

(62)

To: Town of Chapel Hill Transportation Board Members

Date: 8/12/2005

Re: Proposed Maywood Connector Extension between Larkspur and Chapel Watch Village

Dear Transportation Board Members,

My name is Jungsang Kim, and I am a resident of 300 Old Larkspur Way in Chapel Hill. I attended the Transportation Board meeting that was held for the Maywood connector issue in Larkspur neighborhood, and appreciate the board's decision to hear out our story.

I am sure all the technical details from both the Town's engineering staff and residents of Larkspur has been fully digested by the Board. Sitting through the meeting and hearing the Town Engineers and other Chapel Hill residents' comments, I came to understand the origin of the different positions, and appreciate the challenge of the decision the Board is about to make. I would like to convey a viewpoint based on my understanding.

All the technical decisions aside, the decision basically boils down to the tension between the Town Engineers' desire to secure future flexibility of traffic movement options, and the Residents' fear of future safety hazards arising from the potential cut-through traffic. Both concerns, in my opinion, are very valid, but the Board is trying to make a decision weighing future flexibility verses future safety threat.

We have heard from a former Transportation Board member (Chair) 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 any of the Transportation Board members have probably forgotten the decisions they have made. We also heard the arguments that in real world the roads might not invite such painful accidents. While this could well be true, we have also heard the 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 the roads was never actually needed in the first place, and the town traffic flow is managed perfectly fine without ever needing that flexibility. If closing off a road was such a bad decision and impacts town's traffic flow, it is surprising that the issue was never ever re-visited. (On the contrary, one can argue that there are lots of questions about re-visiting a connector road due to cut-through problems, although I do not now for a fact if a road that was initially connected was ever cut off due to such problems in our town...)

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 connection is made or not. All the arguments of traffic calming devices are not relevant, as the current controversy over their effectiveness (see, for example <http://www.io.com/~bumper/ada.htm>) does not reduce the perception of security risk for the residents despite all the arguments for their value; in my opinion, these devices will not eliminate the actual risk (might in fact increase the risk and decrease the effectiveness of the road). I am personally a trained scientist/engineer (currently a faculty member in Pratt School of Engineering at Duke), and my professional intuition tells me that providing a root cause (i.e., vehicular connector) and applying "Band-aids" (i.e., traffic calming measures) is a really bad engineering practice. Each situation has to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Fortunately, my profession also provides me a pretty logical means to provide guidance in this evaluation process. I find that the author of Town's Design Guidelines has gone through this logic very thoroughly and came up with the right conclusion: let me lay this out to you. I hope you base your decision on the recommendations provided by the Town's Design Guidelines (otherwise, what is the value of having such a document??). The basic implication is:

- (1) If the decision is made to connect the road, we get the potential future flexibility but we are assuming the risk of potential cut-through and its associated safety problems.
- (2) If the decision is made not to connect the road, we eliminate the cut-through and its associated safety problems, but we lose the potential future flexibility in traffic flow patterns.

Some might argue that the safety risk we are taking is not large. However, I can also argue (based on the Town Engineers' testimony quoted above) that the flexibility we would lose without the connector may not be that important either. The decision becomes easier if we list and compare the safety risk vs. the value of future flexibility in this case. (For your reference, the Town's Design Guidelines has a simple, single decision criterion: if there is a potential cut-through at all, simply DON'T DO IT – page 9 of Design Guidelines.) In our case, let's lay this all out based on the data that has been gathered so far by the Town...

- (1) What is the potential for safety risk??
 - a. Is the potential for cut-through high? – The answer is YES here, since
 - i. It provides a link between two major roads; for this specific case, the question is not one of simple connectivity between two adjacent residential neighborhoods, but connectivity of residential streets with major commercial facilities.
 - ii. It allows by-pass of many traffic lights
 - iii. It allows by-pass of potentially congested arterial roads
 - iv. The traffic load on these arterial roads is anticipated to grow, but the Town does not have the plan or budget to expand the capacity of these roads yet.
 - b. Is the safety risk high? – The answer is YES here too, since

- i. Maywood and sections of Old Larkspur Way is not designed as a collector road
- ii. There are lots of kids, and the setback between the homes and the road is short in the neighborhood
- iii. There is substantial risk for speeding, since there are no speed bumps and someone (probably the Town) would have to pay for them should there be a decision to install them.

(2) What is the value of traffic flexibility we lose if we close off the road?

a. Public bus transit through this connector in the future?

- i. If the bus goes through this connector, how many homes get closer to the bus stop as compared to when it stays on Eubanks and Weaver Dairy Extension? Answer: < 200 additional households (86 in Larkspur and ~120 in Chapel Watch Village). This is very different from neighborhoods like Southern Village, where there are thousands of homes who are far from nearby arterial roads...
- ii. Of these, how many are currently more than ¼ miles from the major possible transit path (Eubanks and Weaver Dairy), if the proposed Butterfield court extension is completed (Town's criteria for walkable distance to the bus stops, according to the Town's Traffic Engineer at the meeting)? Answer: Probably none. Recall that residents can still walk to Eubanks through proposed bike/pedestrian path from Larkspur.
- iii. Is this road fit for such bus transit? Answer: there is no way the bus can go through and stay on roads that meet collector specifications. (It would traverse portions of Larkspur roads designed as local roads.) The next question: is there an example where a Chapel Hill Transit bus drives through a local road? I do not know the answer, but I would think the bus route should be re-considered if this is true.
- iv. If the transit bus does go through as compared to staying on Eubanks and Weaver Dairy, what is the benefit? What is the likelihood that this "flexibility" will be needed for this purpose? I am sure you can answer this question (or even Town's Traffic Engineer could answer this for you if the actual thoughts are given!!).

b. Town Service Vehicles

- i. What is the best way for the Town Service vehicle to serve Larkspur? Answer: we have shown in one of our slides that a better exit after serving ALL HOMES IN LARKSPUR is to exit through proposed Butterfield extension.
- ii. Is there a benefit in using this to service Chapel Watch Village? Answer: Phil Post proposed a plan at the meeting where the circulation within Chapel Watch Village is self-sustaining.
- iii. What is the benefit of serving both Larkspur and Chapel Watch Village through this connector in a single route? Answer: If the

65

Town Service routes can be separated into groups along Eubanks and along Weaver Dairy (as is now) and such division is effective, there is no benefit. Should the town decide to change their current service route and use this connector, there could be some benefit.

- iv. How likely is this going to dramatically benefit service vehicle route? I guess the answer is up to you to evaluate...
- c. School bus route in the future?
 - i. What is the benefit of having this road open for school bus access?
Answer: Larkspur will not benefit at all (since exit through Weaver Dairy Extension is always the option for Larkspur). Chapel Watch Village will benefit by reducing their travel time by 45 seconds compared to using Rogers Road (according to the TIA study). While 45 seconds might be big enough to invite impatient cut-through traffic, I will let you decide if this will dramatically impact school bus route schedule.
- d. What other "traffic" will need further flexibility?
 - i. Emergency vehicles? They can already use this connector even if they are bike/pedestrian path.
 - ii. Off-loading Eubanks traffic? You must be kidding!!

Well, this is what I can think of using my brain and the information on the situation. How do you think the value of future flexibility weighs against risk of cut-through and its associated problems in this case? Is it fair to ask our neighborhood to bear the cost of perceived flexibility, while incurring safety risks, reduced quality-of-life, and altered neighborhood character? Of course, I welcome any suggestions (from you or the Town's Traffic Engineer), and hope you consider this carefully before you cast your vote. Thanks for reading this through!!

Yours,
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