

Staff Memorandum

Council Meeting – 3/4/2020

PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON PREFERRED OPTION FOR THE FORDHAM BOULEVARD SIDEPATH PROJECT Prepared by Chapel Hill Planning and Parks & Recreation Departments

Background:

Staff presented information about three proposed design alternatives for the Fordham Boulevard Sidepath Project at the [February 26, 2020 Town Council meeting](#). Staff also discussed the primary neighborhood concerns about the Sidepath project and how they have been addressed. Members of the public voiced both concerns and support for the project.

Public input at the February 26, 2020 Council meeting:

Resident 1:

- Shared streets are great models and we should have more of them
- Do not remove healthy tree buffer
- Town needs connectivity, efficient use of local and federal funds, efficient automobile traffic, and safety
- Build sidepath as part of a NCDOT Complete Street project

Resident 2:

- Sidepath is a vital connection in the Mobility and Connectivity Plan
- This is a strategically timed, responsibly funded project using mostly federal funds
- Six of seven TCAB members believe sidepath could and should be built with minimal disruption to neighbors

Resident 3:

- Path between Cleland and Ridgefield is in very poor shape
- The supposed dangers at the intersections already exist
- Path on west side of Fordham is useless because crossing the highway is too difficult and inconvenient
- Traffic will be reduced south to Glen Lennox by providing convenient facilities for other transportation modes

Resident 4:

- Intersections are conflict points regardless of which option is chosen
- Shared street option has six intersections and twelve driveways
- Town's data suggests that there is no speeding problem
- No data suggests that it will be louder with the Sidepath
- The shared street will likely not be paid for by NCDOT and the Town will likely have to repay funds already spent

Resident 5:

- Biking in the area is not safe, but the Sidepath will help fix that
- Cyclists will get 'doored' on the shared street

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- The Sidepath will induce demand from cyclists and pedestrians, which will help climate change
- People already walk on the side of Fordham despite the lack of facilities; this is unsafe

Council members asked staff to provide additional information at the March 4, 2020 Town Council meeting. Those requests and responses are below:

Council Request: Please discuss plans for continued public engagement, particularly with the residents of the Little Ridgefield neighborhood, if the Fordham Sidepath project moves forward.

Staff Response: The Town will continue to work with all interested parties, including adjacent neighbors, if the Fordham Boulevard Sidepath project proceeds as originally proposed. It would be our intent to use the existing project email distribution list and the [project webpage](#) to keep in close contact with everyone involved with the project. We will share drawings at the 70% and 90% stages and ask for comments and suggestions. These plans will include detailed information on proposed traffic calming concepts, landscaping solutions, tree removal information, and fence details.

In this case, we believe that the landscape plans will be one of the essential parts of this project going forward. We're committed to working with adjacent neighbors and other stakeholders to arrive at the best balance of landscape planting to achieve visual buffering, safety for users, habitat for native wildlife, and ease of maintenance. We will also work closely with the neighbors, NCDOT, Town planners, and our design team to arrive at a fence solution that would reduce impact from noise and visual pollution from Fordham Boulevard.

Council Request: Please provide information related to buffer removal and tree protection once the Fordham Sidepath project goes to construction.

Staff Response: The first step is to have the Town arborist visit the site and assess the condition of the existing vegetation, looking specifically for tree health among the cypress trees.

As with all Town construction projects, staff would ensure that there is a provision in the construction contract that the contractor will mark the clearing limits, walk the project corridor with the Town arborist, install tree protection fencing, and adjust the clearing limits based on that meeting.

Council Request: Please look into the six-foot fence height limit on private property.

Staff Response: As noted in the presentation on February 26, 2020, the Town will offer to build fences along the property lines of Hickory Drive for residents who request them. Staff will conduct a follow-up noise analysis in the summer of 2020 to gather additional data when the foliage is full. If this analysis indicates that the fences should be higher than six feet to effectively reduce the noise (and light) from Fordham Boulevard, then the LUMO would need to be amended to allow them. The Town Attorney noted we will need to ensure that the amended language be applicable only to this and other projects with similar circumstances.

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Council Request: How many homes are in the neighborhood?

Staff Response: Based on Google Maps, it appears that there are 64 parcels that border Ridgefield Road, Hickory Drive, and Walnut Street.

Overview of Options:

There are currently three design alternatives for the segment of the project between Ridgefield Road and Willow Drive:

<u>Alternative</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Pros</u>	<u>Cons</u>
Option 1/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10' multiuse path along Fordham Blvd.• Entirely within NCDOT right-of-way• Exact alignment of path will depend on safety mechanisms incorporated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most direct route for users• NCDOT-approved scope• ADA compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some loss of trees/vegetation• Some loss of visual buffer• Potential conflict with turning vehicles
Option 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Shared street' through neighborhood• 10' multiuse path along Ridgefield Road• No sidewalk on Hickory Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More cost effective than other options• Maintains vegetative buffer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pedestrians and bicyclists in the street• NCDOT funding not guaranteed• Not most direct route• Not ADA compliant
Option 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Shared street' through neighborhood• 10' multiuse path along Ridgefield Road• Sidewalk on one side of Hickory Drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pedestrians have dedicated facility• Maintains vegetative buffer• ADA compliant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No dedicated bicycle facility• NCDOT funding not guaranteed• Not most direct route

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that Council adopt Resolution A, Authorizing the Town Manager to proceed with the design of the Fordham Boulevard Sidepath Project within the NCDOT right-of-way from Ridgefield Road to Willow Drive.

Staff believes that the Fordham Boulevard Sidepath as originally proposed will improve non-motorized connectivity and increase mobility for bicyclists and pedestrians in the area. Additionally, separated and safe off-road facilities encourage people to use alternative transportation, especially when they are part of a larger, connected network. There are currently people walking along Fordham Boulevard in this area, and the Sidepath will provide a safer facility. Finally, the Town has a goal of increasing the percentage of residents who walk, bike,

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and take transit to 35% by 2025. The provision of safe and connected facilities for walking and biking will help achieve that goal.

Next Steps:

If Council authorizes staff to proceed with the Sidepath along Fordham Boulevard, staff will continue to work with the consultant to advance the sidepath design with the goals of maximizing safety for path users, minimizing vegetative loss, and maximizing noise abatement.

If the Council authorizes the shared street concept, staff will engage with NCDOT about changing the scope of the project and determine what impact on funding that change will have.