# **ATTACHMENT 6**



Wm. E. Kirk 121 Maple Dr. Chapel Hill NC 27514

November 3, 2006

To: Town of Chapel Hill Council Members & Planning Dept.,

I have been following the Town's planning efforts toward constructing a sidewalk on the 100 block of North St. I attended the open discussion before the recent Town Council meeting, I have read the Planning Dept.'s letter of October 26, 2006 & the attached surveyor's drawing, & I plan to attend the open house on November 8.

Planning Dept.'s letter asks for my feedback & invites me to make known my views & preference, & that is the purpose of my letter today.

In the interest of open disclosure, I will state that my wife & I own 2 houses on North St., at 108 & 110. We lived at 108 for 22 years, & when we moved away, in April 1997, we turned the 2 places over to Southeast, which now manages them as rentals. As a result of this management, we rarely find it necessary to return to North St. We might drive through it once a month; I ride my bicycle down it, again, once a month, but that's the extent of our present relationship to our old neighborhood. Sharon & I have discussed how the 2 of us feel about the sidewalk & have come to the honest conclusion that we find the matter to be of little concern to us as North St. property owners.

We also have little concern about our stone wall in front of 108. Stone walls were mentioned at the meeting as a major factor to be considered in the building of a sidewalk, but the locations or addresses of the walls were not specified. Our wall is the mother of all stone walls on North St., & so I assume it has caught the eye of the Planning Dept. Our feeling is that the disposition of the wall remains in the hands of the project engineer, & we find little to say on the subject.

At this point in my letter, one would expect to find a very short summary—something to the effect that we don't care—about where we stand on the topic of building a sidewalk on one side of North St. or the other, or building 2 complementary sidewalks, or not building one at all. However, I could not put the matter aside when I read in the Planning Dept.'s letter that northside construction is favored & would be preceded by the removal of 8 maple trees.

Did I read that correctly? Can the loss of 8 mature trees add up to a savings of \$150,000? Can \$150,000 justify the removal of these trees?

I decided to take a close look at my old neighborhood—a note-taking walking tour, in fact—to see if I could understand Planning Dept.'s thinking on this matter. I have organized my findings, attached, in the belief that I might persuade Planning, simply put, to leave the trees. Trying to be as objective as I can be, I present 3 factors, secondary to



preserving the 8 maples, which indicate to me that a sidewalk on the south side of the street is preferable to one on the north side. Absent concurrence, I state that the maples should be left & the sidewalk project abandoned.

Sincerely,

Wm. E. Kirk



### THE HOUSES ON NORTH STREET, the 100 BLOCK

- A. The Page Building
- B. Houses, South Side of Street
- C. Houses, North Side of Street
- A. THE PAGE BUILDING. Located on the corner of N. Columbia St. & North St. (west end on the south side of North St.—thus the first bldg. when one enters North St. at its west end). It uses as its address 210 N. Columbia St. & is an exception to the otherwise residential nature of North St. The Page Bldg. is a 3story office building built in 1974. Hours of operation are largely the standard M-F, 9-5. Primary business is the Page law firm; other space is leased. Building & grounds are fairly attractive & well-maintained. It has a large blacktop parking lot, in which approx. 12 spaces are reserved & rented to members of ZTA sorority. The lot is not gated or monitored; after hours, the lot is used by many. (This may be of interest to the Downtown Parking Citizens Committee in regard to Shared Parking.) Of note to this report is the fact that The Page Bldg. has a sidewalk along the entirety of its North St. frontage: red brick; smooth, even & in excellent repair. It is set back from the North St. curb approx. 4 ft., producing a grassy median along the street, which provides space to 3 utility poles, 3 trees, & 2 street signs. Overall, sidewalk & median yield an appearance that is green, pleasant, well-maintained, walker-friendly, & eye-appealing. This sidewalk, already in place, provides a vote for the town to add its sidewalk to the south side of North St., thus saving the town the cost of approximately 100 ft. of sidewalk construction.
- B. HOUSES ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF NORTH ST. Continuing eastward from The Page Bldg., we find:
  - 108—single family in size; rental
  - 110-ditto
  - 116—single family in size divided into multi-unit rentals; 2 small cottages in back
  - 120—ZTA sorority house: 3 story, high-density dwelling with hard-surface parking lot on 2 sides striped for approx, 20-24 spaces. I estimate occupancy of the house to be 50-60.
  - 126—single family in size; multi-unit rentals
  - 128—single family residence
  - 130—ditto
  - 132—single family in size, probably a rental; small cottage in back
  - 215 Henderson St.—on the corner; large, single-family in size; formerly used as a rooming house annex to Phi Mu sorority (next bldg. south). Current use or occupants are unknown to me at this writing.
- C. HOUSES ON THE NORTH SIDE OF NORTH ST., west to east once again:



103-single family in size; rental

105—duplex rental; there are 3 more houses behind 103 & 105; the whole area creates a "compound" of multi-unit rentals with a large common parking lot in the middle

117—single family residence

119—single family in size; rental

121-single family in size; multi-rentals

125—ditto; cottage in back

127—single family residence; large & grand & representing old Chapel Hill

131-ditto

301 Henderson St.—on the corner; single family in size; multi-rental

CONCLUSION: This virtual walking tour of the 100 block of North St. leaves us with the inarguable impression that the street is, with the exception of The Page Bldg., a purely residential street. We can divide it into 2 equal pieces. The west half of North St. is standard college-town fare: predominantly rental, with either the entire house rented as a unit, or the house divided into multiple rental units. Only one house seems to be typical of America at large: a house (117) occupied by a single family. The east half of the street is the opposite: a fair amount of single-family occupancy with an equal number of rentals, either single-unit or multi-unit. The unusually large number of multi-rentals on North St. as a whole means that housing density is greater than what one would find in parts of Chapel Hill lying farther out from campus, and this, of course, means greater pedestrian traffic than one would find in a typical American street. Summary:

1. Proximity of North St. to campus produces a higher-than-normal concentration of high-density housing, which produces a high number

of pedestrians.

2. Proximity to campus—2 blocks—means the students & campus employees living on North St. will not bother driving the short distance to UNC, which, again, produces a high number of pedestrians.

This raises the obvious question: Is there another street in town that is more in need of sidewalks than the 100 block of North St? Perhaps so, but North St. seems to have quite a high priority.

PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC ON NORTH ST., the 100 BLOCK

As explained above, the street itself, due to the dense nature of its housing (which, in turn, is a result of being 2 blocks from downtown & the same 2 blocks from campus) generates quite a large amount of foot traffic. We must also take into account the high-density housing just north of North St.: Oak Terrace, Mill Creek, Townhouse, Northampton & perhaps others. Predominantly student housing, here the residents are in the same situation as the people on North St.: Too close to campus & downtown to bother with driving, they walk (or bike or take the bus). Pedestrians from these apartments & other dwellings, having just had a long & noisy uphill hike on MLK Blvd., arrive at the west end of North St. (i.e., The Page Bldg.) & now face 2 choices. They may continue ahead on N. Columbia St., which offers an even steeper uphill climb for 1



more block, or they may turn left into North St.—flat, quiet, nearly empty of vehicle traffic. The distance to campus from The Page Bldg. is the same (3 blocks) by either route, so I'll guess that topography, more than anything else, is the factor that determines the route taken. I don't know the percentages regarding those who make the turn towards quietude vs. those continuing uphill, but it's a fair observation that the high-density student housing downhill on MLK Blvd. contributes a significant amount of foot traffic to North St. which, when added to the walkers who live on the street, yields a flow of pedestrians funneled into the street—they have, at this time, no where else to walk—that seems dangerous to walkers & a hindrance to traffic flow.

ZTA SORORITY: deceptive & perhaps an anomaly. The house is large, the occupancy high (I estimate around 50-60 young women living there, with others, who are members but not in residence, coming by for meals & house functions) & the house is thus strangely situated in a residential neighborhood. The deception occurs at the back door. An observer assessing pedestrian traffic on North St. would assume that the many ZTA members would contribute in significant numbers to such a study. Not so. The women going back & forth between house & campus do not use North St., running in front of their house, but instead use wooden stairs at the back of their lot to access the contiguous rear of a parking lot which fronts on E. Rosemary St. This creates a straight-line route between ZTA & campus/downtown & keeps the sisters, for the most part, off of North St. Those who do walk in the street are walking to & from The Page Bldg. parking lot, where, as was mentioned, some of them keep cars in spaces leased from the Page law firm & many more—those who are ZTA members but live elsewhere—find free parking for house activities after 5 p.m. & on weekends. Sorority sisters walking between ZTA & The Page Bldg. walk a distance spanning 3 houses—at 108, 110, & 116—before arriving at their house at 120. If we take into account the distance they walk, the frequency with which they make this walk. & the numbers of them that make this walk—numbers which, in the interest of pedestrian safety & traffic flow, cannot be simply discounted—we find, once again, a street in need of a sidewalk. Noting that the women both live & park on the south side of North St., I believe that this provides another vote for building the sidewalk on the south side of the street. It's not clear that they would cross to the north side to make this walk even if a sidewalk were located over there. Unlike the enchanted baseball field, a sidewalk on the north side might not be a construction project about which one could say with certainty: If you build it, they will come. I have seen this situation frequently at the downhill end of Bolinwood Dr., where there is a large apartment complex (Stratford Hills) & a bus stop on the same side of the street. The single sidewalk is on the other side of the street. The result: the students walk the 250 ft. to the bus stop using the street; the sidewalk is largely empty.

### **HISTORY**

North St. has been there from the beginning—sort of. When, on August 10, 1793, an Ornament Ground (in today's language, the UNC campus) & its adjacent town, New Hope Chapel Hill, were laid out on paper, the proposed town was a checkerboard of 30 lots with 6 streets among them. The vacant lots were auctioned off 2 months later, & #3 was bought by Andrew Burke, a Hillsborough merchant. Lot #3, a hefty 4 acres at the northwest corner of town—in fact, it was the northwest corner of town—would contain, among other places, today's Bub O'Malley's & the now-defunct Phi Mu sorority house



on Henderson St. When bought on auction day, Lot #3 was bounded on the south side by Back St. (now Rosemary St.; the front of the lot faced today's Wallace Deck) & on the east side by Grand Ave. (now Henderson St.) The west side faced wilderness, with a creek flowing northward just off this side. This west edge of Lot #3 is now ZTA & the creek may be seen still flowing, 213 years later, between 105 & 117 North St. The north side of the lot, like the west side, had no neighboring lot. This is where the town ended & wilderness began. This line, which marked the northern boundary of both Lot #3 & a hoped-for town, became the eastern half of the 100 block of North St.

I don't know when North St. was built, but its location should indicate that it was one of the very next streets created as New Hope Chapel Hill began to expand beyond its original 6 streets. The name says to me that it was seen as the northern boundary of the village, replacing Back St. as the street that was out in back of town.

The most famous thing to come out of North St. was Betty Smith's novel, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1943), written in an upstairs apartment on the street under discussion. The most famous residents were a couple of law students, Wm. Friday & Terry Sanford, & the ornithologist John K. Terres, who rented quarters (though not as roommates, as one might infer) in the "compound" mentioned above.

#### AN EARLIER SIDEWALK SURVEY

The south side of the 100 block of North St. was one of 24 sidewalk projects that the town included in its 1994-95 Capital Improvement Plan. Each of the 2-dozen proposed sites was evaluated objectively, receiving a score of 0-10 on each of 9 criteria. Yielding scores ranging from 16, the lowest of the 24 projects, to a high of 35, North St. came in with a final score of 28.5, putting it in the middle—number 12—of the 2-dozen proposed projects. A brief description of the project measured the linear footage at 700 ft., stated the required ADA ramps would number 12, the cost would be \$26,400, & the area under consideration would be on the south side from Airport Road (sic) to Henderson Street. The report noted "the large number of pedestrians" & concluded that the "project was considered routine, moderately difficult and difficult at various points when applied to the cost estimate table." I am confused by the linear footage figure of 700 ft.; the distance from Airport Rd. to Henderson St. seems to be slightly greater than that. If the project intended to build a sidewalk along only a part of North St., this is not stated in the report; the CIP clearly takes in the whole length of North St. from Airport to Henderson. The ADA ramps, at 12, are also confusing. Put 2 at each corner, & we have 8 remaining for the 10 southside driveway connections. Conversely, a total of 12 ramps in just 700 linear ft. seems a bit concentrated. The current (October-November 2006) sidewalk plan for this neighborhood gives the length of the street as 800 ft. The difference of 100 ft. might be The Page Bldg.'s red-brick sidewalk: the 1994-95 plan subtracted this sidewalk from the total length because the bricks would have been left in place; the current plan intends to "replace existing brick sidewalk," according to Thomas F. Bick's survey, dated April 18, 2006.

#### **PARKING**



Parking on the north side of North St. is prohibited. Parking on the south side was permitted, unregulated, until about 2 decades ago, when residents-only window stickers became a requirement for parking M-F, 9-4. Residents-only parking was put into effect as the result of a vote taken among the residents on the 100 block, who became exasperated by spillover parking from downtown & campus & approached the town for relief from cars partially blocking driveways, cars parked up on the curb, etc. Even with parking now regulated, the south side of the street is completely filled with residents' cars during the hours of restriction. Due to the parking, combined with the narrow width of the street, traffic flow is extremely tight when 2 cars heading in opposite directions attempt to ease past each other.

#### **OBSTRUCTIONS**

The remainder of this report makes a slow & deliberate enumeration of the obstructions a sidewalk construction project would encounter on the 100 block of North St., dividing the counts of these obstructions or impediments according to whether they are found on the north or the south side of the street.

UTILITY POLES TREES STREET SIGNS

No. side: 2 No. side: 10 (or 11) No. side: 8

So. Side: 8 So. Side: 4 So. Side: 8

FIRE HYDRANT: 1 on the south side (between 116 & 120). None on north side.

MANHOLE COVER: 1 on the south side (at 116). None on the north side.

STONE PILLAR: 1 on the north side (at 119; size is 2' x 2' x 1' high; depth in ground, if any, was not ascertained). None on the south side.

#### **FENCES**

North side: decorative fences are in front of 103 & 105; a longer fence, also with little purpose beyond decoration, is in front of 119 along with 9 bushes, each about 3 ft. tall. A series of 4-ft.-high posts covering approx. 30 linear ft. have been put into the ground along the curb between 131 & the corner house (301 Henderson St.), obviously to prevent over-the-curb parking.

South side: no fences.

### STONE WALLS

North side: at 117 is a rock ground cover (or embankment) rolling downhill away from the street of approx. 30 linear ft., set back 3 ft. from the curb. Purpose might be earth retention or parking/pedestrian deterrence. At 127 are 4x4 ground timbers defining the front edge of the yard, & at 131 is a stone wall for the same purpose; both may or may not be set back far enough from the curb so as not to be obstructions, South side: at 108 is a wall approx. 45 ft. long, 3-4 ft. high, set back 3 ft. from the curb; east corner is in need of repair & the whole wall is thickly covered by vines. At 110 is a low wall 25 ft. long, 1-2 ft. high, set back 5-6 ft. from the curb. At 128 is a rock



embankment 10 ft. long, 3 ft. high. At 132 are attractive & useable stone steps built into the remains of a rock wall or embankment of indeterminate size.

#### **CREEK**

Missing inclusion within the boundaries of the new village by a distance of only a few feet 213 years ago, this small & unnamed creek still flows, unseen, beneath the ground in some type of culvert or conduit on the south side of North St. A person looking for it would see only grass & trees growing beside the house at 116. The curbside manhole cover in front of 116 evidently provides access into this culvert. After flowing northward under the street, the creek emerges on the north side in a sluice beside 105. Stone walls approx. 3 ft. high on either side, a slightly concave cement bottom, clear water sparkling in the sun & surprisingly free of trash & brush, the whole scene is a serendipitous pleasure—or was—to an observer walking by & looking down into the creek & its containment. The area is now so overgrown with trees & brush that the scene is thoroughly hidden.

A sidewalk on the north side would have to take the creek into account, & no small amount of engineering & construction would be necessary. At the very least, the steep drop from curb to sluice would have to be filled in, shored up, & a level surface maintained. At the most, a footbridge would have to span the creek. Either solution would bring back the park-like aesthetic of this small area, a result that all could welcome. The cost of this approx. 30-40 ft. piece of the sidewalk project, on the other hand, might not be so warmly appreciated. Perhaps southside construction beckons.

### **CONCLUSION**

I believe that I have made the case, above, that North St. does warrant sidewalks based on fairly heavy foot traffic—in the street. I also included some history & my observations about parking in the belief that the reader might want to be fully informed in the matter of North St., its sidewalk, & the future, if any, of its maple trees. Finally, I devote most of my space to obstructions.

Some obstructions are more obstructive than others. I have not included water meters or driveway connections because they seem to be routinely handled by any sidewalk project. Street signs & fences are easily relocated, utility poles considerably less so; the manhole & hydrant could probably remain as they are. The apparently permanent obstructive nature of trees is easily overcome: remove them.

This leaves the stone walls as the greatest source of concern to those deliberating the current sidewalk project & seems to swing the project to the north side. The creek, surprisingly, is not mentioned in the current (2006) plan; perhaps I have overestimated its significance.

I have aimed to be objective in this report & I shall maintain my objectivity in this conclusion. I feel the information presented above makes it clear that North St. does, indeed, have considerable pedestrian traffic in the street. As to the question of north side or south side, I have found 3 instances which seem to favor southside construction: an existing sidewalk, ZTA walkers, & the creek. Stone walls notwithstanding, I find no arguments favoring northside sidewalks. Pedestrian safety, restoring the creek, & maintaining the tree-lined look of North St. are my most pressing observations, & I believe they should also engage the attention of everyone else looking into this proposed



project. Stone walls are pleasing to look at & are part of old Chapel Hill, but because they are on the south side & are thus mostly hidden from view by parked cars, they arouse little emotion in me.

## **MY VIEWS & PREFERENCE**

just spare the trees.

The 100 block of North St. may or may not be the most beautiful street in town; there are many beautiful streets & singling out just one is pointless—there are many neighborhoods that make Chapel Hill as unusually attractive as it is. North St. is just one of the several that make this so.

In listing North St's various attributes, I'd begin with the houses—kept in fairly good repair, they are mostly small to medium in size. It is housing built originally for workingmen & their families. In contrast, but not unpleasantly so, are the 2 Grand Old Dames at 127 & 131. Few people on the street seem to give much care to their front yards; little industriousness is evident in gardens or lawns, with the visual result that the yards are pleasant & neat without showing ostentation or a competitiveness among neighbors. Almost unnoticed is the gentle hill at about the middle of the block, slight & yet slightly interesting, raising the east end of the street above the west. Finally, there are the trees: far & away the most important visual attribute that this street has. They are mostly maples & mostly on the north side of the street, which means they have possible removal in their future. I find removal to be absolutely unacceptable. Putting the sidewalks on the southside, even if more costly than northside construction, would be a more intelligent & acceptable solution than removing the trees. If southside construction is too costly, then cancel the project & leave North St. without sidewalks—



Late last year you were invited to a drop in open house at the Town Hall on November, 8<sup>th</sup>, 2006 to see preliminary designs and express your views about constructing a sidewalk on one side of North Street from Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to Henderson Street.

Unfortunately attendance at the open house was low and the feedback we received was inconclusive. So that we can advise the Council whether to proceed with this project we invite you to return the attached postcard by Monday January 15, 2007 indicating your preference for either:

| Options  | Check One  |  |
|--|------------|--|
| a sidewalk on the south side of the street   | ZHO CHOKE  |  |
| a sidewalk on the north side of the street   | I CHOICE * |  |
| no sidewalk on either side of the street   |            |  |
| request to consider traffic calming such as speed humps in-<br>lieu of a sidewalk                              |            |  |
| postpone any decision for sidewalk construction until the declining trees on the north side of the street die. |            |  |

CONTINGENT UPON SIDEWALK REING ROUTED AROUND EXISTING MAPPIE TREE AS AROTOGED BY C. BROOKS & H. HARRIS IN LATE SUMMEN PALL OF 2006, (FRONT 131 NORTH ST.)

Your Name: FUT LLOYD, AGENT FOR ROSAMOND LLOYD CONNER! IT NORTH S

Your Address: CFC: 106 JONES FT. RD. CARROURD NK 27519

E-mail: DUZloyd@ipass.net

Phone Number: W: 967-9948 1+ 968-6828 C 414-0714



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| Your Name     | BILL      | C. TERRY  | 1        |       |       |
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| postpone any decision for sidewalk construction until the declining trees on the north side of the street die. |           |

| Your Name: KOBERT V VAGE  | •••••     |
|---|-----------|
| Your Address: 210 No. Colum Bin St.   | ••••      |
| E-mail: BOB @ OHAPER HILTVITE. Com  | ••••••    |
| Phone Number: 919 - 942 - 6024  |           |
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| postpone any decision for sidewalk construction until the declining trees on the north side of the street die. |           |

REPLACE TREES - THAT WILL MATURE ABOVE OUR HEATIS BUT WILL NOT GROW SO LARGE AS TO CRACK THE SIDEWALK.

| Your Name: JACK HOGAN       |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Your Address: 125 NORTH ST. |  |
| E-mail:                     |  |
| Phone Number: 913-7097      |  |



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| Your Name:    | Lau     | ren Rivers   |          |        |
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| Your Address: | 215     | Henderson    | n Street | •••••• |
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| Your Name: JAMEL MUNGER         |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Your Address: 137 North 53      |   |
| E-mail: Zonverer & bells. 7h. ~ | 4 |
| Phone Number: 928 9849          |   |



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| a sidewalk on the south side of the street   |           |
| a sidewalk on the north side of the street   |           |
| no sidewalk on either side of the street   | 20 option |
| request to consider traffic calming such as speed humps in-<br>lieu of a sidewalk                              | /         |
| postpone any decision for sidewalk construction until the declining trees on the north side of the street die. |           |

| Your Name: TIM CHOTHERS      |          |
|------------------------------|----------|
|                              |          |
| E-mail: two thers & a.l. co. | <b>M</b> |
| Phone Number: 919 969 8915   |          |