

City holds design public hearing for Meadowcreek Parkway interchange

written by Newspark Team | November 1, 2009

Opponents of an interchange that would connect the Meadowcreek Parkway to the Route 250 Bypass and McIntire Road outnumbered supporters at a public hearing held Thursday night. The meeting was the first public hearing on this particular \$32.5 million interchange design, which will elevate Route 250 over McIntire Road and the Parkway.



(Click for a larger image)

The design , which has been developed by the firm RK&K, will utilize a pair of traffic signals on McIntire Road and the Parkway to control access to the bypass. The majority of funding for the project comes from an earmark made by former Senator John Warner (R-VA). The public hearing was facilitated by Becky Clay Christensen, who asked citizens to limit their comments to the design of the interchange, and not the parkway project as a whole.

Supporters of the project included Tim Hulbert of the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce , Bob Hodous, and Charlottesville resident Tobias Stengl. He said he supported the project because it will relieve traffic on Park Street. Charlottesville resident Scott Bandy said the design was not perfect, but he supports the project moving forward.

However, the majority of the 40 people who spoke were opposed to the interchange as well as the Meadowcreek Parkway .

Michael Wolin of the Southern Environmental Law Center said his organization could not support the interchange and called for City Council to approve it only if the parkway is closed to traffic on weekends. Park Street resident A.E. Dick Howard said the project would fit better in Northern Virginia. John Cruickshank of the Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club called the interchange a “monstrosity.”

“This interchange will be as high as a telephone pole, as long as the downtown mall, and will pave over much of the beautiful landscape of McIntire Park,” Cruickshank said.

Former City Council candidate Peter Kleeman said the project would increase the length of time it takes for the Charlottesville Albemarle Rescue Squad (CARS) to respond to calls.



Colette Hall of the North Downtown Residents Association points out the reasons she opposes the interchange

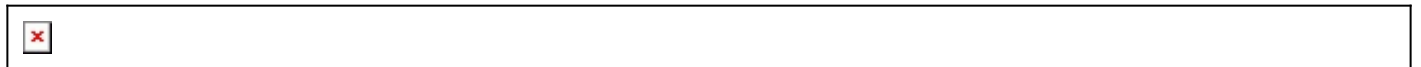
Many of the opponents speaking at the hearing live or work in the immediate vicinity of the interchange. The headmaster of the Covenant School , Ron Sykes, said he is concerned the project will require the removal of many trees on school property, and will limit access to the school. Daniel Bluestone said the design “is nothing short of appalling” because pedestrian and bike paths have been removed in order to cut costs.

Several people took issue with the way the design was rendered for the public hearing. Rich Collins of

Sensible Transportation Alternatives to the Meadowcreek Parkway (STAMP) called the depictions “auto-centric pornography” which does not truly represent the impact the interchange will have. Landscape architect Breck Gastinger pointed out that the drawings depicted mature trees along the median, which will not grow to that size for many years.

Even some supporters of the project were not happy with the design. Anton Largiader of Charlottesville said he would have preferred the roundabout alternative that was recommended by the project’s steering committee.

Many opponents of the project were concerned that the road was being built for the primary benefit of Albemarle County. John Pfaltz blamed City Council for not doing enough to push Albemarle County to build an eastern connector. Charlottesville resident Mark Cabot said growth on Pantops is driving the need for the interchange, and that it is not fair for a road to be built through the heart of Charlottesville when Albemarle County will not support either a western or eastern bypass.



Several former City Councilors were on hand to express their opinion about a project that some helped to get off the drawing board. Former Mayor Virginia Daugherty said she still supports the project, and prefers the traffic signal to the oval roundabout that was recommended by the project’s steering committee because it will be easier for pedestrians to cross. She told the opponents that the parkway is a two-lane street, and that the parkland that will be removed will be replaced.

However, fellow former Mayors Nancy O’Brien and Francis Fife spoke out against the project. Former City Councilor John Conover, who served on the steering committee, said that the project has gotten worse over time as pedestrian paths have been removed the project to save costs.

Citizens have the opportunity to submit written comments through the project’s website through November 9.

A summary of the public comments will be presented to City Council at a November 16 meeting. A memorandum of understanding regarding the mitigations that will have to be performed in order to satisfy federal regulations has not yet been signed. Other steps remaining include approval by the Commonwealth Transportation Board as well as the final federal regulatory approvals. If those are granted, the Virginia Department of Transportation will begin purchasing right of way, with an advertisement for construction bids estimated for early 2011. The project is expected to be completed by late 2013.

TIMELINE FOR PODCAST: