

On Apr 2, 2014, Jeff Prather <[jandcprather@earthlink.net](mailto:jandcprather@earthlink.net)> sent:

Dear Mayor Kleinshmidt and Council Members:

One of the unique and special aspects about Chapel Hill is the liveliness of the debate on issues of local interest. What started out as an attempt by the Town to build community consensus for a vision for Ephesus-Fordham (E-F) redevelopment, has come apart because that consensus was not forged. When the Town Small Areas Plan was released it focused primarily on transportation and did not contain one word written about the low-lying nature of the land and some parcels in the flood plain to be redeveloped. Here we are four years later and the Town staff is just begun to think about the implications of developing in the lowest part of the Booker Creek Watershed.

The fact is that we already have a stormwater management problem now, i.e. flooding, in this watershed without considering the additional paved surfaces in the E-F project, Carolina North, Central West, Glen Lennox, and northern MLK. Where will all the increased stormwater runoff go? In the current E-F discussion, the focus has been until recently on the micro-stormwater issues associated with just this individual development. Claims vary, but estimates for the increase in impervious surface are generally in the range of 20% more impervious surface which will undoubtedly increase stormwater flow into a basin that is already flooding on a regular basis. At the March 24<sup>th</sup> public hearing, Town staff member Chris Jensen described applying Jordan Lake rules to the new zone. That proposal is a step forward. But what is the city proposing to do to alleviate the existing flooding?

Since I moved back to Chapel Hill in 1990 and I have seen several major developments that discharge their stormwater into the wetlands behind Meadowmont. Of course, Meadowmont itself is the largest culprit. But in addition to the build out of Oaks III, the Maida Vale and Blenheim Woods developments in Durham county discharge stormwater from 3 separate stormwater retention ponds into the wetlands just east of the Chapel Hill Country Club golf course. Now, the E-F development will add further SW discharge into the basin. However, the focus cannot just be on the E-F proposal. The city is also addressing proposals for Glen Lennox and Central West (Parts of Carolina North reportedly will also eventually drain into this same basin). How can an existing basin that is already subject to frequently flooding handle this additional runoff? Just look at Bolin and Booker Creek -- what has the city done to alleviate the trash, debris that clogs these waterways?

Over the years I have seen a steady buildup of sediment in Little Creek (the confluence of Bolin and Booker Creeks), particularly in the creek that flows through the 10<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> holes on the golf course. The media has captured numerous pictures of the flooding and tremendous amount of debris washing through the area. I recently walked several hundred yards back into the wetlands east of Pinehurst Drive with Julie McClintock and a representative from the Chapel Hill Stormwater Department. In some

areas the “streambed” was almost indistinguishable from the wetlands. Sediments have essentially silted in much of the streambed forcing the stormwater to create numerous new small tributaries overflowing into the wetlands. Of course, the wetlands were also littered with mountains of trash including yard waste containers, bottles, Styrofoam containers, etc. This accumulation of debris and sediment has severely reduced the carrying capacity of the basin.

Up to a month ago the problem solving for this project resided in the Town Manager’s office and the Economic Development Team. That team commissioned three studies. While these reports contained some useful information they did not go outside the confines of the proposed districts and were cursory in nature. They are no longer setting a direction for a solution. A fourth report from Kimley Horn is expected soon. Town technical staff are involved and are proposing on-site stormwater treatment for all redevelopment. This is good news for water quality. But no actions are proposed for mitigating flooding.

What is the city proposing to do to alleviate the flooding in the watershed before approving these new developments? In order to address the flooding issues, the hydrology of the watershed and planned upstream development need to be studied. The Town would be taking on significant liability and risk proceeding with the proposed changes without understanding the impact of the redevelopment on the watershed.

The bottom line is that the Town of Chapel Hill cannot continue to focus on just the individual development without addressing the impact on the complete watershed – all the way from Hwy 15/501 to the Corps of Engineers impoundment area and to the western reaches including some very large developments that have been approved but not built.

Please use much caution in your deliberations.

Jeff Prather