

# CHCA Board Q&A's with Commissioner Gale Walldorff and PATH Director Ed McBrayer July-September 2006

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### ***A. Notes from July 27 Meeting with Commissioner Walldorff and Director McBrayer***

- Gale Walldorff's Statement
  - It was her "dream" to have a multi-use trail running from North Dekalb Mall to Zonolite Road through Emory with potential connections eastward to the horse farm and Decatur.
  - PATH Foundation would construct and maintain the trail
  - Funding has come through only for the segment from Medlock Park to Mason Mill Park.
  - The new County Transportation Plan includes trails
  - The county adopted the Master Plan produced by PATH in 1999
  - Clifton Corridor is the largest employment center in the county and there needs to be access for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Ed McBrayer's Statement
  - The Mason Mill Park PATH would be the most complex and expensive segment of PATH built so far.
  - Route
    - Start as boardwalk from Willivee Drive bridge
    - Follow south side of South Fork Peachtree creek above the sewer line
    - Across the creek to ridgeline trail. PATH surface becomes concrete
    - Down to existing stone bridge over Burnt Fork Creek
    - Across CSX rail tracks to McDonnell Drive
  - PATH has good relations with CSX and there are three options for crossing the tracks
    - Passage under trestle. This would probably not work because of environmental issues but they will walk the site again in August.
    - New bridge above water works ruins. This requires that either end be at least 23 feet from the center line of the tracks.
    - Tunnel
  - PATH plans to use the existing stone bridge to cross Burnt Fork Creek. They will clean it up and engineers will check its condition.
  - To cross South Fork Peachtree Creek near Willivee Drive they will use a "steadfast" or "golf cart" bridge
  - Ed recommends we visit a new trail ([Whetstone Creek Trail](#)) opening in August [2006] to see their most recent design standards for boardwalks

- For the Mason Mill PATH they intend to reduce the width from their standard 12 feet to 10 feet because they don't expect a lot of speeding cyclists and they can thereby cut fewer trees and do less grading
- PATH will take on "perpetual maintenance" but it is very expensive.
- Discussion
  - Crime on PATH? Ed responded that high traffic on PATHs prevent crime, that PATHs are more secure than malls, and that PATH gives bikes to the county police to use on the trails even though they don't seem to use them
  - What about Nature Preserve? That is not included in this phase.
  - Its value as a commuter corridor to Emory does not seem as good as Desmond Drive which is more direct. Would it be possible to consider alternative routes like Desmond or the power easement to CSX right of way? Ed responded that they had spent \$100,000 on studying this segment and alternatives and believed they had the best route.
  - Would they be willing to attend a general meeting? Gale said they felt they had had general meetings enough. Ed said he was "processed out." Ed said that no one at the table today had been at earlier meetings in previous years and that the earlier proposal to go through Willivee Place had been opposed in a general meeting in favor of the current routing from the Willivee Drive bridge.
  - What is the best-case schedule? Start in December 2006 and finish in about 6 months.
  - Can it be narrower than 10 feet? No, because then it would be too narrow for both cyclists and pedestrians.
  - We presented Chuck Raboli's environmental assessment and Ed agreed to review it. He asked what our main environmental concern was in one sentence. Jim responded that it would be loss of animals like beaver and otters in the creek near the trail. Ed had to leave at this point to address the media about the recent assault at the Silver Comet Trail.
  - Could construction of PATH be tied to restoration of the park, e.g., streambank restoration, removal of invasives, dirt trail restoration and erosion control, restoration of native plant species? Gale said the latest bond issue will fund a new master plan for Mason Mill.
- Next steps
  - Gale was willing to walk the route after she returns from a trip August 9.
  - Could we ensure that existing walking trails would not be disturbed? Gale said we should work with Ed.
  - What should we do about the off-road cyclists? Dave Butler said we should have SORBA work with the Parks department to mark and maintain trails and put up signs.

## ***B. Ed McBrayer's responses via email to Chuck Rabolli's report 8/1/06***

1. Chuck: "This portion of the bike path travels through high quality and environmentally sensitive green space. This heavily wooded area has steep slopes and easily erodable soils. This steepness of the slopes make pouring a concrete path over most of the area (at least the eastern half) impossible without causing great damage to the slopes and stream below. This portion of the path, if constructed, must be elevated boardwalk."
  - a. Ed: We intend to boardwalk the eastern end of the trail as suggested
2. Chuck: The proximity of the path to the stream will undoubtedly cause damage to the stream, mostly due to erosion, during the construction process.
  - a. Ed: We will follow BMP [Best Management Practices] and all applicable erosion control procedures during construction. We have a great track record with the State and County for protecting construction sites from erosion. This said, all construction sites create some erosion. Any "damage" to the creek will be minimal.
3. Chuck: The undeveloped green space through which this path travels is a narrow strip of mature forest. Little of this type of habitat is found in the county park system. Particularly this close to the heavily developed portion of the county. This undeveloped part of the park is in stark contrast to the heavy development of the western part of the park which is developed in a Senior Center, open fields and a tennis center. The undeveloped portion of the park is used and enjoyed by many park visitors. These visitors are attracted to this part of the park specifically because of its undeveloped nature. This is the park experience these users are seeking. I believe that this use and this type user of the park is being underestimated by county managers. The desires of these low-cost, low-impact users should be in the minds of the county decision makers. This contrast and diversity of park amenities should be preserved. The construction of a bike path through this undeveloped portion of the park would be seen as detrimental by many of the current park users.
  - a. Ed: This is a statement of how beautiful and unique this property is, which is exactly why we think everyone should be afforded the opportunity to enjoy it. Our PATH will provide safe, respectful access for everyone rather than reserving it for a few nature walkers.
4. Chuck: This area of the park in natural habitat provides relatively undisturbed habitat for many species of wildlife. The park is used for nature observation by many park visitors. The construction of a path through this natural area will fragment this habitat and bring too many visitors into the park and disturb and displace much of this wildlife. The amenity of wildlife observation on this park will diminish with the bike path construction.
  - a. Ed: This is one persons opinion. The Audubon Society actually promotes trails into forests since birds feed along edges. Our trail creates two new edges in the forest. We are not proposing to access any areas that are not presently subjected to hikers with their unleashed dogs. If inhabitants of the woods are not frightened by unleashed dogs surely they will stay around while a few bicycles pass. Users of the trail will likely keep their dogs leashed.
5. Chuck: Wildlife habitat will be lost due to the removal of trees for the path. This will also increase sunlight to the forest floor and likely cause an increase in invasive non-native plants. This is detrimental to native wildlife and the naturalist type park visitor.

- a. Ed: We are removing a tiny fraction of the trees in the forest. Our trail will follow old road beds and sewer lines for much of the way. This concern is invalid
6. Chuck: An on-street bike path will likely be less expensive to construct than a path through this undeveloped park
  - a. You are correct!
7. Chuck: I am not opposed to a bike path in this general area of the neighborhood. I support the construction of a bike path-in the appropriate location. We need to add more quality of life amenities to our community and a bike path is one of these amenities. I believe that an on-street bike path AROUND Mason Mill Park is more appropriate. The current uses and amenities of Mason Mill Park are sufficient. The undeveloped green space is being used and enjoyed by many. Installing a bike path in the park would benefit some users to the detriment of other users. The park recreation opportunities afforded by this undeveloped portion of the park are greatly valued and enjoyed by many park users. I don't think that use and those users should be replaced by a different use and users. A bike path OUT of the park will preserve this dwindling green space natural and recreational resource, AND provide new bicycle recreation to new users. This is an opportunity to grow our community's quality of life amenities rather than replace one amenity with another. A replacement that will also be a detriment to the environment. This unique park amenity must be preserved.
  - a. Ed: An "on-street bike path" is not a path, it's experienced cyclists sharing narrow roads with busses and trucks. You may feel comfortable doing this, 95% of the public does not! There will be plenty of undisturbed park remaining for nature walks after our trail is installed. We propose to build a first-class facility that offers better access to the park while retaining the natural environment that current users of the park enjoy. I appreciate the time you have spent trying to protect the park from what you perceive as a threat. We will do our best to alleviate your concerns and build something that the neighborhood at large will enjoy.

***C. Gale Walldorff's 9/25/06 response to our 9/13 revised notes and questions from the 7/27 meeting submitted at her request***

1. We identified the following ecological issues that would require extra care in design and construction.
  - a. CHCA: The bridge over South Fork Peachtree Creek just downstream of the Willivee Drive Bridge. Our first concern was that flooding occurs frequently and raises the water line far up either side. So the wider the span the better to avoid having debris hit supports and block water flow and/or weaken the structure itself. Similarly, the height of the boardwalk leading up to the bridge and the actual bridge height would have to be above the highest flood water line, perhaps 8 feet above the sewer easement. Secondly, heavy equipment would probably be needed to install the bridge and the likely access would be the sewer line easement. There may therefore be significant impact on the sewer line manholes and maintenance and someone from Water & Sewer should advise. Some trees may have to be removed and we recommend that measures be taken to replace them elsewhere in the park. To minimize land disturbance from the heavy equipment, we recommend use of mats to distribute the weight. Thirdly, we recommend that the bridge be child-proofed because it will likely be high and in any case open during floods.
  - b. **Gale: The height of the bridge will follow the requirements of the Army Corps of Engineers and DeKalb County. PATH will follow these guidelines. The access to the manhole and existing sewer line under the bridge will be coordinated with DeKalb's Water and Sewer Department. PATH will look at the height of the bridge and determine if extra safety measures are needed, similar to the bridge at Arabia Mountain.**
  - c. CHCA: The slope on the north side of the creek is relatively undisturbed and would require extra care to minimize damage to soil and vegetation, e.g., contractor should be required to use hand tools and smaller equipment and be rigorous about erosion and sediment control.
  - d. **Gale: Although the use of hand tools is not practical, proper sediment controls will be in place throughout the duration of construction and restoration of plants and vegetation will be made upon completion of the project.**
  - e. CHCA: We recommend exploring an option to skirt the ridge top as the trail approaches from the slope and consider additional boardwalk versus concrete along the slope to alleviate the sharp elevation rise to the ridge.
  - f. **Gale: In the past, neighbors had requested the path move up the slope to follow the existing trail and preserve trees. However, PATH would prefer to follow your recommended suggestion to skirt the ridge.**
  - g. CHCA: There are sections of native plants in the route that should be rescued and replanted in the park with appropriate protections.
  - h. **Gale: The Georgia Native Plant Society will be contacted for plant rescue.**
  - i. CHCA: Drainage from existing ridge trails is already poor and there is a tremendous opportunity to improve it with installation of PATH, e.g., by

- installing French drains on either side and covering them with some kind of gravel.
- j. **Gale: More boardwalk will be used instead of concrete to negate the need for french drains.**
  - k. CHCA: The question came up about maintaining the boardwalk and whether it gets slippery when wet or aged; how is that to be addressed?
  - l. **Gale: While this hasn't been a problem on the Silver Comet Trail or the Arabia Mountain Trail, it will be monitored for necessary maintenance.**
  - m. CHCA: We understood from Gale that she is willing to spend money from her greenspace acquisition and development fund to cover the extra expense of addressing these issues if necessary.
  - n. **Gale: District 2 Development funds will be used in order to cover the extra expense of using more boardwalk material for the path.**
2. At the Willivee Bridge access point, there is a blind curve and a steep hill and vehicles often go fast.
    - a. CHCA: We recommended installation of stop signs on Willivee Drive at the PATH crossing.
    - b. **Gale: The placement of signs will be coordinated with DeKalb's Roads and Drainage Department.**
    - c. CHCA: We recommended installation of barriers on the PATH side that force cyclists to dismount or slow down before crossing the street.
    - d. **Gale: Barriers will be installed per PATH guidelines.**
  3. CHCA: We recommended a proposal made in the Chattahoochee Hill Country Regional Greenway Trail Master Plan (p. 56) to set up a Design/Construction Oversight Committee. It could consist of representatives from PATH, the county, and local neighborhood associations CHCA and MANA as well as other persons with relevant knowledge or experience. As stated in the CHC plan, they could review plans and inspect work for adherence to the design standards. Apart from improving quality, this arrangement would surely go a long way to secure local support and would, we believe, serve as a model for PATH to use in future projects to get community support.
    - a. **Gale: Similar to the Chattahoochee Hill Country plan, representatives from the neighborhood could be involved in the review of plans and inspection of work.**
  4. CHCA: Georgia Power Line access route: We recommended consideration of this as an alternative to the present plan to create PATH access from Willivee Bridge.
    - a. The main impediment, according to Gale, was a Georgia Power policy that 100% of abutting property owners must agree to the plan. If that were so, we indicated that the neighborhood association would be willing to try to meet that standard.
    - b. The other major impediment we heard of was a buried gas line but Atlanta Gas and Light informed one resident that the line was too deep to pose a problem.
    - c. Gale indicated that it was too late to change the Willivee Bridge plan. But the power line easement may be a viable additional access.
    - d. **Gale: Please refer to guidelines from Georgia Power. [Sent via fax. See separate file.]**
  5. CHCA: Gale responded that her next step will be to talk to Ted Rheinhart, director of public works, to see what the current state of play is with the remaining property.

- a. **Gale: After consulting with Mr. Rhinehart, it was determined that negotiations with the property owner had stalled. Therefore, this item was placed on the Board of Commissioners agenda for September 26th.**
6. CHCA: Gale was concerned about the state of the water works. She will ask the county to secure the dangerous areas and clean up graffiti and trash.
  - a. **Gale: Commissioner Walldorff will arrange a tour with Marvin Billups from our Parks Department, Chief of Police Marinelli, Candidate Jeff Rader, Commissioner Kathie Gannon and Dave Butler for a follow-up visit to the water works to examine graffiti and trash and discuss possible solutions.**
7. CHCA: She was also concerned about all the large pieces of broken pipe in the park and in Burnt Fork Creek and thought Public Works should help Parks to remove them.
  - a. **Gale: Public Works Department will be contacted regarding clean up of site.**
8. CHCA: Gale will forward information from the five year contract at Deepdene Park to remove invasive plants because Mason Mill park also is overrun with English ivy and privet.
  - a. **Gale: The contact used to remove invasives at Deepdene Park is Terry Sutton (contact #404-532-0040, cell 404-502-0508).**