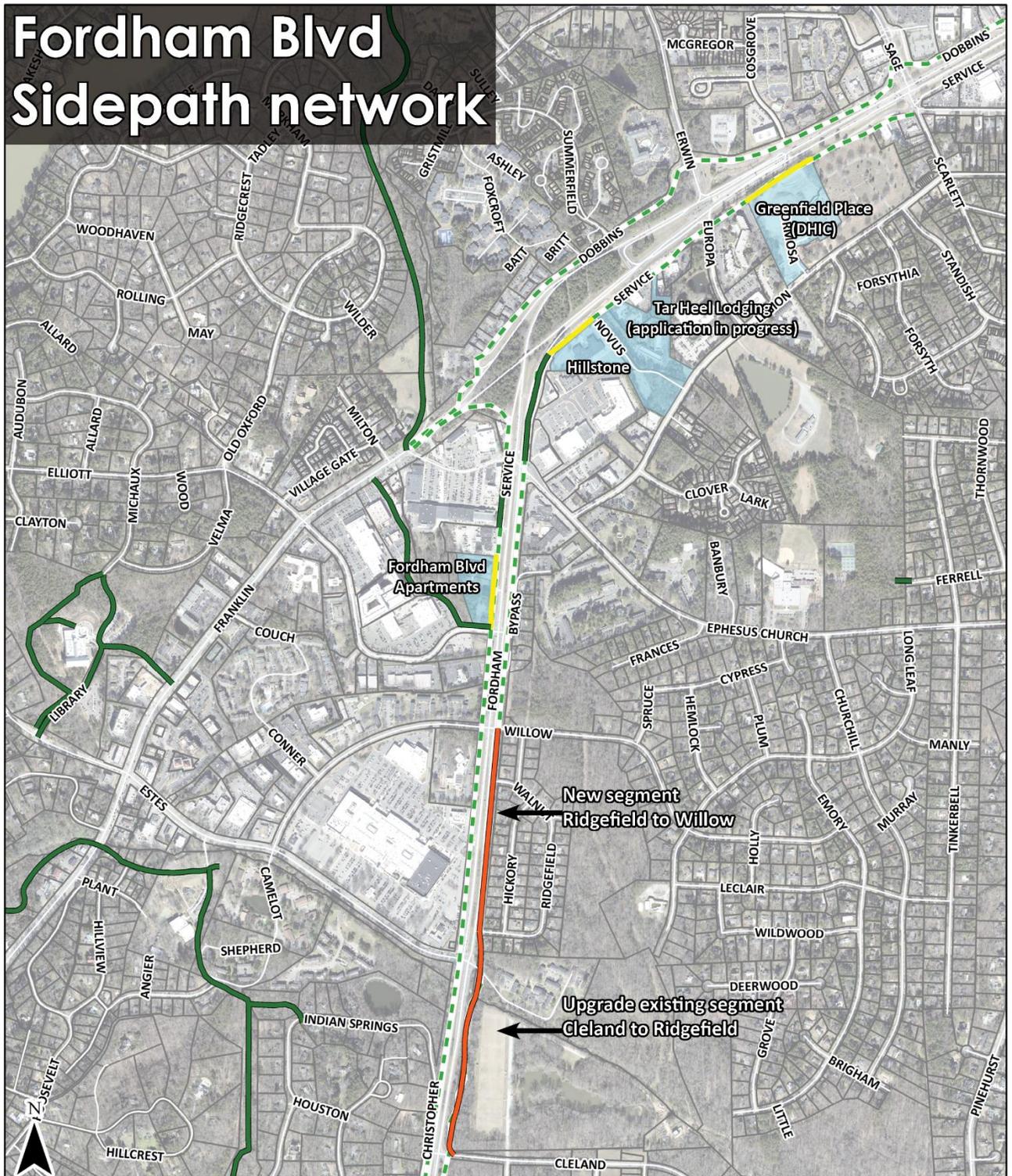
East/South Side of Fordham Blvd

- 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 Rams Plaza Service Road to Hillstone development.
- 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

Fordham Blvd Sidepath network



New segment
Ridgefield to Willow

Upgrade existing segment
Cleland to Ridgefield

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

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)

As properties within the Blue Hill district apply for redevelopment we expect the sidepath system to continue to fill in, especially from Elliot Road eastward to the Town limits.

In order to extend the side path to areas not expected to redevelop in the near term we have submitted a 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 side path 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.

This path will also act as a segment of a larger integrated path system that will go beyond the Blue Hill district and Fordham Boulevard. The facility will eventually connect with a growing pedestrian/bicycle network in Glen Lennox, as Glen Lennox re-develops. The Glen Lennox path system will also eventually connect with the sidepath system along NC 54 which now connects directly to the greenway in Meadowmont.

Concern: There is doubt that a roadside pathway from Ridgefield Road to Willow Drive will be used due to it being uninviting, impractical, not feeling safe (from traffic speeds, noise and pollution) and already existing alternatives.

Response: Specific levels of use of any transportation amenity cannot be guaranteed in the planning phase. However, based on use of similar facilities in Meadowmont and neighboring communities, where there are high levels of use, we believe this facility will also be well used. The location of side paths adjacent to highways may have limited recreational use, yet they serve as alternative transportation facilities. As the system builds and grows we believe use levels will also grow as the facility connects more residential areas to more commercial districts. We note that the area adjacent to Fordham Boulevard already has a worn path that indicates current use.

Concern: This project will not positively affect transportation to Ephesus School.

Response: We agree that the side path will likely not be a significant method for accessing the school. The project was originally funded through the Safe Routes to School program through NCDOT. However, NCDOT redirected those funds and a new funding source was substituted. In recent years the project has not been promoted as an alternative way of accessing the school.

Concern: What will be the impacts of widening Fordham Boulevard and expansion of University Place on the proposed pathway?

Response: We do not have enough information at this time related to plans to widen Fordham Boulevard. However, NCDOT's general practice is to replace existing bicycle-pedestrian facilities as part of roadway projects.

Any changes to University Place will likely not have a direct impact on the side path proposed for the east side of the highway. A major expansion of University Place might result in a requirement that the owner build a side path along the west side of Fordham Boulevard. However, at this time we have no information related to any specific development plans.

Concern: Hickory Drive is already a Town sanctioned bike route.

Response: The existing bike route can be greatly improved and lengthened with a dedicated side path that extends in the short term to Willow Drive and eventually will be part of a larger integrated side path system linking all of the major destinations along Fordham Boulevard and other parts of Town.

IMPACT

Concern: If built as currently proposed the path would severely impact the existing vegetated buffer between Fordham Boulevard and the homes on Hickory. The loss of buffer would reduce screening, increase noise pollution, allow automobile exhaust to enter the neighborhood, increase lead levels, and eliminate existing trees.

Response: The loss of buffer will be one of our greatest challenges. We believe that we can mitigate the loss of buffer by selecting the best possible vegetation for re-planting and the use of fencing. It is our intent to work closely with those residents who live adjacent to the project to find a satisfactory solution to this problem.

Concern: Will the path create stormwater issues?

Response: The path will be designed to meet Town standards for stormwater. The plans will be reviewed by the Town's Stormwater Division.

Concern: Will the path be properly maintained?

Response: We know that the existing path between Cleland Drive and Ridgefield Road was not regularly maintained in the past and can understand the neighborhood's concern about maintenance going forward. The original section of the path was built with asphalt and in a manner that resulted in regular maintenance challenges. The Town intends to build the new

section with concrete instead of asphalt. Our landscape division will regularly patrol and maintain the path as they do all other Town owned trails.

Concern: People will walk off of the path and onto my property.

Response: It is our intent to design the project with a combination of fencing and landscaping that will make it impractical for anyone to leave the public right of way and access private properties.

Concern: The map of the area prepared by the consultant did a poor job of showing the actual impact.

Response: We agree. A new schematic plan has been prepared. As soon as we have an opportunity to review and approve the new plan we will post it to the project website.

ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS FROM LITTLE RIDGEFIELD NEIGHBORHOOD

Shift the Project to the West Side of Fordham Boulevard and Build a Path Adjacent to University Place

The residents suggested that the path would be more useful on the west side of Fordham.

Response: There are long term plans for a path to be built on the west side of Fordham Boulevard adjacent to University Place as a part of a larger integrated path system. There are currently two possible scenarios for development of a side path on the west side. First, if University Place redevelops, such a facility may become part of the project. Another possible option would be for the Town to secure NCDOT funding to add side paths throughout the Fordham Boulevard corridor. However, in the near term we believe that a path along the east side of the highway would provide the most impact since it would directly and indirectly connect large residential areas.

Direct Bicycle and Pedestrian Users into the Neighborhood

The residents suggested that users could be encouraged to use Ridgefield Road, Hickory Drive, and Walnut Street as a shared street. They were acknowledged that several issues would need to be resolved to make this work, including:

- Parking on Ridgefield blocking sight lines and mobility
- Markings and signs for pedestrians/bicyclists
- Possibly reduce speed limit on Hickory to 20 mph

Response: We will ask our consultant to evaluate this idea. In addition, staff have identified additional concerns including:

- Lack of sidewalks and bike facilities, especially near the intersection of neighborhood streets and Fordham Boulevard.
- Since the proposed route is longer we believe that many users will simply continue along the shoulder of Fordham Boulevard rather than take the longer route through the neighborhood (there is an existing worn path in the grass due to use from current users).

These concerns will be evaluated by our consultant.

NEXT STEPS

It is our intent to proceed with design of the path, but to modify our approach to address neighborhood concerns.

1. We intend to modify our design contract to address the concerns raised by the residents.
2. Develop options related to the safety concerns and explore the concept of routing users through the neighborhood. Hold a meeting before proceeding to 70% plans.
3. Reach 70% plans and hold a public meeting.