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Dear Members of the Chapel Hill Town Council and Major Foy,

As a resident of the Northwood subdivision (between Eubanks Road, MLK Jr. Blvd. and Weaver Dairy Road Ext.), a mother of 2 young children, a pedestrian, a bicyclist, and a user of the public transit system, I urge you to improve the pedestrian safety along MLK Jr. Blvd. between Perkins Dr. and Weaver Dairy Road.

Currently there is no sidewalk along the western side of MLK Jr. Blvd. north of Weaver Dairy Road, and the existing pedestrian crossing at Weaver Dairy Road is insufficient and dangerous. Only the southern and eastern sides of this intersection have pedestrian crosswalks, leaving pedestrians in the northwestern quadrant stranded. Crossing at the existing pedestrian signal literally means risking one's life as the signal length is insufficient and right turning vehicles almost never look for pedestrians. When crossing there with my children, I have had many near-misses, and walking on the shoulder of MLK Jr. Blvd. with trucks and large vehicles speeding by is nerve-wracking. Since crossing at the intersection is so dangerous, I am now crossing MLK Jr. Blvd. without a light at Northwood Dr. I have found that to be safer because I can watch the traffic, cross to the center (there is currently a blocked off lane which will likely disappear once Weaver Dairy Road is reconfigured) and then wait to cross over all the way. However, I am very concerned that the traffic on MLK Jr. Blvd. will increase so significantly due to developments that are in progress or are proposed, that it will no longer be possible to cross MLK Jr. Blvd. At that point I would have to use my car for many very short trips to Chapel Hill North and Timberlyne. This situation works contrary to Chapel Hill's effort to reduce vehicular traffic.

Average daily traffic count on this stretch (Perkins Dr. to Weaver Dairy Rd.) of MLK Jr. Blvd. was 26,000 in 2005. The Town Municipal Operations Center is estimated to generate an additional 2000 daily vehicle trips, the majority of them will be using MLK Jr. Blvd. There are proposals for a residential development (Chapel Hill Watch – 120 residential units / 331 parking spaces) and a mixed-use development on Eubanks Road. In addition, there is the residential component of Chapel Hill North that you are currently considering. The master plan for this development did not include an estimate of how many vehicle trips would be generated by the 120 residential units and 242 parking spaces since it is part of the Chapel Hill North Master Plan. However, all of these developments and the prospect of Carolina North will certainly increase the traffic on MLK Jr. Blvd. significantly and therefore further endanger pedestrians.

The speed limit on the section (Perkins Dr. to Weaver Dairy Rd.) of MLK Jr. Blvd. is 35 mph. Speeding is rampant and I have not observed any efforts of the police to slow down the traffic.

I would also like to stress that the lack of pedestrian safety is not just a problem for Northwood residents. People using the two bus stops (MLK Jr. Blvd. at Chapel Hill North and MLK Jr. Blvd. at Northwood Dr.) need to cross the road at least once without a crosswalk. Eighty-six people board and alight the bus daily at those two stops. Residents of Larkspur walk through Northwood to get to Chapel Hill North or Timberlyne, and office workers daily cross MLK Jr. Blvd. to exercise in our quiet wooded subdivision.

In the past, I have approached the town council about this safety issue and was told that MLK Jr. Blvd. is a state road and that the DOT does not build sidewalks. It has been possible in other sections of town. If the town of Chapel Hill approves development of land around a subdivision, it has the responsibility of addressing the effects generated by this development. The fact that Northwood is not annexed is irrelevant since it is part of the Chapel Hill planning district and the town is impacting it directly.

The NC 86/MLK Jr. Blvd. Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety and Mobility Study has demonstrated the shortcomings of the NC 86 corridor and has developed a good set of recommendations. A sidewalk is needed on the west side of MLK Jr. Blvd. from Weaver Dairy Road Ext. to Perkins Rd. now and there needs to be a four-way pedestrian cross walk at the intersection with Weaver Dairy Rd. with signals that prohibit a right turn for vehicles when the pedestrian signal is activated.

I strongly urge the council to delay any possible development on the north side of town until the infrastructure has been updated to safely cross MLK Jr. Blvd. There have been enough pedestrian fatalities in town recently, and my hope is that the council will take this matter seriously enough to prevent more fatalities in the future.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Please contact me should you have any questions. I would be happy to show you the stretch of MLK Jr. Blvd. in question and the intersection with Weaver Dairy Road to demonstrate its hazards.

Sincerely,

Claudia Sheppard