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NCDOT's Beltline Expansion: What To Expect Going Forward

Sarah Kiser, Co-Editor-In-Chief

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 handout 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."

DACA Dilemma: What's Next?

Seung Pang, Staff Writer

Meredith junior Leslie Arreaza gets a lot of questions from people after they know she is an undocumented immigrant. But the first question people always ask is "Why don't you become legal?" Arreaza now does not mind the curiosity from other people, but before she decided to open up about her immigration status, she was afraid of being questioned.

Arreaza moved to the U.S. from Guatemala at age seven. Growing up as a teenager, her parents always warned her, "Never tell anyone we're undocumented." Arreaza's parents told her this after former President George W. Bush prohibited driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants.

In high school, Arreaza didn't tell anybody about her status. "I was scared," she said. She remembers the undocumented immigrant community back then as being very secretive. "

When the Obama-era program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), was designed to shield undocumented immigrants who were brought into the U.S. as children, Arreaza could dream again. She became unafraid, at age 20, after being deeply inspired by an undocumented speaker Jose Antonio Vargas at The Summit for

Golden Door Scholars.

"He was speaking up for us," said Arreaza. "I had some sense of security so I felt like it was my job to step up." Now as the president of the Meredith Refugee and Immigration Club and an activist, she speaks up for the DACA community. When President Trump rescinded DACA on Sept. 5, she went to the Durham rally and spoke on behalf of protesters. "The tension is worse now," said Arreaza. Following the repeal of DACA, President Trump gave Congress six months to pass a replacement. As a result, 800,000 undocumented immigrants are at risk of deportation.

David McLennan, a professor of political science at Meredith College, says it is unclear what President Trump's true intentions are with DACA recipients. "The basic argument that the Trump administration made was that President Obama had exceeded his constitutional authority in the executive order that established the DACA program," said McLennan.

After the President recently had a meeting with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, the Democrats announced that they had reached a deal with President Trump to pass a law

protecting the Dreamers, another name for DACA recipients. But later, President Trump tweeted that "No deal was made on DACA."

The President says he wants to do what is fair for the U.S. economy. But experts predict ending DACA will cost \$433.4 billion in GDP loss over a decade, according to the Center for American Progress. In North Carolina alone, 23,434 of 26,936 DACA recipients, or around 87%, are working. Removing them would cost over a billion dollars, or \$1,179,268,293 to be exact.

What's the future for DACA recipients? Currently, there are three bills at the Congress level: the Dream Act, Recognizing America's Children Act, and the BRIDGE Act, according to the National Immigration Law Center. "While the BRIDGE Act is the least good for the Latino community and the Hope Act is supported by mostly Democrats, the Dream Act has a strong bipartisan support," said Iliana Santillán-Carrillo, Community Organizer at El Pueblo, a non-profit organization advocating for North Carolina's Latino community. "The Dream Act could provide a path to legal status as a permanent form of relief," said Santillán-Carrillo.

According to a Gallup poll, 84% of U.S. adults, or 76%

of Republicans and 91% of Democrats, support immigration reform with a path to citizenship.

North Carolina Senator Thom Tillis says there is a compassionate and conservative solution to the DACA dilemma. "This is not a betrayal to the voters who elected President Trump," he said in his Op-Ed article on Fox News. Tillis promised to introduce a solution that would provide a legal path to undocumented children to earn conditional legal status by requiring them to be employed, to pursue higher education, or to serve in U.S. Armed Forces. "For the many young undocumented immigrants who were brought here as small children, America is the only home they've ever known," said Tillis. "The vast majority of Democrats, Republicans, and independents believe they should have a chance to remain here and contribute to the nation to their fullest ability," he added.

A week ago, Arreaza led a workshop on how to effectively reach representatives in Congress. "They can take DACA, but not our will to fight," said Arreaza in her contributing article on The Huffington Post

More about Leslie Arreaza: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/author/leslie-arreaza/>