

02-26-2020 Town Council Meeting

Responses to Council Questions

ITEM #10: Discuss Options for the Fordham Boulevard Sidepath Project

Council Question:

One of the options I have heard discussed is the possibility of making Ridgefield egress only - what is the current thinking on that?

Staff Response:

We believe that the idea has a good deal of merit and could alleviate some of the safety concerns raised by the neighbors. If the Council decides to pursue the option of building the sidepath within the Fordham Boulevard right of way we will ask our design consultant to evaluate the idea. We would then approach the neighborhood to solicit input. It could then be incorporated into the design of the final project.

Council Question:

For residents that want it, what would the fence material be made of? How tall would it be?

Staff response:

It's too soon in the design process to determine the choice of materials and fence height. We have looked at one product that has an attractive treated wood exterior with a sound absorbing layer sandwiched in between the wood panels. Materials would be based on neighborhood preferences, cost, effectiveness, and further acoustical studies. Further study is needed but our best guess at this time would be a fence height of 6 to 8 feet.

Council Question:

If we move forward with the sidepath, once started, about how long would the project take from start to finish?

Staff response:

We would expect to complete design by late fall 2020. It's difficult to schedule NCDOT review time into the overall schedule, but based on past project experience we believe that a reasonable assumption would be to secure NCDOT approvals in early 2021. We could then bid the project in spring 2021 with a construction start sometime in the summer of 2021. Construction would likely take 9-10 months, depending on weather.

Council Question:

In a scenario in which a sidepath is not constructed along Fordham Blvd, would any of that vegetation need to be cleared in the short-term to avoid any threats to public safety, given how wildly some of the vegetation is growing?

Staff Response:

We believe that it would not be necessary to make any major changes to the current condition of the landscape buffer. However, we can assess the current situation and consider if any incidental landscape maintenance is required to enhance safety without impacting the buffer in a major way.

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Council Question:

Would 170 feet of 10-foot-wide concrete multiuse path along Ridgefield Road, under Option 3 involve any acquisition of homeowners' property and/or vegetation clearance?

Staff Response:

Yes, it will require the acquisition of homeowners' property; however, we have not progressed the design to the point where we can say exactly what amount of right of way would be required or what the landscape loss would be.

Council Question:

If federal funding for this project is lost, could that affect any other projects in Chapel Hill that are seeking federal funding?

Staff Response:

Based on previous experience we believe that NCDOT would likely view the sidepath as a standalone project and would not extend any other funding ban beyond that project.

Council Question:

What would be the timelines associated with the options?

Staff Response:

If the Council decides to pursue the sidepath option we would expect to complete design by late fall 2020. It's difficult to schedule NCDOT review time into the overall schedule, but based on past project experience we believe that a reasonable assumption would be to secure NCDOT approvals in early 2021. We could then bid the project in spring 2021 with a construction start sometime in the summer of 2021. Construction would likely take 9-10 months, depending on weather.

If the Council decides to select the option to route pedestrians and bicycles through the neighborhood we would expect to take several months to present the proposal to NCDOT, then negotiate and execute a new Municipal Agreement, if NCDOT agrees to the new plan. Construction would likely take less time. The end result, assuming a successful negotiation with NCDOT, would likely be about the same with all options.

Council Question:

Would 170 feet of 10-foot-wide concrete multi-use path along Ridgefield Road and and 1,700 feet of

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sidewalk on one side of Hickory Drive, under Option 4 involve any acquisition of homeowners' property and/or vegetation clearance?

Staff Response:

We believe that some additional right of way would be needed for the 170 foot long portion along Ridgefield, but that the Hickory sidewalk could be built within the existing right of way. We believe that some vegetation would be lost along both sections. We would have to advance the design in order to determine the extent of vegetative impact.

Council Question:

What additional traffic calming measures that are referenced on p. 163 of the packet are being considered, besides the decreased radii of the corners and raised/colorful crosswalks?

Staff Response:

We are also considering ideas related to limiting Ridgefield Road and/or Walnut Drive to egress only onto Fordham Boulevard. In addition, we are looking at ways to slow and limit cut-through traffic on the internal street system by the use of traffic diverting devices and changing turn radii.

Council Question:

Is there any sense of what those recorded sound levels referred to on p. 189 of the packet might look like with a noise abatement device such as an acousti-fence or without any landscape buffer-and-no-fence?

Staff Response:

We are confident that some reduction in noise levels is possible and probable. However, we are too early in the design process to arrive at any estimates based on actual design. If the Council decides to move forward with the sidepath option we would perform additional acoustical studies during the summer when foliage is full. We would also adjust sound meters to remove height variables. We would use this information to assist with any fence design and height determinations.

Council Question:

Is there an example in another part of town where the vegetation between a highly trafficked road and adjacent residences has a notable noise mitigation effect?

Staff Response:

Every buffer is different based on the depth of the buffer, elevation and topography issues, size of trees, and other factors. At this time, we are not aware of any specific buffer situation that we can use as a model. However, we could use other situations to help inform our design if we can find an example that would help improve the design.