

Citizens' Forum – Newell-South Neighborhood Improvement Project

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At the June 27 Citizen's Forum, residents of the Newell-South neighborhood spoke "for" and "against" the project. This memo is to inform Council of the history and status of the project, and clarify issues brought up at the Citizen's Forum.

Background:

Newell-South NIP is bounded by North Tryon Street, Old Concord Road, and W. Rocky River Road. The Newell-South NIP area includes several smaller neighborhoods: Autumnwood, Charcon Heights, and Mecklenburg Acres. Autumnwood is the only neighborhood within the NIP area with an organized HOA. Autumnwood HOA has reached out to share information regarding the project with all residents in the project area.

The project proposes sidewalks on Owen Blvd., Gray Dr., Kemp St., Creekstone Pl., Blue Rock Dr., Rockland Dr. and Autumnwood Lane. An overland connector to the future Toby Creek Greenway is proposed on a portion of Rockland Drive. Storm drainage improvements and street trees are also proposed. A map of the project area is attached.

Planning and Design for the Newell-South Neighborhood was included in the 2006 Bonds. Real Estate and Construction is funded with the 2010 Bonds. Newell-South NIP was selected based upon key objectives voiced by the community during the 2002 Newell Area Plan, and consistent with the 2006 Quality of Life Study. These objectives included protecting Newell's environment, creating a bicycle and pedestrian friendly community with safe access to schools, parks, places of worship, UNCC campus, as well as providing effective public transit, and recreational and cultural resources to the area.

Public Involvement:

During the Planning Phase (2007-2008) staff held three public meetings. Residents representing all neighborhoods, within the Newell-South NIP area, including Autumnwood HOA, attended. During the meetings, residents identified and prioritized neighborhood issues which resulted in the creation of five alternatives. The residents voted on which alternative they preferred to see move forward into the design phase. Attendees were given opportunities to review the exhibits and ask questions with project team members throughout the public involvement process.

The Newell-South Project was put on hold for 15 months while awaiting approval of the 2010 bonds. In November 2010, the neighborhood bonds were approved and residents were informed that the Real Estate Acquisition Phase would begin.

Current Status:

A postcard announcing the Real Estate phase was sent in November 2010. This resulted in project opposition, specifically from the Autumnwood HOA.

On March 8, 2011, the project team met with Autumnwood HOA and some residents from other areas of the Newell-South NIP. After the meeting, the project team evaluated petition information provided by Autumnwood HOA. The majority of the opposition seemed to come from residents living on and near Autumnwood Lane. The project team evaluated emails and phone calls, both for and against the project from residents within the entire NIP area. The team considered the high strategic drivers that the Newell Area Plan and the public involvement process had identified, such as safe connectivity to a future transit

corridor and safe connection to the future Toby Creek Greenway extension (item #38 on June 27 agenda). In addition, staff agreed that Autumnwood Lane mainly serves the portion of the neighborhood closer to Old Concord Rd, where there is no existing sidewalk to connect to. Taking all of these things into consideration, the team agreed that the sidewalk along Autumnwood Lane could be eliminated at this time.

The remaining proposed sidewalk within the Newell-South NIP provides an integral connection to the future Toby Creek Greenway, and to the future BLE Transit Corridor. The project team recommends this work remain in the project. If the overland connector on Rockland Dr. is not constructed, the greenway may not come into the neighborhood, but may terminate at a point north of the neighborhood.

On May 3, 2011 the project team and Councilmember Barnes met with the residents. An extensive list of questions was presented to the project team by the residents. Answers were sent via email to the residents. Since then, staff has met face to face on 25 properties to help the property owners understand the specific impacts on their properties. The majority of the concerns have focused on planting strip widths, sidewalk proximity to homes, and tree save. Modifications to planting strip widths have been made to the proposed design to accommodate these concerns where possible.

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To further clarify some specific information that was presented by the residents at the Forum:

- Proposed sidewalks are 5' wide throughout the majority of the neighborhood. There is an area where the proposed sidewalk is 6' wide along Blue Rock Rd, adjacent to a proposed retaining wall. The sidewalk along Rockland varies from 5' to 6.5' due to the proximity and height of a proposed retaining wall. The Toby Creek Greenway overland connector, along the frontage of Ms. Corkhill's property, was originally proposed as 10' wide, and we have reduced it to 8' wide to minimize impacts. Additionally, the County has agreed to relocate Ms. Corkhill's Burford hollies that are currently in the right-of-way and provide the screening that she described in her letter that was read at the Forum on her behalf.
- The proposed retaining wall along Rockland varies up to 6.5' high. The proposed retaining wall along Blue Rock Rd varies up to 3' high. There is only one parcel that the City will acquire right-of-way, at the corner of Rockland and Rocky River. The majority of the proposed improvements are within the City's right-of-way. Where the improvements are outside the right-of-way, a sidewalk utility easements (SUE) will be needed. Temporary construction easements (TCE) will be necessary on most properties.
- We are proposing to fix some minor draining issues, and to grade existing drainage swales and ditches to drain. However, it will be the responsibility of the property owner to continue to maintain these ditches.