



Presentation re 60 Mills Gap Road Apartment Complex Proposal

Asheville City Council Meeting
June 28, 2016

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Process Timeline

- November 19, 2016 - Planning & Zoning first hears matter and expresses concerns with traffic
- December 2015 - Developer revises proposal by dropping commercial outparcels
- January 6, 2016 – Planning & Zoning votes in favor of project with conditions
- February 29 and March 1, 2016 - Developer holds town hall meetings with residents to discuss project
- May 18, 2016 - Residents hold resident-only town hall meeting to discuss project
- June 28, 2016 – City Council considers project

SARBCO/Resident Efforts

- Our goal throughout this process was to objectively analyze the proposal and ensure that the voices of South Asheville residents were heard
- Over 400 individuals signed a letter expressing concern about this project at some time in the process
 - Note that some residents' minds may have changed as the proposal itself changed
 - Many of these same residents emailed Planning & Zoning and City Council members about their concerns
- We set up a group – South Asheville Resident & Business Community Organization – and a webpage at www.sarbco.org that updated residents on the proposed project
- On May 18, 2016, we held a residents-only town hall meeting to discuss the project
- Based on feedback we received from the town hall meeting as well as conversations we have had with residents, it seems that most residents fall into three categories

3 Groups of Resident Thought

Group 1: Not Until Sweeten Creek Road is Widened

- Some residents oppose the project because they do not believe that the current road infrastructure can support another apartment complex
 - Traffic routinely backs up at this intersection, particularly during the PM rush
- They point to the fact that South Asheville is in the midst of an apartment boom, with the full effects of that future traffic not yet felt, and that the Sweeten Creek Road and Mills Gap Road intersection is already over capacity
- They also note that a lot of undeveloped land along Sweeten Creek and Mills Gap Road can be developed by right with several parcels already for sale
- Most residents in this group do not appear to be opposed to apartments at that site *per se*, but do not believe that this is the right time for this project

Sweeten Creek Road Widening Timeline

Project #U-2801A

- Summer 2016 – External Scoping Meeting
 - Meeting purpose is to discuss purpose and need statement for project; public is not invited. City Transportation Department staff member will attend
- Fall 2016 – Public Meeting
- 2019 - Environmental Assessment (EA) Approval
- 2020 – Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) Approval
 - A FONSI is issued when environmental analysis and interagency review during the EA process find a project to have no significant impact on the quality of the environment
- 2020 – Right of Way Acquisition
- 2022 – Construction (letting of contract)
- *2024 – Assuming two years to complete construction*

Information above, except 2024 (in italics), provided by City Transportation Department. 2024 was our estimate to provide some idea of likely completion date if the rest of the schedule held.

Group 2: Use Site as Park or Community Center

- Another group of residents shares similar concerns to the first group, but would like to see the City acquire this parcel and place either a community center or a park on it
- They note that while the City overall has 54 parks and 11 community centers, South Asheville only has 2 parks and 1 community center

Group 3: Permit Project, but Add Two Additional Conditions to Address Traffic

- While not excited about more development, a third group of residents feels that this site will not sit vacant and that a residential apartment complex would have a lower impact on traffic than other likely uses
 - Developers not affiliated with this project have told us that this site could be used for a shopping center or other retail/commercial uses which would create more traffic
- These residents would like to keep this corridor mostly residential given all the commercial activity on Hendersonville Road
- This group, however, has concerns that the developer's proposed improvements as agreed to at P&Z do not fully mitigate the increased traffic from the site and want the following two changes to the conditions approved at P&Z:
 - 1. Extend new right-hand turn lane on Mills Gap Road to have over 200 feet of storage, rather than initially proposed 100 feet
 - 2. Complete traffic improvements at beginning of project

Group 3: Permit Project, but Add Two Additional Conditions to Address Traffic

- This group's rationale for its position is as follows:
 - The traffic improvements, particularly the addition of a new right hand turn lane on Mills Gap Road, should improve traffic flow at the intersection. We have little hope that NCDOT would make this improvement on its own
 - Given that this site will not sit vacant, an apartment complex which will not come on-line until 2020, would have a lower impact on traffic than other likely uses
 - Assuming that the NCDOT timeline holds, Sweeten Creek widening would be complete around 2024. The apartment complex would be complete in 2020, meaning that there would be approximately 4 years between the opening of the complex and the completion of the widening
 - The pedestrian amenities – particularly the signal heads/crosswalks and the extension of the sidewalk along Mills Gap Road across the railroad tracks – would likely not happen any time soon if NCDOT would have to make these improvements

Conclusion

- Thank you to Council Members, Planning & Zoning members, and City Staff for the significant assistance and time that they dedicated to this difficult issue. Regardless of the outcome, residents of South Asheville should know that their concerns were taken very seriously and that Council Members and City Staff went out of their way to listen
- This process highlights the need for residents, the City, the County and NCDOT to address this intersection and infrastructure and comprehensive planning generally in the South Asheville area
 - This will become particularly important as planning for the Sweeten Creek Road widening project begins
 - A group of communities along the Sweeten Creek corridor has already organized into a group called the Sweeten Creek Association of Neighborhoods (SCAN)