

# Rural Area Plan: Public Comments

7/29/16

*This second report includes further information based on additional research, Board of Commissioners input, discussion, and comments that occurred since the initial report was released 7/8/16. Responses are provided for each comment or question to clarify context and resolution.*

*\*Abbreviations are used as follows: Rural Area Plan (RAP); Davidson Planning Ordinance (DPO).*

## I. MOBILITY/CONNECTIVITY

### STREET CONNECTIONS

#### 1. Street Network/Conceptual Roads:

- a. **Abersham Connection:** Is the RAP suggesting a vehicular connection to Abersham Park in lieu of going through Fisher Farm?

Response: Yes. A connection through Fisher Farm is not generally supported, and it is believed that this would be a challenging alignment given the park's topography. The direct reference to this connection will be removed. But the importance of select east-west vehicular connections west of the West Branch of the Rocky River heading east to Shearer Rd. will be emphasized.

Additionally, the plan will recommend consideration of a connection from the west to and through Allison Farm Regional Park (i.e. Abersham) since the road network in this park already exists and extends nearly down to the West Branch of the Rocky River. Considering the possibility of the Boehmler tract developing, this seems like a suitable alternative.

Yes, Meck. Parks & Rec. would need to agree to this connection. The current director, Jim Garges, is not in favor of roads through parks. As the RAP outlines, there are ways to manage such connections – as examples across the nation illustrate. The RAP recommends this connection for the following reasons:

- Due to the importance of establishing connectivity via a network of smaller roads rather than a few large roads as the area develops, to help retain rural character;
- Because the road network at Abersham already exists and, as a result, presents less challenging topography to overcome or detriment to the park by allowing east-west vehicular access when compared to Fisher Farm;
- In order to provide greater park access for all Davidson citizens;
- And, because the RAP looks beyond the tenure of any one Parks & Rec. director.

- b. **Garmon:** Can we connect across West Branch through the Garmon property at some point for more connectivity?

Response: As noted above, the plan will be revised to emphasize east-west/north-south connectivity through the West Branch corridor. This could include a vehicular connection from the Garmon property, but given that property's location so close to the East Rocky River/Shearer Rd. intersection, the benefits of an east-west connection across the West Branch to East Rocky River Rd. are less significant than a connection further north on Shearer Rd. that eventually ties to the Barger Roundabout.

2. **Davidson Bypass:** Is there a route planned around the college to link the north connection through Barger farm to Presbyterian Road?

Response: Yes. The RAP changes the alignment. Previous plans identified a connection through the Davidson College Ecological Preserve and adjacent lands; this plan does not support that connection. Instead, the RAP shows a more or less north-south alignment from the Barger Node/Roundabout to Presbyterian Road (Pg. 56).

3. **Shearer Road:**

- a. **Three-Lane Section:** Confusion exists regarding the proposed three-lane cross-section: Why is this in the plan? Would a median help?

Response: The Town of Davidson does not prefer the three-lane cross-section; the RAP explicitly states that this cross-section is only to be used at intersections – “Action Item 14: Maintain Shearer Rd. as a two-lane road with widening for intersection turn lanes only” (Pg. 61). The proposed turn lane is not continuous.

Furthermore, it’s important to include this section as an alternative in the RAP because Shearer Rd. is an NCDOT roadway, which means Davidson has less control over the roadway design. Therefore, the plan makes this cross-section available for targeted application at specific intersections where NCDOT would otherwise propose its own design, which may not be congruent with the Town’s approach to connectivity and roadway design (i.e. more smaller streets that disperse traffic and enhance neighborhood character rather than fewer larger streets that lead to more congestion). Simply put, it’s a safeguard against incompatible street types that would threaten Shearer Road’s rural character. The Action Item title will be revised to read “...widening for *select* intersection turn lanes only.”

Proposing a two-lane, median-divided road requires more right-of-way that currently does not exist and will result in a larger, more expensive streetscape that could lessen the existing road’s narrower, rural character.

- b. **Improvements:** How do we get Shearer improved with so little development opportunity along that road?

Response: As an NCDOT road, road improvements will be handled by this entity or developers. The Town can work with these groups on sections proposed for improvement to realize the envisioned cross-section, including the multi-use path. Funding for that component would likely need to come from the Town if private development was not involved. The RAP focuses its recommendations for Town-allocated funding of multi-use paths on the Grey and East Rocky River Rd. (ERR) corridors rather than Shearer Rd. for two reasons: 1. Citizen feedback during the charrette focused on Grey/ERR connections into Town; and, 2. The West Branch Greenway will serve as the main non-motorized north-south pathway, as an alternative to Shearer, until development does contribute to the construction of facilities along Shearer Rd.

4. **East Rocky River Road (ERR):**

- a. **Scenic Designation:** Disagreement exists over whether this road should receive the Scenic Overlay District designation and, if not, then what cross section is appropriate.

Response: After further research and consultation with the NC Scenic Byways program it is not recommended that the Scenic Overlay District be applied to ERR. ERR differs from Grey and Shearer in the amount of development it features, particularly on the south side of its roadway (both in terms of development along the road and that which is visible from the road).

- **Setbacks:** In November 2015 a sample of setbacks along Grey Rd. found that the minimum front setback distance was 51', the average was 144', and half of the homes in the sample exceed 150' (Shearer Rd., though not studied in detailed, appeared to have an even greater average). In contrast, many of the homes existing on the south side of ERR are sited relatively close to the road (25'-50'), which yields different results – including overall sense of character and ability to offer scenic vistas.
- **Adjacent Development/Coherence:** Moreover, the amount of development visible from these roadways differs. In particular, the views off of ERR's south side include River Run, Bradford, etc. – large scale developments that are not consistent with reinforcing rural character. The NC Scenic Byways program, which was re-contacted as a result of public feedback for further discussion about these criteria, noted that consideration for a scenic corridor involves the relatedness of resources along a roadway rather than the presence of isolated scenic, historic, recreational, or other elements. The RAP's recommended Scenic Overlay District applies to an already-existing designation or represents an extension of this designation along a previously-designated corridor.

In the event that ERR receives an NC Scenic Byway designation in the future, the application of TOD's Scenic Overlay District to this corridor could be reconsidered.

- b. Cross-Section:** What is the envisioned cross-section for ERR, esp. if a scenic designation is not applied?

Response: Regarding the road's cross-section, the RAP illustrates the current cross-section with the addition of the multi-use path (pg. 55). Although the example doesn't appear as an illustrated cross-section, the image is sufficient to depict the envisioned cross-section: Retaining the same street section and travel lanes.

- c. Future Development Connections:** What will future development frontage and connections look like on ERR?

Response: Future development along this corridor need not consist of many additional road cuts – driveways are provided for existing individual lots, which could be combined with larger parcels for new development opportunities/access, and stubbed connections from surrounding subdivisions such as Bradford and River Run will provide sufficient links to meet ordinance connectivity requirements other than on ERR. As noted above, many of the homes existing on the south side of ERR are sited relatively close to the road (25-50'), so if new development elects to front homes along this road, precedent exists for such fronting at relatively close distances. This is in contrast to Grey and Shearer Roads, where most homes are sited further back. Again, this is applicable only if/when properties (re)develop.

## GREENWAYS

- 5. Greenways:** Can additional places for greenways outside of the floodplain areas be identified as part of this plan?

Response: Action Item 9 identifies new trails, many of which do not occur in floodplain areas (pg. 57).

- 6. Grey Road Greenway:** A greenway along Grey from Concord Rd. to Abersham would be of great benefit, but we're not going to get that through development so what is the mechanism to fund it?

Response: Action Item 9 prioritizes various pathways for funding, including Grey Road (pg. 57). As noted in the comment, funding outside of the development process is not readily available. Such

funding would need to come through a Board of Commissioners decision to offer a bond, project-financing, etc. Staff is considering modifying the RAP to include a greenway fund as part of the development requirements for properties within the Grey Rd. corridor Scenic Overlay District.

## *JUNE WASHAM ROAD*

7. **Street Profile:** Is June Washam Rd. intended to have a suburban street profile? How will this affect its rural character?

Response: Comment #8 in the Public Comment Report noted that a three-way intersection is proposed as part of the Washam tract development; it also noted that citizens have successfully petitioned for the designation of June Washam Rd. to be classified by NCDOT as a neighborhood street, which would allow traffic calming devices (yet to be secured). The RAP does not comment on these changes and the response in the Public Comment Report explains that development adjacent to June Washam Rd. that will connect to this road will feature streets that are in keeping with the DPO requirements, which are designed to reduce speeding. The RAP does not address June Washam Rd. as the on-going development of River Run Phase 5 and the potential development of the Washam and Ballard tracts likely put this road's future rural character in question.

## II. OPEN SPACE/LANDSCAPE

8. **Hunter/Smith/Whisnant Tract:** If this is in Cornelius' jurisdiction then why is it Davidson's RAP?

Response: As noted in Comment #13 in the Public Comment Report, it's a property immediately adjacent to Davidson's ETJ (at the end of Pine Rd.) that has the potential to impact the Town's – and adjacent communities' – access to contiguous open space. In the same way that the plan notes potential historic properties in an inventory for informational purposes, this plan identifies select, key parcels abutting Davidson that may further the aims espoused in the RAP.

9. **Viewsheds:** In exchange for significant development rights the Town should require viewsheds.

Response: Staff recognizes the importance of viewsheds – this is an issue that was mentioned by various participants throughout the charrette and RAP meetings. Comments about viewsheds ranged from roadways to trails and open spaces. Initially, the RAP addressed viewsheds through the application of a Scenic Overlay District to Grey and Shearer Roads. However, comments have stressed the need for viewshed consideration within the development process. This is a practice incorporated into various development proposals on a case-by-case basis. Given that the entire Rural Study Area is believed by RAP participants to have intrinsic viewshed value, it is reasonable to integrate this practice into the development process for parcels within the Rural Study Area.

Staff proposes that the RAP be modified to acknowledge viewshed consideration as a specific Action Item. Correspondingly, the Action Item will recommend revision of the DPO to include viewshed consideration as part of the required Environmental Inventory that accompanies each Master Plan (DPO 14.15.1). Because this is already an existing documentation requirement, this allows an important RAP issue (viewsheds) to be integrated into the existing planning process. This would apply only to properties located within the Rural Study Area.

### III. MASTER PLAN

**10. Historic Resources:** How were historic resources identified? How was it determined what was significant historically and what was not? How should we use the inventory?

Response: The resources were identified by working with individual landowners and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Landmarks Commission to create an inventory of potential resources. The inventory will be used as development comes forward for particular sites, to evaluate historic resources on a case-by-case basis. The RAP will be revised to include this inventory within the plan's Implementation section; a note cross-referencing the RAP's inventory can be added to the DPO in the Rural Planning Area standards so that the inventory can be checked for informational purposes as planners and landowners consider site development opportunities.

**11. Open Space/Greenway/Farm Preservation Incentives:** We have mechanisms to incentivize farms, greenways, etc. and we should incorporate them into the plan.

Response: Comments #17 and #28 in the Public Comment Report addressed this comment directly, proposing specific criteria within the RAP/DPO to incentivize these things.

**12. Framework:** We can apply the Narrow Passage model and move it westward rather than take the McConnell/Village model and move it eastward.

Response: It is not believed that repeating the Narrow Passage model throughout a great extent of the study area would be conducive to achieving the RAP's aims or the Davidson Comprehensive Plan's Livability Themes: Improved connectivity, a variety of housing types, fiscally-positive projects, and development opportunities that afford a range of densities to meet a demographically-changing landscape. As noted on RAP Pg. 9, the Town's 2014 Cost of Fiscal Land Use Impact Analysis illustrated how compact, walkable neighborhood forms that provide a variety of uses, housing types, and mobility options continue to outperform lower density forms concerning the revenue returned to the Town.

Furthermore, it's important to consider the cost of infrastructure and how this impacts a developer's ability to complete the necessary road improvements to achieve the RAP's recommended street network. Developers must be able to achieve a certain return on investment *after* infrastructure installation. The range of building types allowed in the Neighborhood Services, Neighborhood General, and Neighborhood Edge areas allows a sufficient amount of development to fund a road network envisioned by the RAP, ultimately offering Davidson residents greater mobility as projects are completed. This approach likewise has the added benefit of diversifying the land development opportunities in the Rural Study Area, which could help to sustain such opportunities throughout an era of changing preferences or even during downturns.

Additionally, staff contacted Stantec's Craig Lewis, project manager for the consultant team, to get his perspective on the McConnell/Village vs. Narrow Passage model. His response is as follows:

1. The Shearer Road corridor is envisioned to embody the Narrow Passage philosophy because it's quite far from town and has more environmental features worth preserving.
2. To make a neighborhood center viable, there is a certain level of density that is required. That varies from center to center but the biggest key is how many people live within walking/biking distance.
3. Based on the current allocations, we will have no problem achieving the 50% open space goal with the plan as drawn. To require more than that would be to change twenty plus years of vision and expectations.

4. What challenges the “rural area” today is the fact that so much of it is disconnected and low density, causing every trip to be by car and reducing overall walkability. Narrow Passage will be auto-dependent, low-density development. The fact that it preserves open space in common rather than as a part of specific lots does not negate that fact.
5. Narrow Passage works where the priority for a tract is preserving open space but results in much higher infrastructure costs per unit and therefore much higher housing costs. Is the goal for only the very wealthy to live in that area?
6. Building more walkable, compact neighborhoods results in more demographically diverse neighborhoods and have actually been proven to encourage more walking and biking. Diverse neighborhoods have been shown to promote healthy activities.
7. Moving town to the east (i.e. McConnell/Village model) is a natural extension and still well within the bikeshed of the downtown area. In fact, it’s closer than downtown Cornelius – and, even closer than where many with a Davidson address reside (e.g., River Run, Bradford, The Woodlands, Pages Pond, Runnymede, etcetera).
8. 80% of the market growth for new homes in the US is for households without children. Of that, the largest group is those over 65 year old. Requiring detached, expensive single homes that are auto-dependent is not responsive to the market demand. In fact, it is the suburban areas which have appreciated the least in terms of market value in the past ten years.

**13. Retail Nodes:** How can we appropriately size these nodes and ensure their viability?

Response: Staff has worked to confirm that the proposed Barger and East Rocky River/Shearer Road nodes are appropriately sized by: 1. Consulting the work of Robert Gibbs, a market-leader in commercial development opportunities, esp. in communities with mixed-uses such as Davidson; and, 2. Applying Gibbs’ principles utilizing a GIS analysis of trade areas for the proposed nodes.

In the commercial retail industry the types and size commercial centers permitted in Davidson’s Neighborhood Services Planning Area are identified as Convenience Centers. These centers generally share the following characteristics: 10,000 - 30,000 of gross leasable area; an array of goods and services geared towards surrounding residences’ daily needs; locations at crossroads and neighborhood entrances; and, trade areas of 1 - 1.5 miles containing about 2,000 households.

Staff conducted an analysis of the Barger and East Rocky River/Shearer Road nodes measuring the number of potential households within a 1.5 mile radius of these nodes based on the RAP’s proposed planning areas as well as existing development. The analysis revealed approximately 6,400 households between the two nodes, with roughly 4,400 households around the Barger node and 2,450 households within the East Rocky River/Shearer Road trade area (some overlap exists between the two trade areas, which explains why the individual totals exceed the combined). Importantly, these figures do not include data from Cornelius and Cabarrus County, other jurisdictions with existing and projected future development whose land areas lie within each node’s trade area. This would presumably increase the number of households within the defined trade areas.

As a result of this analysis staff believes these proposed nodes are suitably sized for this level of conceptual planning. And, with the nodes’ intended location along corridors affording retail frontage, staff believes these areas will be well-positioned to offer appropriately-scaled commercial uses for area residents when the time to develop these areas arrives.

**14. Development in NE Study Area:** No development should be allowed between Shearer Road and the main branch of the Rocky River.

Response: It's not clear if this means: A. No development whatsoever should be permitted in this area; or, B. The sewer should not be extended north of the Shearer Rd./ERR intersection (RAP Pg. 84) but development should be allowed according to the revised Rural Planning Area standards. Several landowners from this part of the study area actively participated in this process. To specify that no development will be permitted in this area – even under revised Rural Planning Area standards – raises equity issues for those in this area. To state that sewer will not be recommended for extension in this area by the RAP but that development may proceed by-right according to the revised Rural Planning Area standards represents a more tenable position.

#### IV. OVERALL/PROCESS

**15. Participation:** This is an update to the original Comment #30. Information regarding web page visits has been included.

Response: 70-80 persons participated in the 2015 charrette, with the total rising to more than 100 once including participation in the May 2016 Planning Board Meeting; June 2016 Board of Commissioners Work Session; and, Public Comment Period in which staff met with multiple landowners. Moreover, as of mid-July the RAP website has received over 900 views, with 700 being unique visits. The draft RAP has been downloaded over 100 times, with more than 80 unique downloads. See the RAP website for further information on public engagement that has taken place to date.