



MINUTES
Board of Commissioners Monthly Workshop
Monday, June 26, 2006 – 7:30 p.m.

6:00 PM Churton Street Corridor Plan Open House.

The Churton Street Corridor Committee hosted an open house to meet with interested citizens about the draft corridor plan.

PRESENT: Mayor Tom Stevens, Commissioners Brian Lowen, Frances Dancy, Evelyn Lloyd, Michael Gering, and L. Eric Hallman.

STAFF PRESENT: Town Manager Eric Peterson, Assistant Town Manager/Public Works Director Demetric Potts, Finance Director Greg Siler, Town Clerk/Personnel Officer Donna Armbrister, and Planning Director Margaret Hauth.

1. Open the Workshop

7:31:21 PM Mayor Stevens called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

2. Agenda Changes & Agenda Approval

Mayor Stevens called for changes or additions to the agenda, and none were forthcoming.

7:31:39 PM Upon a motion by Commissioner Dancy, seconded by Commissioner Hallman, the Board moved to approve the agenda by a vote of 5-0. The motion was declared passed.

3. Committee Updates and Reports

7:32:03 PM Commissioner Dancy noted the Tourism Board had met and included additional meetings on its schedule to work on several issues.

7:32:43 PM Commissioner Lloyd said she had attended a Fire Department meeting where the issue of radio frequencies were discussed. Town Manager Eric Peterson noted he had been assured that a radio frequency had been set aside for the Hillsborough Fire Department on the 800 megahertz system. He said there were three such frequencies available for rural fire departments.

7:33:40 PM Commissioner Lloyd said the Historic District Commission had heard a presentation from the County regarding the Government Services building. She said the Commission had expressed concerns about the somewhat extensive use of glass. She said she

believed the architects and designers should work with the Commission to address the issues raised.

[7:34:50 PM](#) Commissioner Lowen said he had attended a somewhat lengthy meeting of the Solid Waste Advisory Board and received a presentation by the consultant on what to expect when the landfill closed. He said the suggestion made by the consultant was not well received by a majority of the Board, which included ways to encourage people to recycle. Commissioner Lowen said they were looking at the possibility of having the consultant come back again, or even hiring another consultant.

Commissioner Hallman said Commissioner Lowen had said he would take to the SWAB this Board's recommendation that cardboard be picked up. Commissioner Lowen said he had submitted that recommendation to them.

[7:36:32 PM](#) Mayor Stevens said he had attended the celebration of the new Hillsborough Heights Park, dedicated last Tuesday. He thanked Town staff and members of the Parks and Recreation Board for their hard work. Mayor Stevens said Saturday's Fairview Family Day was also a tremendous event that was well attended by more than 350 people.

4. End of year encumbrances and budget amendments.

[7:38:25 PM](#) Mr. Peterson noted there were year-end budget amendments for 2005-2006, year-end project encumbrances for 2005-2006, and year-end purchase order encumbrances for 2005-2006 under consideration for approval tonight.

[7:39:02 PM](#) Finance Director Greg Siler noted that each of the three items needed separate approval. He said because they update daily, he had provided the Board with the most recent line-item changes. Mr. Siler stated that the Police Department received a percentage of "drug bust" money back, and that had been included in the line item.

[7:40:12 PM](#) Upon a motion by Commissioner Gering, seconded by Commissioner Hallman, the Board moved to approve the year-end budget amendments for 2005-2006 by a vote of 5-0. The motion was declared passed.

[7:40:38 PM](#) Upon a motion by Commissioner Dancy, seconded by Commissioner Lowen, the Board moved to approve the year-end project encumbrances for 2005-2006 by a vote of 5-0. The motion was declared passed.

[7:40:59 PM](#) Upon a motion by Commissioner Dancy, seconded by Commissioner Hallman, the Board moved to approve the year-end purchase order encumbrances for 2005-2006 by a vote of 5-0. The motion was declared passed.

5. Presentation of Churton Street Corridor Plan.

7:41:27 PM Planning Director Margaret Hauth provided a PowerPoint Slide Show Presentation regarding the proposed Churton Street Corridor Plan. She noted the Tourism Board had been working about 18 months on the Plan, with participation from the Planning Board, the Town Board, and the Board of Adjustment, as well as the Chamber of Commerce, members of the Orange County Planning Staff, and the consultants who had performed the majority of the work. Ms. Hauth noted that the corridor was about 4.5 miles, and they had focused primarily on properties that fronted the corridor with a few exceptions. She made the following comments highlighting the slide show presentation:

We envision a future where Hillsborough is an innovative, future-focused town that daily celebrates its diverse and storied heritage. Recognizing the important role Churton Street plays in the civic, cultural and economic life of Hillsborough, this Plan's mission is to improve the appearance and economic vitality of the Churton Street Corridor, to protect and celebrate the diverse historic and cultural identity of the town, to promote environmental stewardship, and to encourage and support an active lifestyle.

We began in January of 2005 with workshops and open houses, and continued into the spring with visual preference surveys of what people wanted. The strengths that resulted from the workshops on North Churton Street were:

- the Town Hall,
- the view of the Town,
- the blend of commercial and residential uses,
- existing retail and services,
- the convenient shopping of North Hills,
- opportunities for landscaping,
- good traffic flow,
- redevelopment of Sinclair Station,
- the good mix of businesses,
- the potential for development and redevelopment, and
- pending new development.

Weaknesses noted in the corridor were:

- signage clutter,
- looks cheap,
- looks run-down; ugly; out of character with Hillsborough,
- needs more redevelopment; high vacancy rate,
- hodge-podge architecture,
- no standard of quality for buildings,
- junkyard and abandoned property at Town entrance,
- needs curb and gutter,
- lack of continuous sidewalks,
- too many curb cuts,

- turn lanes too short,
- no parks/landscaping/trees, and
- lack of commitment to landscape maintenance.

On South Churton Street, strengths were noted as

- good view into Town from 86/70 stoplight,
- Eno River,
- improved traffic flow,
- banners,
- transition zone, from historic downtown to new commercial zone,
- trees and greenery,
- good destination for retail/antiques,
- Daniel Boone Village has character, yet not cohesive,
- retail mix,
- cluster of restaurants, and
- accessibility.

Weaknesses on South Churton Street were:

- clutter of power lines,
- too many, uncoordinated signs that created clutter,
- not enough directional signs from I-40,
- traffic congestion,
- looks like a highway – not a city street,
- ac-hoc road widening/turn lanes,
- dated shopping centers,
- need something to pull people into Town,
- “Welcome” signs does not stand out,
- commercial lots need design that’s more in keeping with Hillsborough and better landscaping, and
- no turn lane at 70A, resulting in traffic backup.

Workshop solutions fell into a number of categories, including promoting business viability/economic development, landscaping/parks and gateways, streetscapes, signage, architectural design/building design, and Code enforcement.

They focused on the top nine issues:

1. Emphasize walkability, pedestrian safety, and trail links throughout the corridor.
2. Bury utility lines.
3. Develop strategies for managing traffic flow and congestion along Churton Street.
4. Reduce sign clutter.

5. Develop and implement clear building design and sign guidelines that emphasize local design cues over corporate identities.
6. Make landscaping a prominent component of Churton Street roadway and streetscape design.
7. Ensure proper maintenance of landscapes.
8. Plan for the redevelopment of existing commercial development.
9. Provide public transportation links between Chapel Hill and Hillsborough, which we now have with the new TTA route.

This Plan picked up three of those items: the transportation improvements, signs, and corridor revitalization. The area was divided into four districts: Waterstone, Churton South, Historic District, and Churton North. The transportation goal is to pursue roadway improvements along the corridor that will manage traffic flow, incorporate pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and provide an attractive streetscape.

Transportation objectives are to decrease traffic congestion (stop & go traffic), increase street safety for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, slow traffic speeds, and create a pleasant streetscape that will attract people and new commerce. Key recommendations were:

- boulevard treatment with planted median, where feasible,
- minimize curb cuts,
- minimize traffic signals, left turns,
- incorporate striped bike lanes where feasible,
- continuous sidewalks along corridor,
- corner and mid-block crosswalks with contrasting pavers,
- improved landscaping at street edges, and
- replace overhead utility wires with underground utilities and decorative light poles.

They were predicting three roundabout locations: Churton Street south of 85 interchange, at Orange Grove Road extension, and one at 86/57. No changes were proposed in the downtown area beyond what was already contained in the Streetscape Plan from several years ago. For North Churton Street, they were reintroducing a planted median with one lane in each direction, as traffic did not warrant additional lanes.

Regarding signage, the public's top priorities were:

1. Signs should reflect Hillsborough.
2. Update sign ordinance.
3. Make sign enforcement a priority/remove temporary signs.
4. Develop Town-scale wayfinding/sign directories in shopping centers.
5. Height of signs should be addressed.
6. Develop better or consolidated signage for (older shopping centers).

Signage plan objectives were:

- To enhance the visitors experience in Hillsborough by improving the signage along the Churton Street Corridor in a way that makes reaching desired destinations simpler.
- To develop a coordinated system of signage that minimizes the number and types of signs necessary to easily find destinations.

Signage plan objectives were:

- To improve the aesthetic appeal of the corridor by decreasing sign clutter and allowing the natural beauty of Hillsborough become the dominant characteristic of the corridor.
- To increase the effectiveness of signs by creating an environment with a more streamlined, predictable appearance

Key recommendations for signage were:

- Way-finding System: Establish a coordinated way-finding system that helps the user find their destination and understand where they are in the system.
- Commercial Signage Plan: Plan for and implement low-key commercial signage along the corridor that reinforces Hillsborough's identity and the concept of place-making.
- Highway Guide Signage: Work with NCDOT to replace and relocate when necessary outdated and excessive highway directional signage.

The Way-Finding system would develop a coordinated system of directional signage that:

- Will be readily identifiable with Hillsborough.
- Exhibit common characteristics that will help create a brand for Hillsborough.
- Include new community gateway signs that welcome visitors to Hillsborough and reflect the unique character of Hillsborough.
- Incorporates trailblazer signs that reinforce place-making by directing visitors to major attractions and shopping districts.
- Customizes street-level signage to orient the visitor to their location.
- Places public parking signs and pedestrian level signage so that they work together to make public parking easy to find and then provides more detailed information to help them find their specific destination.

Corridor revitalization recommendations were:

- Future Development Patterns: Identify future development and redevelopment opportunities along the corridor. Consider future land uses that will break up the existing pattern of commercial strip development.
- Districts: Establish distinct district identities for portions of Churton Street with discernable edges and functions.

- Gateways: Develop improved gateways that provide attractive, entranceways that reflect the identity of Hillsborough.

Areas ripe for redevelopment include the Daniel Boone area, some of the areas around the Old Mill Business Park, the North Hills Shopping Center. Areas subject for redevelopment at some point were Waterstone and Churton South.

Next steps include a public hearing scheduled on July 25, and an implementation packet included with the Board's agenda materials for September. We want to integrate this with the Strategic Growth Plan and the ordinance rewrite coming soon.

[7:57:29 PM](#) Commissioner Hallman asked what NCDOT's current thinking was regarding roundabouts. Ms. Hauth responded they were using them in certain locations when particular criterion was met. She said she would contact NCDOT and make sure that this was a viable option.

[7:58:39 PM](#) Commissioner Hallman asked if NCDOT was constructing two-lane roundabouts. Ms. Hauth said she was not aware of any, but by the time they were ready for construction they may be more acceptable. She noted that roundabouts had a number of benefits, including the ease of mowing a roundabout as opposed to maintaining a traffic light.

[8:00:06 PM](#) Mayor Stevens said it was helpful to talk about the functionality of roundabouts and not just the aesthetics. Ms. Hauth said that left turns slow down traffic if you don't have a center turn lane, so by installing roundabouts you have to travel a little further but you would not be conflicting with anyone so your potential for an accident was very limited.

[8:00:50 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said it was a huge gain for pedestrians in terms of safety, since they would only have to look in one direction.

[8:01:10 PM](#) Commissioner Lowen said left turns caused traffic problems in many areas, particularly in the Hardees/Wendy's area, and asked what was envisioned to help solve that, such as service roads. Ms. Hauth replied this Plan did not include service roads, but they would be encouraged as properties came in for redevelopment. She said they were not interested in the service road concept at this time because they had the potential to take out a lot of existing businesses.

[8:02:00 PM](#) Commissioner Lowen noted that area was dangerous, and he encouraged his family to always turn right and travel farther down the street and turn around if necessary. He said he looked forward to solving the traffic problems in that section of Town.

[8:02:41 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said another advantage of a roundabout was that traffic would move slower and was not stop-and-go, and more cars could be pushed through.

[8:02:53 PM](#) Commissioner Lowen asked if the roundabout proposed near McDonald's would encompass the entrance and exits onto 85. Ms. Hauth responded it would encompass the ramps

but not at Cardinal Drive or the entrance to McDonald's. She said she did not believe the intent of the roundabout was to catch the driveway at McDonald's, but for the ramps onto and off of 85. Ms. Hauth said these were still concepts, and these types of issues would be taken into consideration as the Plan moved forward.

[8:04:04 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said one thing that had struck him about commercial signage was that it could be done in a way that involved the stakeholders, and provide some level of incentives, and do it quickly. He said you could achieve a dramatic effect within a short period of time, and it had worked well in other municipalities. Ms. Hauth explained the types of signs that were possibilities for business use. She said signs served two purposes: where you trying to help people who already knew you were located there, or were you trying to grab the passerby and get them to stop at your business. Ms. Hauth said there was a big difference between the purposes of those two signs, and how big they needed to be. She said much of the Plan was getting people at the right speed so they could interact with what the signs were trying to convey.

[8:07:17 PM](#) Mayor Stevens said you also had to have a level playing field. He said you don't need a huge sign if everyone's sign as at a reasonable height and a reasonable size. Mayor Stevens said a cooperative effort would enhance everyone's business and ultimately created more investment in the aesthetics of it. Ms. Hauth said it was a matter of basically establishing an identity for the different areas

[8:08:34 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said if commercial signs were placed lower than the way-finding signs, then the way-finding signs would become the most prominent ones. Ms. Hauth agreed.

[8:08:52 PM](#) Commissioner Lowen said regarding fast food restaurant signs, he had been many places where such signs were placed low and of a reasonable size. He said people had no trouble finding them, noting that DOT placed signs on the highways to let you know that upcoming exits had such restaurants available.

[8:09:59 PM](#) Commissioner Dancy asked during this process, what was the perceived financial impact, noting that signage was one thing she believed could be pushed forward. She said signs would probably be the most dramatic change as you enter Hillsborough. Ms. Hauth responded that there were funds included in the new budget to begin working with a company to begin the public process.

[8:11:14 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said initial estimates were based on someone else's experience, where \$15,000 would begin the planning where we would hire a consultant who would help us figure out what we wanted to express, and work with the community and the stakeholders to develop a system from a conceptual point of view. He said \$15,000 was included in the new budget, and Mr. Peterson was forecasting \$15,000 Year #2 (FY08) of the Financial Plan..

[8:12:07 PM](#) Commissioner Dancy said we needed to bring Waterstone in so they would know what the concept would be, and that the area would be a starting point for this Plan. She said it was important that they not get ahead of the Town by installing signs before we were ready.

[8:12:55 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said this was why we needed to move forward with design guidelines. He said these were public signs that would be in the public right-of-way. He said with private signs, our design guidelines could regulate them and make sure they were in harmony. Commissioner Dancy agreed, noting that Waterstone's signs would be ready to go up before we even get started with pulling up signs.

[8:13:17 PM](#) Commissioner Gering stated this was important, because if we were going to revise the sign guidelines in six months to say you could not build signs higher than six feet tall, then people needed to know that. He said that was an incentive to get people involved, especially stakeholders with had a financial interest.

[8:14:12 PM](#) Mayor Stevens said that raised a question on how much more outreach we needed to be doing in our next steps. Ms. Hauth said she had made this same presentation to the Chamber of Commerce a month ago, and they had mailed notices and copies of the plan to the larger property owners in the corridor along with potential next steps. She said that all of the property owners in the corridor received a post card notice of tonight's meeting. Ms. Hauth said short of individually calling them and setting a time to sit down with each of them, they had tried to bring them in as much as possible.

She noted that over the past several years business owners in the corridor who were not on the street had expressed an interest in different signage, so hopefully we will find a way to accommodate them in a way that would not require many directional signs to redirect traffic. She said she hoped a different system would accommodate that.

[8:15:46 PM](#) Responding to a comment by Mayor Stevens, Ms. Hauth said the student designers had broken the corridor up into four or five pieces, and attempted to define a character for each one. She said they could work to more closely identify those areas, so that directional signs could point people to particular areas, such as Churton South. Mayor Stevens said that had struck him as a good idea.

[8:17:00 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said as we started to develop Cornelius/70 Plan there were many elements here that would fit naturally in that plan. He said it defined one or two additional districts. He asked how Ms. Hauth saw the Strategic Growth Plan in comparison to what this Plan had done so far. Ms. Hauth said this Plan was more of a close-up plan or finer grade than the Strategic Growth Plan, which was further removed. She said this could inform the Strategic Growth Plan in terms that we were saying that the Churton Street corridor was the most important to economic vitality and other things. Ms. Hauth said we could feed that into the overall strategic plan and make sure the recommendations that came out of that support these redevelopment proposals and make sure they don't work at cross-purposes. She said some of the good ideas from the Churton Plan could be applied Town-wide.

[8:18:34 PM](#) Commissioner Gering asked if the Strategic Growth Plan included concepts like overlay districts that should be applied to particular areas. Ms. Hauth said it was possible, noting that overlay could sometimes be convoluted to implement and she was looking to see if there were ways to do with without an overlay district but still accomplish the same goal.

[8:19:15 PM](#) Commissioner Gering wondered how some elements of this Plan related to the Strategic Growth Plan, such as the appropriation of a business interest district. Ms. Hauth said she would need to study exactly what a business improvement area would be.

[8:19:44 PM](#) Jody Kovach with DCA stated one thing in terms of coordinating with the Strategic Growth Plan that would be critical for the Town to look at was to flesh out some of the land use priorities along the corridor. She said as the Town looked more broadly at land use Town-wide some of the transportation and signage objectives could be incorporated along with re-examining land use along the corridor. Ms. Kovach said that was one of the key connections between this Plan and the Strategic Growth Plan.

[8:20:59 PM](#) Ms. Hauth reiterated that the Plan was still a draft, and noted there was a lot of detail on the drawings. She said the larger drawings were easier to read, and would be available in her office if any of the Board members wanted to take a look at them. Ms. Hauth noted they were posted on the Town's website as well.

[8:21:39 PM](#) Commissioner Gering asked if there was anything the Town Board could do to facilitate moving this Plan along. Ms. Hauth replied part of it would be an item on the July agenda to talk about some general organizational issues. She said one issue was that of staffing highlighted by Clarion, and asked the Board to have an open mind to changes in the way things were presently done.

[8:22:31 PM](#) Commissioner Gering said he would do that, and was excited about the inception of this Plan and could see it beginning to take root. Ms. Hauth said the work to date was impressive and this Plan could really change and improve how we live everyday.

[8:23:11 PM](#) Mayor Stevens commended the work that had been done by all of the staff, volunteers and others. He said the Board had a lot to work with here, and commended the efforts to bring the public into the process. He said he looked forward to the continued work on the Plan.

6. Other

No other business.

7. Adjourn

[8:24:55 PM](#) Upon a motion by Commissioner Dancy, seconded by Commissioner Gering, the Board moved to adjourn the meeting by a vote of 5-0. The motion was declared passed.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna F. Armbrister, CMC
Town Clerk