

Chapel Hill approves Wegmans Food Market along U.S. 15-501 near Durham County line

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb October 25, 2017

CHAPEL HILL – Wegmans Food Market could bring people from across the region to shop just inside the Orange County line by 2020, officials said after the project was approved Wednesday.

The Chapel Hill Town Council unanimously voted for the 130,000-square-foot Wegmans project for 14.7 acres on U.S. 15-501 after delving into concerns about parking, traffic and how the grocer might affect neighboring properties.

The project will replace the current Performance AutoMall between U.S. 15-501 and Old Durham Road. The automall will be moving to the Southpoint Auto Mall near The Streets at Southpoint.

Chapel Hill and Orange County have agreed to pay Wegmans \$4 million in incentives if the company creates 185 full-time jobs and 413 part-time jobs over five years and meets annual property and sales-tax revenue goals. Wegmans is expected to generate over \$1.8 million in property and sales taxes each year.

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce is “really thrilled to have a Wegmans in our community,” said Katie Loovis, vice president of external affairs.

“This is a fantastic company. They have strong wages for their employees, they are very involved in the community, (and) this is going to build our commercial tax base,” she said.

The store is the first Wegmans approved for the Triangle; three other stores are proposed for Cary and Raleigh. The Chapel Hill store will have 750 parking spaces in two lots, including a satellite lot across Old Durham Road that Pennoni engineer Justin Brown said will be largely for employees.

Traffic concerns

Traffic remained the biggest sticking point for council members and residents during the 18-month approval process.

As a result, the N.C. Department of Transportation will require Wegmans to make a number of changes to surrounding roads and intersections. The New York state grocer is expected to add 3,214 more daily trips to the roughly 7,500 that exist now.

Chapel Hill, passers-by and nearby neighborhoods could account for roughly two-thirds of those trips, officials said, with the rest from Durham and Interstate 40.

While council and community members hoped the site’s main entrance could be on the service road that parallels U.S. 15-501, Wegmans was not able to work out a deal with the State Employees Credit Union, which owns the former Blue Cross and Blue Shield building next door.

Instead, Wegmans will have an entrance-only driveway on the service road and leave an access point to the SECU property in case of a future opportunity. Council members said the ability to route some traffic onto the service road is a plus.

Three other driveways will be located on Old Durham Road just east of Hardee’s restaurant, at a new roundabout between Wegmans and its satellite lot, and behind the store for deliveries.

NCDOT also will require Wegmans to add turn lanes to Old Durham Road and at its intersection with U.S. 15-501; a longer median blocking cross-traffic at Old Durham Road and Scarlett Drive; and improve the intersection of U.S. 15-501 and Eastowne/Lakeview Drive. (CONTINUED...)

NCDOT, town and Wegmans officials will continue to monitor traffic on Old Durham Road during construction and after the store opens, Town Manager Roger Stancil said. Wegmans will pay \$150,000 to the town toward any necessary upgrades.

HNTB senior transportation engineer Craig Sheffler said areas east of Lakeview Drive were not part of the traffic study, but after hearing from residents, he thinks there also should be a study of existing and Wegmans-related issues in those areas.

Stancil noted there also have been multiple conversations with SECU and UNC Health Care about the traffic effects of the Wegmans project and their future plans.

"What we do know in working with DOT is as those properties develop, there will need to be a revamping of that whole gateway into Chapel Hill," he said.

The Wegmans plan did little to resolve residents' worries about spillover traffic onto their smaller, neighborhood streets, but town planner Judy Johnson said there are things the town can do to discourage cut-through traffic.

They have tried to predict the future effects as best as they can, Council member George Cianciolo said.

"The fact of the matter, a (few) years down road, if we see that there are impacts we couldn't predict, I think it's not something that is up to the applicant to fix at that point. I think that we as a town – we want this project for the economic benefits – it will be our responsibility then to figure out a way to fix it," he said.

Will Wegmans and its new traffic plan get Chapel Hill's approval Wednesday?

The Herald-Sun By Tammy Grubb October 24, 2017

CHAPEL HILL – A revised plan for Wegmans Food Market could give drivers on U.S. 15-501 another way to reach the store, while easing the traffic jams expected on Old Durham Road.

You can learn more about the changes at a public information meeting at 5:15 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 24, in the second-floor training room at Chapel Hill Town Hall, 405 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

The council will resume a public hearing and could vote Wednesday on the \$30 million project near the Orange-Durham county line. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the Town Hall Council Chamber.

The 130,000-square-foot Wegmans Food Market, if approved, would replace the 14.7-acre Performance AutoMall, which is moving to the Southpoint Auto Mall near The Streets at Southpoint mall. The Wegmans store is one of four proposed for Chapel Hill, Cary and Raleigh.

The developer is seeking 750 parking spaces – 87 more than town rules allow.

Chapel Hill and Orange County have offered Wegmans a \$4 million incentive if the company creates 185 full-time jobs and 413 part-time jobs over five years and meets annual property and sales-tax revenue goals. The project could bring in over \$366,000 in property taxes and up to \$1.5 million in sales taxes each year.

However, the traffic that the project would generate has been a lingering concern for council members and residents.

The plan initially included entrances on Old Durham Road, behind the Wegmans site, and along the service road between the site and U.S. 15-501. That plan relied on drivers being able to use the U.S. 15-501 intersection at Eastowne Drive and the service road, but Wegmans could not reach a deal with the neighboring State Employees Credit Union, which owns the former Blue Cross and Blue Shield building. (CONTINUED...)

A new plan, offered at a Sept. 13 public hearing, would have routed all Wegmans traffic onto Old Durham Road, which is already congested and backs up at times. That plan alarmed nearby residents, who feared massive traffic jams and speeding cars cutting through their neighborhoods.

Project officials went back to the drawing board to devise a plan that lets drivers use the service road to reach Wegmans via a new entrance-only driveway on the western end of the property.

The revised plan also includes three full-access driveways on Old Durham Road: just past the Hardee's, at a new roundabout between Wegmans and its satellite parking lot, and from the satellite parking onto Cooper Street. Delivery trucks would use a driveway behind the store.

A traffic study shows the grocery could generate roughly 10,766 trips – 3,214 more cars than now use the area – when it opens in 2018. Project officials estimated that two-thirds would come from Chapel Hill, passers-by or the surrounding area, while the rest would travel from the east.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation also would require project developers to add turn lanes on Old Durham Road and at its intersection with U.S. 15-501; a longer median blocking cross-traffic at Old Durham Road and Scarlett Drive; and improve the intersection of U.S. 15-501 and Eastowne/Lakeview Drive.

The NCDOT determined that a traffic light isn't needed now at the intersection of Lakeview Drive and Old Durham Road, but the town wants Wegmans to do another traffic study after the store opens and pay \$150,000 toward any future traffic upgrades.

Tammy Grubb: 919-829-8926, @TammyGrubb

[Solution to traffic puzzle stands between Chapel Hill and future Wegmans Food Market]

[Wegmans, Sprouts, Lidl: New grocers spark store wars]

WHAT'S NEXT

A public information meeting about the changes to the Wegmans Food Market plan will be held at 5:15 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 24, in the second-floor training room at Chapel Hill Town Hall, 405 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

The Town Council will continue a public hearing and could vote Wednesday on the project. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. in the Council Chamber at Town Hall.

Durham's downtown loop may become a relic of the past

The Herald-Sun By Cliff Bellamy and Zachery Eanes October 18, 2017

DURHAM – The City of Durham wants to convert the downtown loop to two-way traffic.

The city's Transportation Department has applied for a \$12 million U.S. Department of Transportation TIGER Grant to convert the loop, a move it says will improve safety and mobility as well as boost economic development downtown.

The money would change pavement markings for two-way traffic and bicycles, modify traffic signals and construct roundabouts at key intersections along Roxboro Street.

Changing the traffic flow of the loop has become a perennial policy discussion. Long before downtown's economy began reviving, civic boosters often decried the one-way loop as an obstacle to downtown revitalization.

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"One-way streets are great for traffic but are horrible for pedestrians and the walkability of a downtown. On one-way streets drivers tend to stay at a sustained speed. Drivers don't have to stop or turn," Downtown Durham Inc. Policy Director Matt Gladdek told The Herald-Sun earlier this year.

"Driving through, on a one-way, you might see a shop and say 'That looks good, I'll stop there on my way home.' But, of course, you would not pass that way again on your way home," he said.

Currently the only street-oriented businesses on the loop are the Mr. Tire Auto Service and the McDonald's on Morgan Street, Gladdek said on Wednesday. He added that he believes a two-way loop would attract more street-oriented retail development along Morgan, Roxboro and Ramseur streets.

Two-way conversion of the loop would also increase safety for all roadway users – motorists, bicyclists, transit users and pedestrians, according to City of Durham Transportation Director Terry Bellamy.

"If we secure this U.S. DOT funding, we'll be able to decrease speeds in the loop and create or improve facilities such as sidewalks, bicycle facilities, transit amenities and street lighting," Bellamy said. "Funding for this project would also allow us to explore adding roundabouts to increase safety and traffic flow at key downtown intersections."

Bellamy said the city applied for a TIGER grant to redo the downtown loop in 2012 – but that application wasn't accepted.

This is the ninth round of TIGER grants that the U.S. DOT has offered since 2009, with \$500 million earmarked for this round, though the future of the program under the Trump administration has been questioned.

He added that, although TIGER grants are very competitive, the city has a much better chance this time around. "Just 'cause we didn't get it in 2012 doesn't mean we stopped the dream," he said.

"What's changed from before is that Durham has invested over a billion dollars in downtown," he said. "If you look at what we have done, we did not just ask for federal money. The city, the county and the business community has made investments to improve downtown not just for automobile users, but also for pedestrians and residents."

Durham has had some previous success with TIGER grants. The city received a \$222,700 TIGER grant in 2014 to help plan the Duke Belt Line project.

The \$12 million grant would fall within an estimated cost range that a 2015 study placed on the project. The study estimated the cost of transforming the infrastructure at between \$12 million and \$15 million without factoring in streetscape details such as new street lights. Bellamy said that the total estimated cost could reach up to \$18 million.

However, a more robust transformation of the streetscape, which would include more significant improvements, could cost an estimated \$35 million – a figure the 2015 study recommended financing through the issuance of new municipal bonds.

The 2015 study also identified five intersections that could benefit from new development if the loop was redone, including the Roxboro and Liberty streets intersection, where the downtown library is being renovated, and most of the intersections along West Morgan Street.

The loop is made up of several street segments that form a one-way loop around the central business district. It was designed and built to funnel traffic through downtown. However, the loop does not support pedestrians, bicyclists or transit users who want to safely get around downtown or the businesses and retailers in the city's central business district, a news release on Wednesday stated.

The loop also creates a barrier between downtown and adjoining low-income and minority neighborhoods.
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The goal to convert downtown streets to two-way traffic began with the creation of the Downtown Durham Master Plan in 1999. In 2007, the city converted Main Street and Chapel Hill Street to two-way traffic, and Durham has since seen more than \$1 billion invested in restaurants, shops and business along those streets, according to the city.

A park or a quarry? RDU weighs two visions for 105 acres of its land.

The News and Observer By Richard Stradling October 12, 2017

MORRISVILLE – The Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority has received two offers to lease 105 acres of airport land near Umstead State Park: one from a conservation group that wants to preserve the land, and another from a stone company that wants to dig it up.

Wake Stone Corp. already operates a quarry next to the airport's property, just south of William B. Umstead State Park, and proposes opening a new stone quarry on airport land that would operate for 25 to 30 years. The company says after the quarry shuts down, the property could be used for recreation, including hiking and fishing.

Meanwhile, The Conservation Fund, a national environmental organization, says the offer it made this summer [to buy the 105 acres](#) for \$6.46 million still stands. But this week it also proposed to lease the property or to lease/purchase it over five years for \$6.8 million.

"We thought it was important that the RDU board have conservation alternatives to consider for the property as they evaluate leasing it to Wake Stone or others for a quarry," Bill Holman, The Conservation Fund's state director, wrote in an email.

Airport authority chairman Farad Ali turned down [The Conservation Fund's offer to buy the property in a letter on Sept. 8](#), the same day the airport put it and two other tracts near Umstead totaling 151 acres up for lease. Wake County has proposed leasing the other two tracts for use by hikers and mountain bikers in an effort to expand on nearby Lake Crabtree Park that the county maintains on land it leases from the airport.

The airport authority met Thursday to give the county, The Conservation Fund and Wake Stone a chance to make their cases for leasing airport property in public. Afterward, Raleigh-Durham International Airport president and CEO Michael Landguth said his staff will review the proposals and make recommendations to the authority, but said he could not say how long that would take. (CONTINUED...)



The Raleigh-Durham Airport Authority has put these three pieces of land, totaling about 256 acres, up for lease.

RDU

The meeting drew dozens of people who support the idea of preserving the airport land for recreation. A coalition of groups and individuals called [RDU Forest](#) is collecting signatures in support of a plan to expand hiking and off-road cycling on airport land and in a portion of Umstead park nearest the airport. The plan depends on The Conservation Fund gaining control of the 105 acres known as the Odd Fellows property and Wake County securing a long-term lease on the remaining 151 acres the airport has made available for lease.

Sig Hutchinson, chairman of the Wake County Board of Commissioners, told authority members that this was a chance to create a “recreational wonderland” in the middle of a growing region.

“This is not only our opportunity, this is our destiny, our legacy,” he said.

The three pieces of airport land were once considered necessary for a planned runway that never materialized, and now RDU is looking for ways to generate income from them for other projects. Wake made the only lease offer for the 151 acres. It has proposed leasing the property for 40 years – the maximum the airport is willing to offer – at a rate that would be based on an appraisal that hasn’t been done yet.

But RDU now has two suitors for the Odd Fellows property.

Wake Stone has long had its eye on the property to complement its existing quarry, which opened in 1982. Landguth said shortly after he came to RDU six years ago, Wake Stone approached him about buying the Odd Fellows property. He told the company that the airport had a long-standing policy against selling property, and the conversation turned to a possible lease. Landguth said after hearing from others about wanting the property for recreation, the airport decided to make a public request for lease proposals.

The airport authority has already endorsed the idea of putting a quarry on the Odd Fellows property. A master plan for airport development over the next 25 years that the authority approved last fall designates the land for “industrial/quarry.”

Sam Bratton, president of Wake Stone, told authority members Thursday that the quarry lease would generate more income for the airport than the sale to The Conservation Fund and noted that the company has been good neighbors wherever it operates.

“Umstead has thrived while we’ve been in operation right next door,” Bratton said.

When a park is not a park

The airport authority sought the guidance of Peter Kirsch, an attorney who specializes in legal issues facing airports, who explained Federal Aviation Administration rules and policies on the sale or lease of airport land. He spent several minutes Thursday explaining why parks are considered incompatible neighbors with airports and that airport administrators should not create parks on adjoining land.

“Because parks are protected,” Kirsch said. “And if you later create an impact on that park, you’ve violated federal law.”

Wake County commissioner Irv Portman later asked how the airport could have signed a lease with the county to create Lake Crabtree Park. Kirsch replied that there’s language in the lease that makes it clear that the property is a recreation area and not a park as the FAA would understand it.

“So there are legal ways to do this,” Portman said, referring to the county’s lease offer.

“Recreational uses created by airports are quite common,” Kirsch said.

Wendy Jacobs, chair of the Durham County Board of Commissioners, noted that RDU has been neighbors with Umstead State Park since the airport was created in 1939. (CONTINUED...)

"We have a huge precedent here for recreational use being compatible with the airport," Jacobs said.

Contributions questioned

At the outset of Thursday's meeting, authority member Dickie Thompson offered to excuse himself from the lease discussions if his fellow board members wanted. Thompson noted that he had received \$4,000 in contributions to his recent campaign for re-election to the Raleigh City Council from four executives of Wake Stone Corp., including Sam Bratton and his brothers John and Theodore. Thompson's campaign recorded the checks on Sept. 9, the day after the airport announced that it was making the Odd Fellows property available for lease.

On Wednesday, Kym Hunter, an attorney for the Southern Environmental Law Center, asked that Thompson not take part in any decisions related to leases for the airport land because of those checks.

"These donations seriously undermine Mr. Thompson's ability to consider the future use of the Odd Fellows tract in an impartial manner," Hunter wrote on behalf of The Umstead Coalition.

Thompson told his colleagues that he's not influenced by campaign contributions and that he has known the Bratton family for decades. The same four Wake Stone executives also supported Thompson's first campaign for the Raleigh City Council in 2015, when each wrote checks totaling \$500, according to state Board of Elections records.

Thompson also noted that the two Wake commissioners, Hutchinson and Portman, also donated to his campaign, as had Jean Spooner, head of the Umstead Coalition. In the end, no one on the airport authority asked Thompson to step aside.

Carrboro has the highest population density rate in NC

dailytarheel.com By Doug Dubrowski October 11, 2017

Chapel Hill and Carrboro have exceptionally high population density rates in Orange County, and the two towns are still growing.

According to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce's 2017 State of the Community Report, 94 percent of Orange County is located outside Chapel Hill, Carrboro and Hillsborough. However, only 43 percent of the county's housing units are located outside of those areas.

Aaron Nelson, president of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, said Duke University is the county's largest landowner, holding thousands of acres of forestland.

"Carrboro is so dense because it is a very small land area. I think it's about six square miles, and it has (about) 19,000 people, and it's a lot of apartment complexes," Nelson said. "But Carrboro is only (about) 2 percent of the land area of Orange County, so it can be very dense and then Orange County can still be very not-dense."

Nelson said this disparity had [historical roots](#). As downtown Carrboro developed into a mill village, small houses were built very close together, creating a dense urban core that survives today.

Carrboro Mayor Lydia Lavelle said smaller houses are encouraged in modern Carrboro by ordinances to allow more people to live in the community while keeping housing costs affordable.

"For instance, we try to encourage developers to provide affordable housing and when they do that we allow them a density bonus," she said. "We allow them more houses on a property they would not normally be able to build if they also agree to provide affordable housing." (CONTINUED...)

Carrboro compared to other cities

Lavelle said Carrboro's density was still lower than in many comparable communities across the country.

"In Carrboro, we have the highest density per square mile of any town in North Carolina, but yet, if you look at other states, there are other cities in other states that are much more dense," she said.

Nelson agreed Carrboro's density was not abnormal and said Orange County in general is actually outpaced by many surrounding areas, including Wake County, Durham County and Chatham County.

"Carrboro is growing faster than Chapel Hill, and faster than the county on average, but still slower than almost anywhere else in the Triangle," Nelson said.

The State of the Community Report predicts the concentration of residents will stay manageable. While Chapel Hill is expected to experience an increase in density, it would still be less dense in 2030 than the college towns of Charlottesville, Virginia, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Boulder, Colorado and others are today.

The same report also stated that Orange County is growing at its slowest percentage rate since the 1930s, averaging 0.9 percent per year since 2010.

Lavelle said planners have long identified an area around Carrboro and Chapel Hill to target for development, but also seek to manage its density.

"In our county, we actually proactively work to try to keep our density within what we call an urban growth boundary," Lavelle said.

How population density affects transportation

As the population continues to increase, transportation planners use data to craft predictions and solutions to challenges such as increased traffic.

Andy Henry, senior transportation planner for the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization, said the MPO uses a land use model to distribute population and employment increases to different places in Orange County. Next, this information is run through a travel demand model, which forecasts the traffic on roadways and transit systems.

These projections help planners like Henry adjust to the transportation challenges posed by density. As population increases, Henry said transportation planning responses can be constrained by the layouts of tightly-packed communities.

"There's only so many places where you can widen roads or add lanes in Orange County, because so many of the roadways are already in urbanized areas, and the negative impact of the community would be too great to widen the roads," he said.

Unless citizens adjust their transportation habits, Henry said population growth means traffic in the most populated areas is bound to increase.

"In a lot of areas, with the expected population and employment growth, you're going to see overall congestion increase," Henry said. "Of course, that would depend, because if a lot of people moved over to transit, or walked or biked more, especially in the urban area, that could kind of mitigate or reduce some of those increases in roadway congestion."

Lavelle said Carrboro's geographic features and zoning rules help ease the challenges posed by population increases, and the town could feasibly become denser.

"Our town is fairly flat, and it's easy to get around by walking and biking," she said. "Our neighborhoods are zoned in a way that we can pack a lot of people in our 6.4 square miles, and they're also able to get around fairly easily."

Proposed bike lanes along I-40 could reduce congestion, boost economy

WRAL.com Reporters Julia Sims, Web Editor Natalie Matthews October 10, 2017

Raleigh, N.C. — The evening commute on Interstate 40 in Raleigh is often a sea of brake lights. Soon, commuters may be able to navigate the stretch of interstate by bike.

"This provides recreational opportunities, it protects the environment, it reduces congestion, and it promotes economic development and a healthy community," said Wake County Board of Commissioners Chairman Sig Hutchinson.

Proposed bike lanes would run from Trenton Road in west Raleigh to Airport Boulevard.

Hutchinson calls the proposal transformational for the area. A similar bikeway in Colorado has earned high praise, and Hutchinson said he believes it would have the same effect here.

"We need more transportation options," he said.

Chris Snow, Wake County's director of parks and recreation, said the 7- to 9-mile bikeway would cost about \$1 million a mile.

"It would be an expensive trail," Snow said. "We have to figure out how to get through or around entities."

Some of that cost involves purchasing or leasing land from the Raleigh-Durham International Airport as well as the state.

"It would be a conversation with them about how we can get through their property or around their property to make a connection," Snow said.

Eighty percent of the project would likely be covered by state transportation funds. Wake County would fund the rest.

Hutchinson thinks it's worth it.

"When people are sitting on the I-40 parking lot at 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. and you're seeing cyclists flying by you at close to 20 mph, I promise you they'll lose it," Hutchinson said.

Commissioners plan to talk about funding options next week. There is currently no timetable for the project.