

NCDOT's Beltline Expansion: What To Expect Going Forward

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After six years of planning and two periods of public comment, the NCDOT has determined that to complete the beltline expansion project, it must take some land of right of way from Meredith's campus. How much exactly will be determined when the NCDOT selects a contractor. John Williams, a project manager at the NCDOT said that they "complete a preliminary design... the final design is handled by a contractor."

Timeline

The next public announcement is expected around February 2018 when NCDOT publishes the lengthy document, "Finding of No Significant Impact under the National Environmental Policy Act." The publication will respond to public comments and establish that the project can go on. Around July or August 2018 a contractor will be selected. Between July 2018 and August 2019 at the earliest, Meredith's campus will see construction. The entire expansion is expected to take four years. NCDOT officials cannot estimate how long they will be constructing on former Meredith property.

Safety

There will be a fence separating campus from construction, then a permanent fence. Williams said normally they would have a construction fence "which is fairly easy to penetrate." He said that "the College has asked for something heavier and more sturdy." NCDOT is open to that. Earth moving equipment will not be left on campus and construction should not spillover past the fence. He added that "that was a specific concern that Dr. Allen voiced."

Safety in the Future

What is to prevent future projects from taking more of Meredith's campus in the future? Williams said that "the reality is that everyone who lives in this area lives in an urban area that is developing. I can tell you that the interior of your campus is somewhat protected because it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places." So everything within Meredith's main road circling campus "would be very hard to touch with any project." Everything outside of that is not legally protected, but it is "highly valued by politicians, by the DOT,

and a lot of other people as well." But he can't say exactly because "it's not within [his] power to forecast or assure that none would ever happen again."

Addressing voiced concerns Williams said that NCDOT "has been working with Meredith as a stakeholder." Meredith has discussed issues with the NCDOT such as physical impacts, security, light pollution, noise pollution, and relocating the greenway. Not much has been discussed about trash that would come off the proposed flyover. Nothing has been announced yet about the concerns, but "the conversations are ongoing." They will be ongoing in the next few weeks when Meredith officials meet again with NCDOT.

Since the meetings that NCDOT held in Kresge Auditorium on Sept. 5, "there have been no decisions" as of Sept. 18.

Williams addressed several concerns that were raised by members of the Meredith community. The Hillsborough St.-Wade Ave. slight detour alternative would "push the greenway out a bit" resulting in right of way land being taken closer to Meredith's barn and the Massey House,

which means some of the trees would have to be felled for that. In addition, some of the trees along the commuter parking lot, along the auxiliary sports field, and in rear of The Oaks will have to be cut down. NCDOT is "committed to reestablishing vegetation." The new vegetation might not be as dense as it is now, depending on what species and age of plants get replaced.

The project is being done under a design-build process with the goal of "reducing the impact," Williams said. A handbook prepared by the NCDOT says "this usually ends in faster completion."

According to Williams, NCDOT will try to minimize effects on Meredith's campus. He said that "beyond that there are things we can and will do, like putting in retaining walls."

He spoke about tightening up the loops on the ramps. He said they might "have the potential to use a tighter radius, which reduces the physical impact." Williams added that "One other major help would be if we are successful in working with Meredith and Raleigh to relocate that section of greenway along the beltline to Faircloth."