

New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee

Minutes of Meeting of January 12, 2012

(Present: Edeburn, Fowler, Healy, Welch, Kent, Jacobs, Bo Howes, Debbie McCarthy, Jane Korest, Brendan Moore, Helen Youngblood, Brad Pittman, Helen Fischer, Stan Bukowski, Mike Waldroup. From TTA/URS Consultants: Nathan Ellis, Wib Gulley, Greg Northcutt, Bill Houppermans, Juanita Shearer-Swink, Jeff Weisner)

- (1) **Sandy Creek Park.** Healy said that, thanks to yeoman work during November and December by John Goebel and many volunteers, the bridge at Sandy Creek Park has been completely re-decked for pedestrian use, at a cost of only \$3000 for materials. There is \$2000 left in the park grant, which will be used to build two bird “hides”. Healy has obtained information on what we must do to have the bridge named in honor of Ken Coulter. The decision is made by a committee chaired by director of Parks and Recreation, which accepts applications only twice a year, next in April. Healy will prepare necessary documentation and we can discuss further and hopefully vote on a resolution at our next meeting.

Healy said he had gone to a meeting January 11 to discuss city-wide “Creek Week” which will take place Saturday, March 17 through Saturday, March 24. Stream cleanups will be March 17. Healy suggested that the NHCCAC clean up Sandy Creek (the park is in good shape, but there should be work to be done on east side of Garrett Rd.) and encourage neighborhood groups to do clean-ups at Leigh Farm and Hollow Rock. He suggested that we repeat our Bird and Butterfly Festival on March 24, which would include formal opening of the bridge and, if ready, the bird hides. (Naming for Ken Coulter could be done at a Fall event.)

- (2) **TTA Proposed Light Rail Transit Route.** Wib Gulley introduced TTA staff and staff from their consultants, URS. The last public hearing was held yesterday and TTA will now turn to preliminary engineering and environmental impact analysis, which will start in about one year from now and will take two to three years to complete. Weisner said that comments were most welcome and TTA is serious about minimizing environmental impacts to the greatest extent possible. He said the project team includes engineers and environmental analysts.

Kent asked for TTA comments on New Hope Advisory Committee’s suggested alternate route, which would substantially follow 15-501. Weisner said that in talking with NCDOT about track paralleling another part of 15-501, the agency wanted a reservation for future lane widening—not just a lane width but also expanding the shoulders to

NCDOT's current standard of 8 ft. TTA thought an additional 7-10 ft. setback is also needed. He said that the 1994 "15-501 Corridor Transportation Master Plan" provided for an upgrade of the rest of 15-501 that would expand the median, add a "slip on-off" ramp lane, and relocate the existing frontage road. But he said that NCDOT might be willing to negotiate on the addition of the slip ramp. Kent said the bridge design involved specific provision of a "wing wall" on the south side that would integrate transit into the bridge design.

Kent said there is a transit reservation on county land along 15-501 on the south side of the bridge. Korest passed out a copy of the triangular area location of the reservation. . Kent said that when the new bridge was built there were improvements to the 15-501/Garrett Rd. intersection and that there was room for a future "urban interchange."

Youngblood asked Houppermans what area would be needed for aerial structures [to support LRT track]. He replied that the aerial guideway is 30 ft. wide. For at-grade sections, this would increase according to the width associated with cut or fill slopes on both sides. He said that a 40 ft. right of way was used in Miami for their 30 foot wide structure to accommodate for maintenance activities on the sides of the structure. . Because this is a wetland area, he said, future maintenance would have to be done from the top down—and even construction of the columns would have to be done from the top.

Kent observed that the "along the bridge" route could accommodate curvatures used elsewhere in the LPA proposal. It was replied that length of curves was lower in the vicinity of stations and that it "would be unwise to have curves that slow train service" in areas away from the stations. Houppermans said there was a need to minimize the number of properties that would lose part of their land to the LRT system, stating that owners of such land tend to demand that the whole parcel be purchased. Gulley said there would be problems if one would have to take out part of the Wellington Apartments, which are occupied by low income residents.

Kent then offered some ideas on minimizing impacts to Sandy Creek [on the east side of Garrett Rd.] Kent proposed an alignment that would cross the now vacant parcel on the southwest quadrant of Garrett Road and the Boulevard; continue eastward either south or north of the businesses along the service road, and then continue along 15-501 crossing Sandy Creek adjacent to the MLK off ramp. Houppermans said it was possible to do an aerial crossing of MLK Parkway.

Kent said that the station at Patterson Place should not be so close to the unbuildable land by the creek. He said that if the idea is to maximize development around stations, a location farther south would be desirable.

Houppermans said that in this case the selection of the Locally Preferred Alternative [by February] would be followed by a scoping process for the Environmental Impact Statement and preparation of a full fledged EIS. TTA intends to have 4 scoping meetings in March, then a 45 day comment period. The "New Starts" funding application will be submitted to the Federal Transit Administration in August. McCarthy asked to see stations from Gateway and beyond. The map was consulted. Kent asked if the 18 acre train maintenance facility, in the New Hope Corridor in the first TTA map had been dropped. Gulley replied that it is still one of 4 sites under study.

Fowler asked if and when a second proposed corridor [along 15-501] would appear on maps, as had been done around Meadowmont. Gulley said that the proposal had been amended to change the original line to a broad swath.

Houppermans said that TTA would respond to NHCCAC comments on the route after the end of the scoping process. He said TTA wanted NHCCAC support for what they are doing. Korest said that it has been helpful in the Meadowmont area to have two mapped alternatives from the start. Weisner said that alternatives would have to be "screened for prudence" before being mapped. Houppermans said he would "guarantee your proposed alignment is worthy of consideration."

Kent noted that the Fish and Wildlife Service has accepted the New Hope Bottomlands as important natural areas. Korest noted that both state and county funds were used for the Githens Park trail, giving the government a special interests/standing in the EIS process. She said that either corridor being considered will cross land acquired by local government as open space. Weisner said that per Sec. 4F this would be considered in the EIS unless the impacts were declared "de minimis". Shearer-Swink said that local governments would have a role in the scoping process. Kent contended that a Sec. 404 determination would be required and Weisner agreed. He said that TTA was happy that the State Natural Heritage Program had commented in detail and offered a scientific viewpoint.

Gulley thanked the NHCCAC for this meeting and said that this would be an “ongoing conversation.”