

New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee—Minutes of Meeting of April 14, 2011

[Present: Edeburn, Fowler, Goebel, Healy, Jacobs, Kent, Waldroup, Welch, Harrison, Youngblood, Brendan Moore (Durham County Open Space), Bo Howes (Triangle Land Conservancy). Hannah Berg (Durham City-County Planning), Wib Gulley (Triangle Transit Authority), Greg Northcutt (Triangle Transit Authority), Jeff Weisner (URS Consulting), Bo Glenn]

- (1) Hollow Rock Park. Healy shared the following email from Rich Shaw, who could not attend in person:

Staff from the four local governments have been meeting to discuss the steps needed to implement the Hollow Rock Master Plan (adopted 2010). Although no funds are anticipated to develop/operate the park over the next 2-3 years, work on the following prerequisite activities continues: land stewardship, land transfers (among partners), further archaeological survey work, trail development (including bridge construction), and the proposed relocation of the former Hollow Rock Store. In addition, limited public use of the future park has been allowed (with advance approval) such as Audubon walks and the annual Forest View Elementary "Week at the Creek." Staff met with NCDOT last week to review the process for closing a portion of Pickett Road. Durham City/County expected to support potential closure later this month. Key decision points to be presented to elected officials in late 2011.

Healy said he has been attending meetings of CH Mineral Club and made Howard Lineberger (trained as a geologist) a member. Howard is now in email touch with them re possible receipt of donations of local mineral collections, books, posters, and other materials that can be used in geology programs at Hollow Rock and other parks and related school programs.

- (2) Triangle Transit Authority. Wib Gulley gave a history of the ups and downs of transit proposals in the Triangle over the last decade or more. The latest proposal is based on the 2008 report of the Special Transit Advisory Committee (Bo Glenn was a Durham member) and adoption of a regional transportation plan by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (which represents local governments). Various corridors were subjected to ridership potential analysis. For more information, see <http://www.ourtransitfuture.com/>. After many public hearings, a "locally preferred alternative" will soon be presented to local governments for consideration. A link to a map showing various routes may be found at <http://www.dchcmo.org/dmdocuments/exhibitvi2.pdf>

A law passed in 2009 allows Triangle counties to authorize a referendum to levy a half-cent general sales tax for implementation of the plan. The counties may also direct \$7 of the vehicle registration fee now collected by the state to transit.

Healy said that he had attended the public input session in Durham and had noted that the proposed Durham to Chapel Hill corridor appeared to present significant New Hope issues, particularly but not limited to the crossing of the main stem of the creek between 15-501 and Old Chapel Hill Rd. Gulley said there would be ample opportunity for analyzing and adjusting the corridor during the EIS phase of the project. Healy said that the NHCCAC had tried over the last 18 years to pull density toward 15-501 and Old Chapel Hill Road in anticipation of future transit of some sort along or near those arteries. He expressed an interest in seeing whether the trip generation modeling included recent construction and reflected the specific population(s) most likely to use transit, rather than personal automobiles, as well as assumptions about future growth in various parts of the New Hope Corridor (which may or may not be consistent with the New Hope plan). Healy expressed concern over whether decisions that may have already been made about the location of stations would preclude less-damaging crossings of the New Hope.

Kent expressed considerable concern over the possible crossing of very wide wetland areas in any alignment other than the existing ones, such as US 15-501. He noted that this area of the New Hope Creek Corridor is particularly special in that it is a hardwood bottomland, one of the best remaining in the NC Piedmont. Further, this area of the New Hope Creek floodplain is crucial as a link in a major regional amenity, the New Hope Creek Wildlife and Open Space Corridor, and in Durham County this corridor connects two large, existing, public/semi-public, regional class, open space investments: the Jordan Lake Gamelands (to the south) and the Duke Forest lands (to the north).

Kent said that he is a regular transit/bike user, very supportive of transit improvement, but also very much opposed to placing transit where it destroys valuable community resources. "What we need are proposals that will compliment, rather than compromise the New Hope Creek Wildlife and Open Space Corridor. Also, for any new uses, such as a transit route, that would cross the New Hope Creek Wildlife and Open Space Corridor, we need to stick to the transportation corridors which cross the Creek already."

Kent said that his understanding was that the south side of the new 15-501 bridge has been specially designed to accommodate an adjoining bridge for transit (as close as 13 feet away). He also said that the new 15-501 bridge has been designed (elevated and lengthened) to allow wildlife, open space corridor passage underneath and that similar wildlife/open space accommodation would be necessary in any transit crossing of the NH corridor. Gulley said that part of the proposed NH crossing would indeed be elevated. Kent said that on each approach (NE and SW) to the new

15-501 bridge deck there is a long causeway (fill structure) to attain elevation and that, if a transit bridge were placed adjacent to the 15-501 bridge, rather than further away, money could be saved in that a transit bridge, for consistency with the 15-501 bridge, would need only have an elevated structure (as opposed to a less expensive causeway/fill structure) only enough (length and height) to match the dimensions of the opening beneath new highway bridge, an opening 10 feet vertical and 300 feet horizontal.

Of note: During the discussion of this agenda item, a plan map ("Exhibit VI-II, Initial Rail & Busway Middle Alignments") was shown and discussed (<http://www.dchcmpo.org/dmdocuments/exhibitvi2.pdf>).

It should be noted that the "Corridor A" alignment referred to during the discussion ("SSGW1 Phase 1 Corridor A," on the Exhibit VI-II map legend) was given favor (over the alignment on Exhibit VI-II shown, in red, as the "Preferred DMU/LRT/Busway" alignment) only because "SSGW1 Phase 1 Corridor A" is closer to 15-501 than the "Preferred DMU/LRT/Busway" alignment.

Subsequent review of transit planning documents (US 15-501, MIS, Phase 1 Report) shows that the "Corridor A" alignment is not an alignment which is immediately adjacent to 15-501. What is shown in the planning documents as such is an "Alignment B" (AKA "Corridor B"), described (MIS Phase 1, CHAPTER VII) as "within the right-of-way of US 15-501." And because "Corridor B" is adjacent to 15-501, in the area of the crossing of the New Hope Corridor, it would be favored over "Corridor A." Less fragmentation of the New Hope Creek Wildlife and Open Space Corridor would result if "Corridor B," rather than "Corridor A," were used. (For a map of Corridors A and B, see the attached pdf file: "[LRT-RRT2.dwg Group Layer.pdf](#)" entitled: "Exhibit 9, US 15-501 MIS/EIS, Initial LRT/RRT Alts.")

Youngblood said there is much more field data needed in this part of the corridor. Healy agreed and asked that both TTA and the city share with the NHCCAC the most detailed possible maps, including maps showing seasonally wet areas and elevational changes. Gulley said that maps will be posted on the TTA website.

In view of limited time, Healy asked that a separate meeting be scheduled between TTA and NHCCAC to discuss these issues over much better maps. He also asked that a TTA representative attend future NHCCAC meetings. Gulley said that TTA has only 6 staff and cannot afford to send a representative to each meeting. [In later discussion, Healy said he understood that sending someone to every, or at least most, meetings—as DOST, City Planning, County trails do—could be a burden. He suggested that both NHCCAC and TTA take special care to alert one another as to actions/meeting that might affect one another, much as we now do with Durham

Bike/Ped Committee.] Healy will add Wib Gulley and Greg Northcutt to our mailing list for meeting announcements and minutes.

- (3) Trails. Moore said Durham trails are generally in good shape but he can always use volunteer help. He noted that neighbors on Durham side of Hollow Rock are building destructive short cuts at some places on the flagged trail. He said the big obstacle to trail building in that area is need for four bridges, one of them of significant size.
- (4) Sandy Creek Park. Healy noted that the March 19 Creek Week event was a great success and thanked all who had worked so hard to make it possible. Goebel said there are large piles of much and compost to be moved, and sought volunteers. Lineberger has 5 DA students who need a project and he will put them to work doing the ecozone delineation [Healy note—how about also noting major trees or other plants where markers should be placed, as well as locations and quantities of invasive species]. Goebel said \$5000 state Adopt-a-Trail grant has been applied for. He said cost estimate for redecking large bridge is \$69,000 though volunteer labor could reduce it significantly. Kent said he would look into demolition technologies, one of the prime cost/environmental concerns in removing the old bridge decking. Healy, Goebel, Youngblood will write Audubon Society-Toyota grant application (probably for \$25,000) due May 31. Kent and Howes will coordinate with Audubon Society, which has already indicated support of the application, but is concerned about fiscal management. Healy inquired whether monies could be contracted to City of Durham, which could then manage payment of suppliers, etc. Healy and Kent will listen to Audubon/Toyota podcast and other information as to what the grant application will entail. Healy is exploring various clinics/organizations that serve the handicapped and will try to get letters of support, given that bridge will enable people with disabilities to see a larger portion of the park, including the stream. Goebel will do the same with nearby neighborhoods. NH Audubon Board meets last week of month, so final proposal could be sent to them for final approval before May 31 deadline.
- (5) Due to the pressure of time, we did not have a chance to discuss Bill Olive's proposal "to post and maintain basic information" related to water quality in New Hope Creek, including number of fish, amount of water flow, scientists who have worked with water in the NH, relation to deer population, etc. Healy will follow up on this with John Kent and Judd Edeburn, who have long experience in this area.

Next meeting, Thursday, May 12, 5 pm at the Clubhouse of the Garrett Farms development.