



Russell R. McMurry, P.E., Commissioner
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March 27, 2023

Re: Responses to Public Information Open House Comments for PI#: 0017976, Chatham County, Garrard Avenue Improvements

Thank you for your feedback concerning the proposed project referenced above. We appreciate your participation and the questions and comments received through the project's website and the in-person open house. As the project develops, the proposed project plan may need to be revised. If there are significant changes to what was shown on the project's website and at the in-person meeting, there will be additional public outreach. If no significant changes are proposed, the project will proceed to right-of-way (ROW) acquisition and final design. Following the completion of all ROW acquisitions, the project design would be finalized, and the project would advance to construction.

Every comment provided during the project's comment period beginning on *November 3, 2022*, and ending on *November 23, 2022*, will be made part of the project's official record. The project's website received **92** page views in total, and **40** people attended the in-person open house. Of the **17** respondents who formally commented, **8** were in **support** of the project, **3** were **opposed**, **4** were **uncommitted**, and **2** expressed **conditional support**.

The Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT) has prepared a single response letter that addresses all questions and comments received during the comment period which are summarized below (*in italics*) followed by our response.

- *General support of the proposed project including the path, pedestrian lighting, and proposed roundabout, in addition to questions about how the roundabout was selected*

We appreciate your support of the proposed project. The intersections along the corridor were analyzed through Georgia DOT's Intersection Control Evaluation (ICE) process. This process evaluates the performance of various types of intersection control, including traffic signals, stop signs, and roundabouts with consideration for traffic operations, safety, and cost. Neither traffic signal nor all-way stop control warrants were met, and based on the ICE results, the roundabout was selected as the optimal solution at Chatham Parkway. Roundabouts are known to reduce the frequency and severity of crashes at intersections and typically calm traffic/reduce speeds, which we understand is important to the community. The roundabout is also expected to accommodate potential future traffic growth in the area.

- *Concern of existing drainage and proposed drainage after the improvements are constructed*

The design team has met with the Chatham County's engineers to discuss existing drainage concerns and measures to potentially include along the Garrard Avenue corridor. The team will continue to coordinate drainage enhancements along the

corridor during design so that the project will improve current drainage conditions. Further, Chatham County is aware of off-site drainage issues in this area, and the County is planning a separate project to improve and provide maintenance access for the section of Louis Mills Branch (Marshall) drainage canal between Marshall Avenue and Veterans Parkway. For additional information, please contact Pamela Bernard, Chatham County Engineering, at 912-652-7800.

- *Concern with vehicles speeding*

We appreciate your concern about speeding and are evaluating traffic calming measures with the proposed project. Roundabouts, like the one proposed for the intersection at Chatham Parkway, have proven to be effective at slowing traffic. The addition of curb and gutter has also shown to be effective in slowing traffic, as have the small medians that are proposed to accommodate crosswalks. In advance of crosswalks, high visibility signs will be added in accordance with design guidelines.

- *Concerns that the project will increase traffic volumes along Garrard Avenue*

This project and its proposed improvements are not expected to induce additional traffic along Garrard Avenue, and the road will remain a two-lane roadway with one travel lane in each direction. Independently of this project, traffic volumes along the corridor are anticipated to increase based on future developments and general growth in traffic associated with growth in the Savannah region. The project has been designed to accommodate this traffic growth and will include proposed turn lanes and intersection improvements where warranted.

- *Concern of need for sidewalks or multi-use paths*

This project was programmed to rehabilitate the roadway pavement section and improve safety along the corridor. The project will address poor pavement conditions, substandard lane widths, safety concerns, limited roadway lighting, and a lack of pedestrian, bicycle, and transit accommodations. There are churches, school bus stops, and Chatham Area Transit (CAT) bus stops along Garrard Avenue that warrant the need for pedestrian accommodations. We will evaluate ways to reduce the project footprint, including reducing the path width, while still addressing the pedestrian needs along the corridor.

- *Consideration for adding a bus shelter at the existing bus stop and reducing the number of bus stops along the project*

An initial meeting was held with CAT and bus stops were shown based on their guidelines. We are actively coordinating with CAT to reduce the number of bus stops from four to two, and the team will continue to coordinate with CAT to refine details for additional measures such as shelters and benches during design.

- Consideration for not widening existing lanes along Garrard Avenue

The intent is to widen the lanes to 11-feet, which they already are in some places. In other locations, the existing lanes are only 9-feet wide. Based on federal and state design requirements for this roadway classification and traffic volumes, the minimum lane width allowed is 11-feet. There have been several instances in the last few years where buses have either side swiped each other or had mirrors hit due to narrow lane widths. These areas will be widened to provide a consistent lane width of 11-feet to help address this issue.

- Concern for property impacts

Please note that the proposed ROW and easements have not yet been finalized and it is possible that the conceptual ROW or easements shown on the layouts can be reduced or perhaps eliminated during design. In the event your property is required in part, a certified appraiser will make a fair market value appraisal of the area to be required, including any damages to the remainder of the land, if applicable. The appraisal will also include values for improvements required or damages that may be applicable for impacts to landscaping, wells, or similar features.

As the project moves forward, we will evaluate ways to minimize impacts to private property and to keep ROW acquisition to a minimum. Impacts to large trees will be minimized and protected during construction as much as possible.

- Questions about project schedule, budget, and fund usage

Projects using federal transportation funds administered through Georgia DOT must adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); other applicable federal guidelines; and Georgia DOT's Plan Development Process (PDP). Construction funds are programmed based on anticipated availability, as well as a project's scheduled PDP completion date. As mentioned in the meeting, the construction funding is currently programmed for use in 2027, but the County, Georgia DOT, and design team are working to accelerate the project schedule. In addition, transportation funding is typically awarded specifically for use on transportation projects and cannot be repurposed for non-transportation uses, such as community centers or parks. For additional information, please contact Chatham County Parks & Recreation at 912-652-6780.

Again, thank you for your feedback. Should you have further questions or comments, please call the project manager, Stanley Thelisma, at 404-631-1598 or the environmental analyst, Takiyah Christian, at 404-631-1178.

Sincerely,



Eric Duff
State Environmental Administrator

ED

cc: Honorable Ann R. Purcell, Georgia DOT Board Member (District 1)
Representative Carl Gilliard, State Representative (District 162)
Senator Lester Jackson, State Senator (District 2)
Stanley Thelisma, Georgia DOT Project Manager (via email)
PDF for Project File