

September 21, 2005

Town of Chapel Hill
Town Council

Dear Mayor and Members of Town Council:

I am writing this letter regarding the issue of Maywood Road extension in the Larkspur neighborhood to the proposed Chapel Watch Village (CWV) neighborhood in north Chapel Hill. I am a resident of Larkspur (300 Old Larkspur Way) and a proud resident of Chapel Hill, and we moved from New Jersey about a year ago. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your service to the Town, helping build such a wonderful town to live in. I also have a great appreciation of the process the Town has established, where the opportunities for residents to make input to Town's important decisions are widely provided.

Attending the Town Council meetings and Transportation Board meetings where this issue was discussed in detail by various parties, I came to understand the origin of the different positions, and appreciate the challenge of the decision the Council will have to make. All the technical data aside, **the decision basically boils down to the tension between the Town Engineers' desire to secure future flexibility of traffic movement options (for the benefit of fellow Chapel Hill residents), and the Residents' fear of future safety hazards arising from the potential cut-through traffic.** Both concerns, in my opinion, are very valid, and the Council's final decision will be weighing future flexibility verses future safety threat.

I have heard arguments at the Transportation Board meeting regarding the Town Engineers' responsibility of securing future flexibility of traffic engineering, and how the residents might only be concerned about their near term future (as they can move away and care less) while the town engineers need to plan 50-100 years into the future. While this is a very true statement, one can also argue that in the event of a traffic accident where one of our kids is harmed, it is the unfortunate victim (and their family) who will have to live with the painful consequences throughout the rest of their lives, long after the Traffic Engineer or other Town officials have probably forgotten the decisions they have made. I heard the arguments that in real world the roads might not invite such painful accidents. While this could well be true, I also heard comment from the Town's Traffic Engineer that in the 20 years he has served the town, there was not a single incident where a blocked-off road was re-opened. This is a resounding testimony that the "future flexibility" that was lost by closing off these roads was never actually needed in the first place, and the town traffic flow is managed perfectly fine without needing that flexibility.

Since no one has a crystal ball looking into the future, weighing the **value of future flexibility in town's traffic flow needs and future risk of traffic cut-through problems** is a tough job. What is quite clear to me is that there is no solution in between that will satisfy both. The decision will be binary: either the vehicular connection is made or not. Each situation has to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Fortunately, we can try to more concretely evaluate the possible benefit to our fellow Chapel Hill residents that might be compromised (in terms of Transit services, school bus routes, etc.) by not making the connection, verses the risk that the neighborhood would suffer (both from

safety risk and neighborhood character point of view), and that might shed some light in the value of vehicular connection here. I find that the author of Town's Design Guidelines has gone through this logic very thoroughly and came up with a simple, single decision criterion: **if there is a potential cut-through, simply DON'T DO IT – page 9 of Design Guidelines.** I believe that a bike/pedestrian walkway that will also allow emergency vehicle access is the right solution for this connector, instead of the full vehicular access road.

It looks like the value of running the Chapel Hill Transit bus through this connector road is quite minimal, given the size of the two neighborhoods involved and their proximity to the collector/arterial roads (Weaver Dairy Extension and Eubanks). Practically all houses in these neighborhoods have ¼ mile access to these major roads if the second entrance to Larkspur (extension of Butterfield Court) and the proposed pedestrian/bike/emergency connector is built. As for the school buses, we can think of loading the CWV kids at the end of Maywood from Larkspur side (they can use the walkway to come over): this way the loading/unloading can be done much more safely (compared to a loading point on Eubanks), and the full benefit of shortest pathway to Seawell/Smith Schools can be utilized. The principle of containing local traffic (to grocery stores, etc.) on local roads to relieve the pressure on major roads does not quite play out with this connector, since the traffic from the two neighborhood involved has to get on to Eubanks, Martin Luther King or Homestead to get to any facilities other than residential homes: opening up this road to vehicular traffic will not change that at all.

Some have proposed putting heavy traffic calming devices on the CWV development in an attempt to deter cut-through traffic. Unfortunately, I believe such solution will be the worst of all imaginable. What we would create in that scenario is where after getting through a few hundred yards of CWV neighborhood with traffic calming devices, there is a 0.5 mile stretch in Larkspur where the vehicles will have a clear shot to Weaver Dairy Extension (currently, there is no traffic calming devices installed in Larkspur at all). For those cutting through CWV-Maywood-Larkspur-WDE, it is a few hundred yards of traffic calming devices over a 2+ mile cut-through path. If anything, the traffic calming devices in CWV will encourage cut-through traffic to speed in our neighborhood to make up for whatever time is lost, rather than deterring them from taking the cut-through. Unless traffic calming devices are installed along the entire path, this scheme is a bad solution for everyone involved. The traffic calming devices will come at a cost: Chapel Hill taxpayers will have to pay for it (CWV developers have cited Supreme Court rulings that give the Town no right to impose the cost upon them), and the emergency response time will suffer from excessive traffic calming devices. I am personally a trained scientist/engineer, and my professional intuition tells me that providing a root cause (i.e., vehicular connector for cut-through) and applying "Band-aids" (i.e., traffic calming measures) is a really bad engineering practice.

The other major concern is neighborhood character and connectivity at "people" level that could be damaged or missed by the vehicular connection. The bike/pedestrian connector road between old Northwood neighborhood and Larkspur is actually located on my property, and I witness the value such connection brings to the two neighborhoods on a daily basis. A lot (and I mean, A LOT, including myself!!) of our neighbors take our kids biking or walking in the Northwood neighborhood, since there is relatively little

through vehicular traffic. I do meet with people from Northwood neighborhood walking with their families into Larkspur using this pathway as I spend the evening hours in my backyard with the kids. We would stand around and chat, and I get to meet the wonderful people from the other neighborhood. I can only imagine what the situation would have been if that was a vehicular connector: I would not bring my kids out in my backyard (probably fenced it off since I have little ones who can chase a ball into the road easily!!), and there will be absolutely no chance of meeting the people from Northwood neighborhood, if they are passing by in their cars. Also, if there are lots of non-resident through traffic (they spend a lot less attention slowing down for kids playing), the neighborhood will be considered less desirable for taking my 7 year old biking (who just learnt to bike without training wheels, and still somewhat shaky!!), or my 3 year old for a walk. The reason that Larkspur neighbors go to Northwood and Northwood neighbors come to Larkspur is because we all feel they are safe and quiet (in terms of traffic load), and that stimulates real connectivity in the neighborhood. How many of you have, when you are driving through someone else's neighborhood, stopped your car and talked with people in that neighborhood? It is the "connectivity at the personal level", opportunities for neighbors from adjacent developments to meet and communicate, the character of the neighborhoods and thus that of the Town that will be compromised if lots of non-residential cars are invited to local roads.

Some have portrayed the motivation of Larkspur residents that oppose this connector road as being selfish, that we would like to live in a large cul-de-sac where nobody else will come to visit, and defying the potential public benefit to the fellow residents of Chapel Hill. I have met a lot of our neighbors discussing this issue, and found out that these portrayals are furthest from the truth and totally unfair. I have never lived on a cul-de-sac my entire life, and that has never been high on my priority list when I looked for houses in the past. Larkspur residents are good Chapel Hill citizens, who value the public benefits and have spent the time and effort trying to come up with creative solutions that will provide benefit to the fellow residents of Chapel Hill without sacrificing the safety of our children, which I am sure all other Town residents would do. Given the little public benefit that is anticipated and lots of positive and unique character of Chapel Hill that will be lost, I believe the best solution is to make this connector a bike and pedestrian pathway with emergency vehicle access. I hope you asses this situation based on factual benefits and losses (rather than perceptions and guesses), and make the right decision that will benefit the future safety of North Chapel Hill residents. Thank you very much for your time and consideration reading this letter.

Yours Sincerely,

Jungsang Kim

300 Old Larkspur Way

Jungsang_kim@yahoo.com

(919) 969-7571