

Staff Memorandum

Business Meeting – 11/7/2018

Overview: The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) is seeking a Council resolution in support of a bike-pedestrian improvement project at the W. Franklin St./E. Main St./Merritt Mill Rd./Brewer Ln. intersection. NCDOT requires the resolution and associated feedback because the total cost of the project is estimated to be in excess of \$250,000. Town staff and Council representatives to the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC MPO) have been working with staff from NCDOT and the Town of Carrboro to finalize design for the project, and are satisfied that the final design meets the Town's requirements for this location and goals for a safer multimodal system.

Recommendation: That the Council adopt the attached resolution in support of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) improvement project at the W. Franklin St./E. Main St./Merritt Mill Rd./Brewer Ln. intersection.

Background: The intersection improvement project was originally submitted by the Towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro to the NCDOT SPOT 2.0 prioritization process in 2011. It was funded as a highway project in the 2016-2025 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and scheduled for construction in FY19. This project was originally envisioned as a roundabout to improve capacity and reduce congestion at the intersection, while improving safety for bicycles and pedestrians at the same time. After much analysis and discussion with both Towns' staffs and Council DCHC MPO representatives, NCDOT determined that the impacts to adjacent properties, including business relocations, and the associated costs were too significant to justify the minimal traffic improvements that would result from the project. As a result, NCDOT reclassified the highway improvements as a bicycle and pedestrian safety project with significantly fewer impacts to adjacent properties. NCDOT is funding and managing the project in its entirety.

The improvements proposed for the intersection support the Town's goals for safe and convenient multimodal roadways. The pedestrian improvements include continuous sidewalks around the intersection, high visibility crosswalks, and pedestrian signals at all crossings. Bicycle improvements primarily consist of bike loop detectors at all intersection approaches, and NCDOT is aware of both towns' interest in exploring the possibility of road diets on W. Franklin St. and E. Main St. and has ensured that the intersection design will not prohibit those modifications in the future, if desired. Vehicular and overall safety improvements at the intersection include a (future planted) median on W. Franklin between Merritt Mill Rd. and Graham St., improved directional/wayfinding signage (i.e. Downtown Chapel Hill →), and minor lane reconfigurations to improve traffic flow.

Fiscal Impact: The Town has no fiscal responsibility for this project; NCDOT is funding and managing it in its entirety. The project is estimated to cost approximately \$350,000.

Staff Analysis: As mentioned above, this project originated as an intersection project aimed at improving traffic flow and safety. The existing condition data collected by the consultant shows poor level of service (LOS) for several of the intersection approaches in both the AM and the PM peak hours. In addition, this intersection is considered to be difficult to navigate for vehicles, due to the elongated design and five-legged approach. Many consider it to be unsafe for pedestrians because of the lack of sidewalk in some locations and the absence of marked crosswalks and pedestrian signals at several crossings. There are no existing bicycle facilities.

Staff and the Council DCHC MPO representatives have been working with NCDOT and their consultant throughout the whole design and alternatives analysis process for this project. Staff did not push for bike lanes or other bicycle improvements through the intersection at

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this point because there are currently no connecting facilities on any of the approaching roadways. Additional bike improvements will be sought if and when the road diets on W. Franklin St. and E. Main St. are pursued in the future.

In sum, staff is satisfied that the project as proposed will improve bike-ped safety and traffic flow at the intersection without major impacts to the adjacent properties.

Next Steps: NCDOT expects to bid the project this fall, begin construction in spring 2019, and conclude construction before the students return in August.