



PARKS AND RECREATION
Town of Chapel Hill
200 Plant Road
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
bwebster@townofchapelhill.org

phone (919) 968-2819 *cell* (919) 809-4721
fax (919) 932-2923
www.townofchapelhill.org

MEMORANDUM

FORDHAM BOULEVARD SIDEPATH PROJECT

QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY ADVISORY BOARD AND RESIDENTS OF THE LITTLE RIDGEFIELD NEIGHBORHOOD

On December 17, 2019, the Transportation and Connectivity Advisory Board (TCAB) asked staff to answer a number of questions related to the Fordham Boulevard Sidepath project and bring the responses to their January 28, 2020 meeting. These questions came from both residents and TCAB members. The staff made an oral presentation at the January 2020 meeting. This memorandum is a summary and further refinement of the responses presented at the meeting.

The Town's consultant prepared the following documents, which accompany this memorandum.

Kimley Horn Noise Monitoring Memo

Alternative 1 Clearing Plan for the proposed sidepath section between Ridgefield Road and Willow Drive

Alternative 2 Clearing Plan for the proposed sidepath section between Ridgefield Road and Willow Drive

Landscape Plan for the proposed sidepath section between Ridgefield Road and Willow Drive

TCAB and Resident Questions (from December 17, 2019):

1. Is it possible to measure noise adjacent to the project and along the property lines?

Staff Response: Please see the Kimley Horn Noise Monitoring Memo. Our consultant measured the existing noise on Fordham Boulevard at two locations for 24 hours, on January 16 and 17, 2020.

One monitor was located on the east side of Fordham Boulevard, halfway between Ridgefield Drive and Walnut Street. The monitor was placed at the eastern end of the landscape buffer at the property line. The other monitor was located in front of University Place, on the west side of Fordham Boulevard, the same distance from the edge of pavement as the meter on the east side of the highway.

The intent was to compare the current background noise conditions between the existing vegetated buffer (east side of Fordham Boulevard) and no buffer (west side of Fordham Boulevard). The Little Ridgefield side (east) showed a slightly higher ambient noise level, likely due to the meter being 5 feet higher than the meter on the west side of the roadway. Another possible reason is that there may have been more northbound traffic during the test period.

Our consultant reports that according to FHWA vegetation is only able to decrease traffic noise if it is dense enough, long enough, and tall enough that it cannot be seen through. The existing vegetative buffer is approximately 35 feet wide and in several locations it is possible to see the private fences along the right-of-way.

2. Is it possible to install a higher fence? Are there specific estimates of noise and pollution abatement for different fence types?

Staff Response: According to the Town's consultant, earth berms and solid mass walls (concrete) are the most effective methods to reduce noise pollution from highways. In this case there is not enough room to construct an earth berm. Concrete walls such as are found along interstate highways would be cost prohibitive. Our consultant provided information about Acoustifence, which is a noise absorptive treatment that can be put inside an attractive wood fence along the property lines. At this point in the design process we cannot recommend this particular product; more research would be needed before we can make any such recommendation. However, it is one possible product that might be installed to reduce noise.

It is the Town's current position that the Town would pay for the installation of a section of Acoustifence (or some other product) on the property of any adjoining neighbor who desires a section of fence to enhance the buffer.

We also believe that it is too soon in the design process to decide what height of the fence should be. If a decision is made to proceed with a sidepath along Fordham Boulevard we would work closely with our consultant to explore acoustical barriers and determine their ideal height. The Kimley-Horn Noise Monitoring memo indicates that the height of the fence has less of an impact in reducing noise than the materials used. It would be our goal to find a fence with an ideal combination of height and materials that can be installed within budget. If all neighbors agree, the fence would span the entire length of the project from Willow Drive to Ridgefield Drive.

3. Is it possible to maintain any of the landscape buffer during construction?

Staff Response: Please see the Construction Clearing and Landscape plans for the proposed sidepath section between Ridgefield Road and Willow Drive.

We believe that it is too soon in the design process to determine exactly what the clearing limits would be and what plantings would be used to replace some of the lost buffer. If a decision is made to proceed with a sidepath along Fordham Boulevard we would work closely with our consultant and the neighbors to develop plans that would minimize clearing and maximize landscaping after construction.

We have developed a plan sheet for clearing limits and a preliminary landscape plan. While these plans are not in a final state they are likely close enough to get a very good idea of what the clearing and replanting would be like.

These plan sheets suggest that for the majority of the length we would be able to maintain varying amounts of the existing landscape buffer along Fordham Boulevard. The current plans suggest that the 4-5 properties just north of Ridgefield would lose almost all of the existing buffer in order to construct the path. This area is currently a dense stand of bamboo.

4. Have other advisory boards reviewed the side path project?

Staff Response: The Parks and Recreation Department has provided assistance and resources to help during the design of this project. Because of this involvement the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission was provided information at one of its meetings. However, the Commission made no recommendations.

We expect that the TCAB will be the only advisory board to make formal recommendations related to this project because it is considered a transportation project.

5. Do you have estimated costs for any right-of-way (ROW) acquisition, replacement of the existing side path, and the potential sidewalk construction if the option is selected to route traffic onto the neighborhood streets?

Staff Response: We have the following cost estimates. These estimates are very preliminary and are not based on detailed design:

- Right-of-Way Acquisition: \$0. No anticipated right-of-way acquisition for Fordham sidepath or sidewalk along Hickory Drive.
- Construct a sidewalk along Hickory Drive from Ridgefield Road to Willow Drive: \$443,000. Should not require ROW acquisition. NCDOT would likely not allow this source of funding to be used to construct a sidewalk along a low-volume, low-speed road such as Hickory Drive.
- Upgrading the existing path between Cleland Drive and Ridgefield Drive: \$377,000.

6. Please explain how will the path would be designed around the existing ditch along Fordham Boulevard?

Staff Response: See the Landscape Plan for the proposed sidepath cross-sections between Ridgefield Road and Willow Drive.

The landscape plans show cross-sections for the different segments. The path is shown on the property side of the ditch in all locations. Generally the cross section shows: Fordham

Boulevard > grass shoulder > vegetation buffer (existing or proposed) > sidepath > buffer > fence/property. The width of the buffer between Fordham and the path is 40 – 42 feet in all locations.

7. Is there an estimate of usage based on facility type (sidepath, shared street, etc.)?

Staff Response: We spent a considerable amount of time researching this issue, but could not find a forecasting tool. Literature and experience both say that people will use multiuse paths when they are built. For example, when we initially proposed the Town's greenways trail system we were asked the same question. At that time we also looked and failed to find a forecasting tool.

8. Is there a feasible option to build the sidepath as part of the 15-501 "complete street" redevelopment that would make a better path and preserve the buffer?

Staff Response: NCDOT's new complete street policy states that they will pay for bike-pedestrian-transit facilities that are in an adopted plan along roadways if they have active highway improvement projects. This is applicable to Fordham Boulevard, which is currently an unfunded project. If Fordham Boulevard improvements are funded in some future round of state transportation prioritization, it is anticipated that NCDOT would construct the paths as part of any such project.

We have two concerns related to this potential approach. First, the Fordham Boulevard highway project is not currently funded. The Town has no control over if and when it would get funded. Funding could be years in the future or not at all.

Second, in our experience the Town is usually far more concerned about and responsive to landscape buffer and fence issues than NCDOT.

9. Are there materials available to make a shared street route clearer than "sharrows"?

Staff Response: If the shared street concept is selected as the preferred design option we would spend time and resources investigating the best combination of street marking and signage. We are not ready to make specific recommendations this early in the design process.

10. Is there a way to build the path closer to 15-501 using smaller machines in order to leave existing buffer?

Staff Response: It appears that the location of the ditch along Fordham Boulevard would prevent building the path closer to the highway. We anticipate leaving between 5.5 – 10 feet of vegetated buffer between the trail and the property lines. We also propose the installation of an acoustical damping fence.

Additional 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>