

Connected Roads Plan Meeting Q&A Feb 1, 2023

Questions Addressed by Town of Chapel Hill and Stantec during Feb 1 Meeting

- What teamwork with Town departments do you have?

We have consulted and continue to consult with Fire, Transit, Parks and Recreation, Planning, Police, and the Town Manager's office. These departments also answer questions from the consultants to ensure that town-specific details are included in every step of the project.

- Why do developers have more of a say in need for connectivity?

As the Town looks to avoid spending on new roads through existing communities, it is often developers that are building additional roads and connections during construction. In many cases, initial development plans do not have high levels of connectivity. Therefore, we need to set out clear townwide expectations for connectivity and work with developers throughout the approval process to ensure the Town's expectations are met.

- How does the town think about the connection that currently exists from timber hollow apartments to old forest creek for pedestrians via a natural pathway but makes no sense for vehicles for either side due to safety issues like no sidewalks.

The Town is looking at all possible connections, but there will be a process using consistent criteria designed by the consultants to ensure that negatives do not outweigh benefits. The design of the connection, including safety features like sidewalks, is an example of an important factor in these criteria-based decisions.

- I'm concerned about changes that result in more car traffic going through neighborhoods with no infrastructure (sidewalks, ped crossings, lighting) to handle additional traffic (endangering kids who walk to school, quiet nature of neighborhood etc).

The Town will not seek to add connections without holistically looking at the trade-offs, including additional traffic volumes over time and the capacity of neighborhood roads. However, we understand that if there is a neighborhood that is currently one-way in, one-way out, all traffic flows to that connection, even as density increases, and we are trying to prevent that moving forward.

- Town staff have said over the years that when density occurs, the traffic goes to the major arteries. Why should neighborhood streets without sidewalks absorb more traffic and put pedestrians at risk?

The Town is looking for a balance of both. Our large arterial streets are our deadliest streets. We're not looking to replace trips from folks coming in and out of town on those major arterials. Instead, there are many local trips, using all modes, that town residents can make to get from one place to another that we want to evaluate. Moving forward, we want to assess what the best route for these trips is as density intensifies.

- I am also confused why the planning for the new development going in on Estes (Aura) did not include tackling the connectivity issues as part of the new development planning process - why is this happening after that was all approved?

The Aura development is an example of where Town staff has encouraged connectivity in line with existing plans - the Central West Plan designated out what should happen in that area and so we had a street pattern to refer to when we had Aura connect to the 710 development and Somerset. Aura residents will then not only come off MLK and Estes but also Somerset. This also supported measures to improve the Somerset intersection which has been a stated concern for that neighborhood. Having a pre-existing pattern to point to through the Central West Plan made this process work and we want to have that across town.

- How does the Town work around tree conflicts?

These are the types of natural features that we would want to account for in the planning-level analysis, especially as we look towards required tree buffers for developments. These are issues that we want to address holistically now rather than when the developer comes with a full site plan.

- Who are the identified stakeholders for this plan, and does it include residents that live in these neighborhoods that are being targeted? How are you proactively notifying and engaging with residents of neighborhoods whose roads are in the Points of Interest map?

We have had focus groups with identified stakeholders including one dedicated to emergency and other town services to get their takes on connectivity regarding transit, fire, emergency services, police, solid waste, and public works. We had one for bike and pedestrian advocates, including low vision folks, and then are planning to have one with developers and one with Town Council. We have also had public meetings open to residents and tried to push those as much as possible on Town platforms. The initial focus areas consist of a large population of residents. Because specific roads within those initial focus areas have not been identified, we have not yet sought out folks on specific roads yet using localized listservs and Nextdoor groups, for example. Once this process moves to that stage, we will use these tools and more to engage with neighbors.

- Where has the drive - pun intended for this plan to be vehicle centric? Who were you asking?

We have to look at healthy street connections. The bicycle and pedestrian connections in and between neighborhoods are generally uncontroversial in Chapel Hill. The questions come more often on a development-by-development basis when vehicle connectivity come into play, and we want to make holistic decisions based off of planning principles.

- Why is it that you are recommending a rational planning approach to this connectivity project?

The Town seeks to start from accepted and tested best practices of increasing connectivity, but that doesn't mean that the Town foregoes the specific contexts of Chapel Hill and Chapel Hill neighborhoods.

- Is there a limit on how much growth is acceptable?

This is part of larger discussions happening in Chapel Hill. We want to, through this Connected Roads project, proactively plan for accommodating the growth that we know is happening.

- What commitment does Town Management have in Planning staff to administer this project?

We have buy-in from Town Council. This is a major reason why we have been holding focus groups recently so that we can address all their questions as they will need to be a part of this moving forward.

Remaining Questions Not Addressed During Feb 1 Meeting:

- How do dedicated bike lanes and sidewalks enter into the plans

The final plan will include road cross-sections that take pedestrians and cyclists into account. All roads will include sidewalks, and bike lanes will be recommended where appropriate. In addition, some proposed connections may end up as bike-ped connections if the evaluation process deems that the best outcome.

- Is the emergency access cut-through between Wellington and Huntingdon on the list of potential connection points under consideration for car access. Our HOA President has told us that it is NOT but based on today's conversation it sounds like everything is under consideration. Can you clarify?

The plan is concentrating on the focus areas identified in the [Future Land Use Map](#). The Huntington/Wellington emergency access is not within a focus area, and is not in, or adjacent to, a likely redevelopment site. However, specific connections have not been identified at this stage in the process.

- Is this well publicized at the Library and with multiple HOA's?

We have worked to publicize this plan as much as possible through the Town's newsletters, social media, and event advertising, and the Let's Talk Town pop-up events. We are happy to take any suggestions on outreach and any suggested avenues of research that people are willing to offer.