

Residents again giving their two cents on Business 40 upgrades

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

Three years ago, when the North Carolina Department of Transportation announced that it would launch a project to improve the safety of a 1.1 mile section of Business 40, the Winston-Salem community spoke out.

Neighborhood Solutions, a public involvement firm specializing in environmental justice, was hired to act as a liaison between NCDOT and the community. More than 80 workers hired by the company polled city residents to gauge their thoughts on the Business 40 Improvement Project.

"This is a critical project," remarked DOT Engineer Pat Ivey. "Business 40 is very compact, but this project, this road, impacts a lot of people."

Through a variety of community meetings, surveys and in person interviews, a record number of city residents weighed in on whether they preferred that the improvements be done by completely closing the section of Business 40, which is between the Highway 52 interchange and the Hawthorne Curve, for two years or keeping it partially open, which would stretch the construction time window to roughly six years. Sixty eight per-



Barbara Isom listens to Business 40 Improvement Project worker.

Photos by Layla Farmer

cent of them said they preferred to have it closed; and the DOT has pledged to honor their wishes.

This week, the DOT and Neighborhood Solutions are giving residents a chance to actually view some of the options available to improve the stretch of Business 40, a project not slated to begin until 2018. During three meetings, residents were invited to explore the project overview, view various

roadway design ideas and voice concerns or suggestions about the progression of the project and the way it will be carried out.

"More than 40 percent of the residents along Business 40 along this area have responded to the (initial) interviews. That is unheard of," Jumetta Posey, CEO of Neighborhood Solutions said. "We're trying to keep up that opportunity and access for those

people throughout the process." Charles Reynolds was among those who came out to the first Corridor-wide meeting at WSSU's Anderson Center Tuesday night. Reynolds, who lives off Liberty Street, still has concerns about the Highway being completely shut down for two years. Making it to the hospital from East Winston in the event of an emergency, for instance, will be a much slower process if Business 40 is inaccessible, he noted.



Reynolds

"People have got to get to their jobs and get to the hospital," he declared. "They need a straight access road to get there."

Though he concedes that the more than 50 year-old infrastructure along the freeway is in need of an upfit, Reynolds, who retired from RJR after more than three decades, said that the people who will someday use the new roadway should always come first in the process.

"The bridges got to be fixed; it's got to be done, but they've got to

do it the right way," he said. "You've gotta think about the people."

NAACP Chapter President Jimmy Boyd said he was concerned about how the project might affect the city's minority populations.

"It's a great idea, but I want to see what impact it has on our community," he commented. "Historically, when you bring projects and stuff in the community, we (minorities) are the ones that had to be displaced, so those are my concerns."

Attendance at the WSSU meeting was light - a concern for many involved with the project. Though project leaders are encouraging community involvement, time is of the essence, Posey said.

"If they want a voice in this project, they've got to start participating," she said of city residents and business owners. "Once these decision are made, because of the kind of outreach we've had, they're not going to have any recourse."

The final Corridor-wide meeting will take place today (Thursday, Oct. 14) from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the ballroom of the Millennium Center, 101 West 5th St. For more information about the Business 40 project, call 336-724-2130 or visit www.business40nc.com.

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