



Village of Flat Rock  
North Carolina

Incorporated in 1995

### NORTH HIGHLAND LAKE ROAD PROJECT

The purpose of this special newsletter is to inform the residents of Flat Rock about the facts concerning the proposed N. Highland Lake Road Project and clarify some misconceptions.

Residents of Flat Rock have long appreciated the uniqueness of our Village. In order to maintain that character, future planning is critical. To that end, a group of Flat Rock citizens worked in cooperation with Orion Planning Group to create a Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) in 2013. This Plan was adopted unanimously by the Village Council when completed. The plan has several sections, but the pertinent section for this discussion is section 4, Transportation. Of particular note are the following items in section 4:

- Action item 4.1 states that the ***Village will work in association with NCDOT to continually improve area roadways and transportation systems for vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians consistent with Village policy and planning goals.***
- Action item 4.8 directs the ***Village to develop sidewalks and multi-use trails using best management practices that are cost-effective and harmonious with the natural environment for the enjoyment of residents and tourists.***

The Village Council and Planning Board use the CLUP when making decisions that will impact the Village. The proposed improvement of N. Highland Lake Road along with a multiuse path is in keeping with the goals and objectives of the CLUP, and the Council feels that they have a duty to consider plans proposed by NCDOT.

In addition to the CLUP, the Village Council has also passed various resolutions and established other committees that support the inclusion of multiuse paths in the village. A historical summary and timeline of the road proposal can be found on the Village website.

In October of 2017, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) submitted a plan that was presented to the public for input. **That plan had features that the Council found unacceptable and requested some revisions. A reworked plan is expected for presentation to the public and Village Council this spring.**

## FAQ

### Where did the N. Highland Lake Road project originate?

- Since 2009, NCDOT ranks road projects to select for inclusion in its Statewide Transportation Improvement Project (STIP).
- In 2011, NCDOT Division 14 (which includes Henderson County) originated the N. Highland Lake Road improvement project. Based on the NCDOT points system, however, the project did not score high enough to justify funding, so the project did not go forward.
- In 2014, Division 14 again proposed the N Highland Lake Road improvement project. This time it ranked high enough for NCDOT to fund the project.

### What makes this project necessary? The traffic on the road seems fine now.

- While growth in Flat Rock has been slow, Henderson County is growing rapidly. N. Highland Lake Road is a major connector road, which means it is a road that moves traffic from one area of high use to another area of high use. NCDOT studies indicate:
  - The current traffic volume is approximately 6,400 cars a day.
  - The anticipated volume in 2040, which is the target year NCDOT designs for, is about 9,700 cars a day.
  - Based on these NCDOT studies, if nothing is done, levels of congestion for approaches to Greenville Highway, Highland Park Road, and Highland Lake Drive will increase. Adding turn lanes and increased storage lengths will reduce future congestion rates to acceptable levels as traffic increases.
- NCDOT has deemed N. Highland Lake Road “substandard.”
  - The narrowness of the road does not allow for passage of emergency vehicles in case of an accident on the road.
  - Sight lines are not adequate or safe.
  - There are no shoulders for a car or bicycle to use to avoid an accident.
  - There were 91 reported vehicle crashes along N. Highland Lake Road from 2011 to 2016. 21 of those accidents resulted in injuries. There were 3 accidents in the last quarter of 2017 and a hit and run in February of 2018 that involved a bicyclist who suffered a broken leg. (Statistics and incident reports provided by NCDOT and Blue Ridge Fire & Rescue.)
  - Left turn movement accounted for 37% of the accidents, while another 22% involved vehicles running off the road or sideswipes.
  - The addition of turn lanes, increased storage and improving the width of the travel lanes provides more margin of error to help drivers avoid these types of crashes.

This project also encourages transportation forms other than cars, while reducing conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists, and cars. This will help keep Flat Rock green.

### **I heard that NCDOT never awarded any points for this project. Why is it going forward?**

Proposed road projects around the state compete for state funding based on an NCDOT point system; each project is given points based on a number of variables. Projects with enough points are considered for funding.

- Three entities award points for Flat Rock projects: NCDOT Raleigh, NCDOT District 14 and the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).
- In 2014, the number of points awarded to the N. Highland Lake Road by NCDOT Raleigh and MPO was sufficient to allow this project to go forward. Division 14's points were not needed to justify funding. Division 14 then shifted their point allocation to other projects in the district.

Although District 14 did not use any of their points on this project, District 14 fully supports the N. Highland Lake Road project; recall District 14 originated the project in 2011 and has consistently supported it since that time.

### **How long has the Council been aware of this project?**

- NCDOT gave their project recommendations to the Village Council in January 2016.
- In February 2016, NCDOT met with the Council in a regular open Council meeting to discuss the earlier January meeting and seek more input from the Village Council.
- The Planning Board was presented with a summary of the NCDOT meetings in February 2016.

### **When was the public informed?**

- The Times-News reported on November 20, 2015, that, as a result of the state budget adopted in September, several NCDOT projects in Henderson County would be accelerated. Two new projects were added; one being the upgrade of N. Highland Lake Road from Greenville Highway to Spartanburg Highway with the right of way acquisition commencing in 2020, and construction in 2022.
- Discussions about the project occurred between NCDOT and Village Council in February 2016 during open council meetings.
- NCDOT presented the preliminary plans for public input in October 2017.

A detailed historical summary of actions and notifications can be seen on the Flat Rock Village website.

### **How much of the road will be straightened?**

- The Village Council requested that NCDOT keep road alignment as close to the current configuration as possible.
- The NCDOT plan shared with the public in October 2017, for the most part, shows the road following its current path, except for the intersections with Highland Lake Drive and Highland Park Road. This portion would be somewhat straightened to provide improved sight lines and thus increase safety at the entrance to the Highland Golf Villas community and the Park at Flat Rock.

### **How wide will the road be?**

According to the most recent NCDOT plan:

- The road will remain two lanes with 14-foot-wide lanes for most of the distance. Currently, the lanes are 11 feet wide. The speed limit will still be 35 MPH.
- Travel lanes near the Highland Park Road and Highland Lake Drive will be 14 feet wide with a 12-14 foot left turning lane.
- On the park side of the road, there would be a 4-foot-wide grass buffer and a 10-foot-wide multi-use walking and bicycle path. The addition of curbs and gutters is still being debated.
- Beyond the path would be an 8 foot right of way for utilities and drainage. (The right of way is needed for access for NCDOT and utilities to do maintenance and repair.)
- The right of way would look like the surrounding landscape. Right now, there is a 25 to 30 foot right of way along both sides of the road. The current right of way is measured from the center of the road.

### **Why does the Council favor a multi-use path?**

- This goes back to the CLUP mentioned in the introduction. One of the goals in the CLUP is to increase sidewalks, paths, and greenways throughout the Village.
- A 10-foot-wide path would allow for bicyclists and pedestrians to share the path safely.
- The path would allow more people to access the park on foot.
- The path could eventually connect to paths that would link to Carl Sandburg, the Village Center, and potentially to Jackson Park and Blue Ridge Community College.

### **Why does the park need a new entrance? Is this why the Council wants the road changed?**

- The current park entrance is shared with the Highland Golf Villas Community of 44 homes.
- The current entrance to the park cannot safely accommodate large vehicles such as school buses and emergency vehicles.
- The original park plan showed an entrance further down N. Highland Lake Road in the area before the waterfall. That location was mandated by NCDOT. Due to the curvature of the road, NCDOT determined it was the only place with adequate sight lines for safety. The Village's projected construction cost of a new entrance at that location was almost \$1 million.
- The new road project would provide safer sight lines and turn lanes on the road, allowing the park entrance to be closer to the parking lot and to be constructed at a considerably lower cost.
- The new road project would also remove park traffic from Highland Golf Drive.
- The existing entrance to the park and the Highland Golf Villas Community is dangerous. It is difficult to see oncoming traffic when turning into or out of Highland Golf Drive. The RR tracks formerly provided a speed bump that slowed traffic down. The RR has recently repaired the tracks and cars now come over the tracks much faster.

Gaining a new park entrance was not the driving factor in the Council's decision to let this plan go forward. As planning proceeded, it became apparent that this would be another benefit of the project. The proposed new location for the entrance was added midway in the process.

**Will this project affect the Pinecrest Presbyterian Church and Western Carolina Veterinary Hospital in a negative way?**

- The Council has asked NCDOT to minimize the impact on every landowner whose property abuts the road and always take property from the Park as a primary action.
- The property of the Church, Veterinary Hospital, and other businesses along N. Highland Lake Road must be protected. Council and NCDOT are very sensitive to this issue.

**How much land will the project impact the historic district?**

- The Village asked NCDOT to do the road improvements on the park side as much as possible.
- The current plan shows very little, if any land taken from the opposite side of the road, where historic properties are located.
- This project will not reduce the size of the historic district or change its designation.

**What about the trees?**

- Almost all the trees that will be removed along the road are located along the park's edge.
- NCDOT is sensitive to Flat Rock's love of trees and has assured the Council it will preserve as many trees as possible.
- NCDOT will replant some trees.
- The Village will augment the NCDOT landscape allowance by planting of an increased number of larger trees.

Note: This road project can be an opportunity to improve the tree-lined entrance to the Village over the long-term by planting larger, long-lived native hardwoods.

**Is this the beginning of NCDOT's plans to widen other roads in Flat Rock such as Greenville Highway and Little River Road?**

- No. Any rumors of widening other roads in Flat Rock are simply not true.
- There are NO PLANS within a 10-year horizon to widen Little River Road, Rutledge Drive or Greenville Highway. Ten years is the longest time in the future that NCDOT considers new plans.
- Most transportation projects originate with the MPO and NCDOT Division 14, which propose them to NCDOT Raleigh for consideration. Flat Rock has a representative at these organizations (usually a council member), and when road projects for Flat Rock are proposed Flat Rock can push them down to the bottom of the list.
- Through village representation on the Henderson County Transportation Advisory Committee and the MPO, we can keep a future widening plan from ever reaching fruition.

In fact, in the 1990's the state had plans to widen Greenville Highway, then known as US 25. Greenville Highway is a scenic byway and Village leaders worked with NCDOT to designate a connector road between Greenville Highway and Spartanburg Highway as US25, and re-designate Greenville Highway through the Village as NC 225.

**Some have said that this will negatively change the character of Flat Rock forever.**

It is hard to see how slightly widening a road a little over a mile long and adding a walking path can ruin a community. This project is in keeping with the CLUP. The Council and NCDOT are aware of the spirit and character of the Village. No one wants that destroyed.

This plan offers many benefits to the Village and will not spoil Flat Rock's "Sense of Place." The Council wants a plan that will give maximum benefits with minimum impact and follows the future planning guidelines for Flat Rock. The Council's duty is to plan for Flat Rock's future.

This plan is not a gateway to urbanization. This is a plan to improve a road in Flat Rock to be compatible with future growth and use, as well as providing a way to access the park without using a car. The multi-use path potentially can become part of a larger plan to connect the park to Connemara, The Village center and possibly other parts of Henderson County.

Questions or comments? Please go to [villageofflatrock.org](http://villageofflatrock.org) and click on the Contact Us section.

The Flat Rock Village Council