

Traffic Committee Meeting

MINUTES

March 29, 2010

Committee Members

Present: Mayor Pro-Tem Hazel Tyndall, Council Liaison; Susan Ruinen, Chair; Clyde Smith, Co-Chair; Karen Hanner, Secretary; Dan Walker; Frank Berry; David McGehee; Rosemary Wilson; Randy Edwards; Rosemarie Nuzzo; Bob Ferrell

Attending: Mayor Randy Halfacre, Council Members Danny Frazier, Ted Stambolitis, Kathy Maness, Richard Thompson; Britt Poole, Terrence Green, Brad Cunningham, Stuart Ford, Becky Hildebrand, Johnny Jeffcoat, Don Alcorn, Tim Driggers, Maro Rogers, Robert S. Perry, Ken Stiverson, Michelle E. Walsh-Saboski, Kevin Chen, Brenda Love, Kelli Sturkie, Wattie Wharton, Thomas O'Brien, Tommy Georgiades, Clifton Rogers, Scott Adams
From SCDOT: Kati Holland, Liz Carpenter, Ladd Gibson

Mayor Randy Halfacre welcomed everyone and introduced himself and the Council Members attending. He introduced Kati Holland from SCDOT and gave a brief history of traffic concerns in the Town of Lexington. In 2004, Mike Flack, the chairman of the Lexington Chamber of Commerce, approached the Lexington Town Council about the need to address traffic problems. He proposed a partnership between the Town and the Chamber. Lexington County was not in support of most of the plans.

In 2005, SCDOT proposed some options to improve traffic in the town. The planned designs included changes to existing thoroughfares as there has been no funding available for construction of new roadways. The Town Council approved a 3 Phase Traffic Improvement Plan including the controversial one-way pairs.

The topic of discussion for today's meeting is Phase I of the Traffic Improvement Plan. Using a large display map, Kati Holland briefly reviewed the designed Phase I Improvements Plan along US 378 at Park Road, US 1 and Old Chapin Road, and West Butler Street/Reed Avenue. From George Street at the Lizards Thicket along 378, there is an added third lane for right turns. From the BB&T on 378 at Reed Avenue, there is an added third lane for right turns or straight ahead at Old Chapin Road. It becomes a right turn only lane at Park Road. A concrete median extends from Park Road to West Butler Street on 378. Currently, the acquisition of right of way for the improvements is in progress.

She noted that the restriction of construction times to night hours is possible but could increase the project cost from 10-15%. The cost of the improved signal arms is estimated at \$100,000 to \$150,000 each.

When questioned about the concrete median, Kati referred to research demonstrating that the use of this design reduced crashes and traffic delays while increasing traffic flow.

There was discussion of the use of right in/right out traffic control devices. Randy Halfacre pointed to the number of accidents, some severe, at the Publix entrance on 378 and the significant decrease since the construction of the pork chop island directing traffic to turn right out and right into the shopping center. Ted Stambolitis observed that those areas have interconnected access.

David McGehee asked about a design that did not include the construction of the concrete median on 378. Kati responded that SCDOT would not support that design.

Ladd Gibson commented that this plan is designed to accommodate the future phases of improvements including the one way pairs but alone will help relieve congestion and decrease accidents.

Frank Berry asked about funding. Kati responded that the funding is available for this project. Hazel Tyndall commented that if this project is not implemented, funding for future projects will not be obtained. Clyde Smith commented that the traffic improvements must go forward.

Ted Stambolitis read the following statement for the committee:

"Ladies & Gentleman of the traffic committee, Mr. Mayor and fellow Councilman. There are several issues and concerns that we would like to address and need your immediate and urgent attention.

*1) During the construction of these improvements, we know that there will be lane closures. **It is absolutely imperative that this is not done during retail business hours (6:00 am- 9:00 pm).** The traffic has difficult time going through Lexington with four lanes. Closing lanes during these said hours will cause major havoc. These traffic improvements should not be implemented at the expense of the businesses.*

*2) If the improvements are not conducted in a time sensitive manner, it will eliminate businesses. The economic impact would be devastating. Just in our shopping center alone, we have 17 businesses. **The total employment with all the businesses combined is over 200 people. In these three blocks there will be over 2000 jobs negatively affected.** With the high unemployment rate that we are experiencing right now, the last thing we need to do is eliminate much needed jobs.*

3) If you have lane closures during the retail business hours of 6:00 am-9:00 pm, emergency vehicles will have a difficult time travelling through this area as well. When seconds and minutes count during an emergency, this could be the difference between life or death.

*4) The concrete curb/barrier that is being proposed between the streets on Columbia Ave & West Main St. from Park Rd. to Reed Ave., has been reported that it will increase safety and efficiency. We have done a traffic survey from 2008-2009 and discovered that there are over 38,000 cars a day that pass on this road, which totals 27,740,000 cars in two years. **In these past two years of this survey it is reported that there have been only three accidents in these medians. This means that we have had approximately 1 accident per 10,000,00 cars. And by the way in these accidents, there were no reported injuries. I would contend that the safety issue is a non issue.***

The concrete curb/barrier will severely deter traffic from making left hand turns into businesses located on these streets. There are over 40 businesses that are located on this stretch of road. The concrete curb/barrier will have a huge negative economic impact. With this current economy, that will possibly destroy those businesses permanently and hurt healthy businesses as well. Examples of similar cases: Case #1- the Town of Lexington designed and constructed the road improvements on the 100 block of Main Street. The project took over 22 months. The creation of the center median and the "bump outs" at the intersections has not only not improved the traffic flow but has actually made traffic worse than before. During construction businesses suffered severe loss and in some cases did not even survive through the construction. Five years later, businesses are hesitant to locate to downtown Lexington because of the inaccessibility and inadequate infrastructure. Case #2: 24 years ago, the city of Columbia also chose to

install a concrete median in downtown on Main Street. That project also caused such a negative economic impact for downtown Columbia that they ripped out the median and converted the median back into a painted center turn lane. To prevent this from happening in this traffic plan proposal, please eliminate the concrete curb/barrier and replace it with a painted center medium. This would be exactly like all the other streets though-out Lexington. As you may observe, they do not have any concrete curbs in front Wal-Mart or Publix or Target shopping center. Certainly, these intersections have the same if not more traffic than this particular project. An alternative to the medium would be TWLTL (Two Way left Turn Lane), these provide better access and more operational flexibility. Make no mistake, we do appose the center concrete curb.

5) The construction contract between the chosen contractor and DOT should be reviewed and approved by Town Council and our legal department. There needs to be language submitted that protects the ingress and egress of the businesses during regular business hours. In addition, there should be severe liquidated damages for blocking these accesses and for late completion. We must also have one of our own project supervisor (Britt Poole or Stuart Ford) monitor the progress and if needed to correct any shortcomings, mistakes or oversights.

6) For aesthetic improvements we request that all islands and mediums be landscape mediums. These areas should have low lying foliage and seasonal color. It would also be beneficial to add any low growing trees in these areas if possible.

7) We would like to see an additional space allocated for a center turn lane on Old Chapin Road to further help with traffic flow on this road. The two shopping centers facing each other (Lexington Village and the Shoppes At Flight Deck have many cars entering and exiting into this intersection and a larger median would allow safer accessibility.

In conclusion, the safety and well being of the Citizens of Lexington and the safety and well being of the business community of Lexington far outweigh the savings that a contractor may realize by doing construction during the peak hours of these roads. Do this right, insist on total night construction, Eliminate "the concrete curb center medium" and replace it with painted center turn lane medium. Before the Town council adopts the traffic plan, these requirements must be articulated, documented and enforced in the specifications of the DOT Traffic plan. Thanks, Ted"

Randy Halfacre thanked Ted for his comments and noted that this plan is designed to improve a challenging situation.

Ted reiterated that his business depends on impulse traffic. Eliminating the option of making a left turn would make a significant impact on all of the businesses in that area. Susan Ruinen observed that the highest accident risk is associated with left turns into the traffic.

David McGehee commented that as a local resident he usually avoids that area because of the traffic congestion. He felt that the improvements would encourage visits to that area.

Ted used diagrams to point out that Two Way Left Turn Lane medians could be used as an extra lane for left turn traffic.

Liz Carpenter stated that a traffic engineering study determined that based on volume and safety criteria, the median lanes would not be long enough to accommodate two way left turns.

Maro Rogers commented that as a business owner she felt the concrete medians would not serve a good purpose. She offered the example of the median in front of the State Museum on Gervais Street in Columbia which prevents left turns forcing traffic to use Huger Street to enter.

Tim Driggers commented that there were no studies which showed the impact on a business after creating a barrier to left turns. He felt that funding could be obtained for a different traffic plan.

Don Alcorn from Rush's stated his concerns about the possible deterrent a concrete median would be to impulse traffic. He was also concerned about the loss of 17 parking spaces to the right of way acquisition and possible future use of the property in the right of way.

Robert Perry of Riley's Drugs commented on the loss of a building that has been in business since 1947.

Ken Stiverson of Walgreens expressed concerns regarding the concrete median eliminating left turns from Columbia Avenue. Susan Ruinen commented that a left turn signal should be warranted for the intersection of US 1 and US 378 making access to his business easier.

Michelle Walsh-Saboski from The Bistro expressed her disapproval of the concrete median plan.

Wattie Whorton of Yummie Creations questioned the ability of emergency vehicles to cross the concrete median.

Scott Adams reported on research from the Center for Transportation that indicated raised medians did not have a significant economic impact. The Urban Land Institute found most businesses along concrete medians do well with visibility having more impact than the presence of the median. He stated traffic improvements will also improve business. The Lexington Chamber of Commerce supports finding a solution to the problem of the "town with bad traffic".

Johnny Jeffcoat commented from the perspective of a former business owner and conceded that there is pain with progress. He recalled the proposed Lexington by-pass that was proposed and killed by politics. He agreed that something needs to be done to improve the flow of traffic.

Danny Frazier commented that SCDOT should consider any other options to the concrete median but he supported moving forward with the plan.

Ted Stambolitis questioned if U turns would be allowed at intersections. Kati Holland stated that would have to be determined by warrant study. That study could be accelerated.

Susan Ruinen requested that the committee consider the plan again at the next scheduled traffic meeting April 20 at 8:00 am in the Eli Mack Room.

Respectfully submitted by Karen Hanner, Secretary.

Approved By: _____

Susan Ruinen, Chair