

New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee

Minutes of Meeting of September 12, 2013

[Present: Goebel, Fowler, Healy, Welch, Kent, Korest, Harrison, Greg Northcutt (Triangle Transit), Bill Houppermans (URS Consulting)]

- (1) Sandy Creek Park. Goebel described major progress in adding facilities to the park. Some 500 feet of split rail fence have been installed around the “meadow” (60 post holes) to deter drivers from ripping up the sod with ATVs. The fence is strong and looks great. The only negative aspect of our fence work is that our rented power auger (worth \$2000) was stolen by someone who broke into the locked storage area. Our old lawnmower was also stolen. Fortunately, the power washer was insured, so our cost was only \$200.

Work is almost half done on the wildlife observation deck—city inspection of the understructure will take place tomorrow. The disgusting litter observed last year in one part of the forest area was traced to a Duke fraternity. When Duke did not take action, Goebel contacted their national office. The young men quite rapidly called John with an offer to do whatever community service we might require!

The next step, besides finishing the observation deck, is to install handicap friendly picnic tables and a barbeque, as well as expanding the butterfly garden planting beds. The butterfly garden is flourishing and John has raised a large number of new nectar producing plants (from seed) that will be outplanted later this year or in the spring.

Goebel also has applied to Keep Durham Beautiful for a grant to make artistic use of a huge chain (part of the sewer plant) uncovered during our construction work. John is working with Vega Metals to turn it into a decorative sign for the park. Estimated cost is about \$1500.

We will celebrate whatever we have finished at a Fall Environmental Festival, to be held Saturday, October 19 from 9 am to 1 pm. In addition to dedicating facilities, we will have bird walks, tree identification, and exhibits on a number of the park’s natural values. Healy is putting together a poster exhibit on the old sewage plant (built 1927) and its repurposing as a park. **VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED, PARTICULARLY TO PUBLICIZE THE EVENT** to friends, mailing lists, organizations, etc.

- (2) Hollow Rock Park. Korest said there was a delay in project reviews under the federal program and we will not learn definitely about the potential \$200,000 urban trail grant until as late as January. She said that design work for the needed bridges would be done before this time so that contracts can be let as soon as the grant is made.
- (3) Old Chapel Hill Road Park. Korest noted the hard work of Brendan Moore in trail maintenance and vegetative management. Several hundred feet of very heavy boardwalk have been laid and tied down with cables, but (to Moore's frustration) recent flooding has still moved some of them. The damage has now been fixed.

Kent said that Patterson Place Apartments developer has now cut natural vegetation down to the edge of the park, despite our request that this be avoided by moving the development's trail connection to another part of their property. Kent also noted, and reported to authorities, substantial soil erosion that appear to come from land disturbance at the development, including soil washed into the park. Korest will check this out.

- (4) PSNC gas pipeline. Developer has told us that they have to do an open cut because of geological conditions. Kent did a mussel survey of the crossing area and found several mussel species, including the creeper (*Strophotus undulatus*), listed by the state as threatened. We are talking with company about doing the open cut with Best Management Practices, with close monitoring by us and by state/local authorities. Kent expressed concern about damage that might follow a rain event (even if dam/excavation is done when dry weather is expected) and asked about a contingency plan. Healy suggested that we film construction and post on YouTube, as we did for Turkey Farm Road bridge replacement.

I-40 widening. Kent said he has obtained some past environmental studies relevant to this project. He may do a mussel survey in the area (he has a shell collecting permit and an expert to identify species from their shells).

- (6) Environmental study for Durham-Chapel Hill Light Rail Transit. Bill Houppermans, of URS Consulting, gave an overview of work in progress. He passed out a set of maps (see attached PDF file) indicating the two alternative routes proposed for LRT across the New Hope Corridor—(1) directly across the corridor between 15-501 and Old Chapel Hill Road (yellow line) and (2) along or parallel to the south side of 15-501 (blue line). Actually the 15-501 alternative has two sub-alternatives, differing in how the tracks would cross Sandy Creek (blue line vs orange line). Houppermans said that TTA is not analyzing the alternative, suggested by some, that would route the LRT along heavily developed land along Old Chapel Hill Road, in part because of the large number of

driveway and roadway crossings that would result in too many impacts to homes and neighborhoods in terms of physical impacts, noise impacts (crossing gates and bells) and safety concerns given the proximity of the tracks and the frequency of potential conflicts. He observed that the Old Chapel Hill Road alignment also bypasses the Gateway station and Patterson Place Station, which are key station sites as of result of the station area planning exercise. Houppermans stated that this will be the subject of a “white paper” documenting the above.

Kent expressed disappointment that the Old Chapel Hill Road route was no longer being analyzed, citing its environmental advantages. Healy requested, as he had at previous meetings, that the assumption, accepted as a constraint in the TTA analysis, that NCDOT would add another lane to 15-501 be relaxed in the course of sensitivity analysis, particularly because the lane is not part of the long range transportation plan. He observed that it seemed wasteful to simultaneously expand highway capacity and build a rail system in the same corridor, and that this might be unlikely in a future world of scarce federal and state resources.

Northcutt said that TTA has tried to accommodate the position of important stakeholders (such as NCDOT) early in the process, since experience has shown that ignoring them leads to future surprises, particularly, large cost increases.

Healy observed that, while understanding that it was not part of the present analysis, adding a station at 15-501 and Garrett Rd. could prove advantageous from the standpoint of both passenger generation and major new land development, since the area within a half mile has large numbers of apartment dwellers as well as land that is either vacant or in low-value uses. Northcutt said that over the coming years, the planning process would be flexible if major changes occurred in the intentions of real estate owners. Healy said that trains do not have to stop at every station and hence adding a station does not necessarily mean added trip time. Houppermans said that there was precedent for “skip-stop” type operations. Houppermans also pointed out that NCDOT stated that there is potential for a future grade separated interchange at Garrett Road which would influence a station location and feasibility. Houppermans said that the target is to have a single, NEPA-compliant, Locally Preferred Alternative selected 18 months from now. There would then be agency comments and a final EIS and approved alternative would be designated within another 6 months. Houppermans iterated that it is important that the stakeholders agree on the alternatives because it will not be possible to add additional alternatives later on given the time constraints of the Federal EIS process.

After hearing the presentation by TTA/URS the members of the New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee agreed that the alternatives to be studied by TTA reflect those that the Committee had agreed upon in its previous discussion and written comments.

