

Busy intersection gets safety suggestions

Residents propose remedies at Ballantyne Commons Parkway-Elm Lane improvement hearing

by Carolyn Steeves
news@thecharlotteweekly.com

About 50 people gathered at St. Matthew Catholic Church in Ballantyne June 18 for a second public hearing on safety and capacity recommendations for the city's proposed Ballantyne Commons Parkway and Elm Lane intersection project.

The city hopes to spend \$7.2 million from a \$181.1 million proposed bond referendum for 2010, which is part of its five-year transportation, neighborhood and affordable-housing improvement plan. The heavily used intersection has been identified as having low-level service grades, poor visibility, a high number of accidents and lack of pedestrian and bicycle friendliness,

(more on page 13)



Intersection hearing

(continued from page 1)

according to the improvement proposal. Some recommendations include building pedestrian medians on Ballantyne Commons Parkway, adding two wheelchair ramps on each corner of the intersection, adding bicycle lanes, extending the sidewalks along Elm Lane and Ballantyne Commons, adding a southbound lane on Elm Lane, and building up the road's profile to increase the visibility of oncoming cars.

The intersection was identified as part of the city's Intersection Capacity and Multi-Modal Enhancement Program to improve various intersections throughout the city and make them safer for all modes of travel. The intersection's four corners are occupied by St. Matthew Church, Stonecrest shopping center, a Wachovia/Wells Fargo branch bank and the Village of Troon residential area. The entire process could take four to five years, according to Tom Sorrentino, a senior engineer with the Charlotte Department of Transportation at the meeting.

The planning team surveyed residents at the first public meeting in June 2008, where people ranked the intersection's least and most important needs.

Attendees indicated that sidewalks, left-turn lanes, intersection improvements and enhanced pedestrian crossings were at the top of their lists. Presenters noted that many recommendations now in the proposal came from residents at the first public meeting, from the offset left-turn lanes to the pedestrian medians and others.

Many residents at the second hearing requested a left-turn signal on Elm Lane to allow drivers to more easily turn onto

Ballantyne Commons. They noted that people now often have to wait or "jump the light," which they said is potentially dangerous and holds up traffic. A few residents recalled that eight years ago, there was a turn signal at that intersection.

One citizen said that changing the turn signal light is the improvement "that counts" and he came to the meeting to request it. "Lanes would be great and everything, but if we won't have the money until next year, at least fix the lights," another resident added.

The planning team agreed to have CDOT's signal systems group look into putting a left-turn signal at the intersection.

Sorrentino said this high-traffic intersection is very important to the immediate area. He added that there's a lot of development on the horizon for the area, which will only increase the intersection's use.

Next, the planning team will update the report and move to the design phase, which is expected to begin in 2010 if the bonds pass and will take a year. The right-of-way acquisitions are slated to begin in 2011, and construction is scheduled to begin in 2012 and last one to two years. □



(Above) Charlotte Department of Transportation Senior Engineer Tom Sorrentino suggested Ballantyne Commons Parkway-Elm Lane intersection improvements to some 50 residents who attended a public hearing at St. Matthew Catholic Church. (Below) An aerial view of the project's scope.

Carolyn Steeves/SCW photo and courtesy of City of Charlotte