

Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study

**Focus Area Workshop
Route 7/Route 35 Intersection Area
Wednesday, May 5, 2010
6:30 – 8:30 PM**

Veterans Park Elementary School - Cafeteria
8 Governor Street
Ridgefield, CT

Attendance

Advisory Committee Members and Public who signed in: 20 in attendance

South Western Regional Planning Agency

Craig Lader Study Manager

Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials

David Hannon Deputy Director

Connecticut Department of Transportation Staff:

David Head Transportation Planning

Katharine Rattan Transportation Planning

Consultant Team:

Susan VanBenschoten Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Carol Gould Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Sam Eisenbeiser Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Francisco Gomes Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Leslie Black Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.

Welcome Activity:

As participants entered the workshop, they were asked to answer three questions. Below is a summary of questions and responses:

What do you value most about the area of Route 7 and 35 now?

- good traffic flow
- commercial value
- easy access to Ridgefield
- scenery
- new restaurants

What would you most like to see change in the area of Route 7 and 35 in the future?

- change the zone to allow retail
- a traffic light on Route 7 north of Route 35 junction
- rezone to B1 from Haviland Road to Danbury line
- more travel lanes
- aesthetics – more landscaping for businesses, better architecture

- stagger traffic lights to enable easier use of 638 Danbury entrance
- expanded commercial uses
- enable/facilitate entrance to and exit from condominium development at 638 Danbury Road
- better traffic flow

List the top 2 reasons you come to or go through the area of Route 7 and Route 35 Intersection?

- only road going south
- medical services
- access to other areas
- we live just north of intersection of 7 and 35
- shopping in Danbury to go north; School at Fairfield University going south
- shops at 590 Danbury Road
- traveling north from Ridgefield to get to Danbury
- have a home near there and it is easiest route between Ridgefield and Danbury
- landlord
- work reasons

Presentation

Susan VanBenschoten welcomed the audience to the first geographic focus area workshop looking at the Route 7/Route 35 Intersection area for the Route 7 Transportation and Land Use Study. She explained the purpose of the study and emphasized that this study will focus on Route 7 within Danbury, Ridgefield, Redding, and Wilton. *The study will not evaluate the need for an expressway from Danbury to Norwalk, but will instead investigate ways to maximize the efficiency and safety of all modes of the existing transportation system.*

Ms. VanBenschoten then presented existing conditions in the corridor as well as the 2030 Corridor Vision developed by the project team and the Advisory Committee. She explained the purpose of the geographic focus area workshops being held for the areas around Route 7/Route 35 Intersection, Branchville, and Wilton Center. This first workshop is to gather input to better understand public issues and ideas or vision for each focus area. The second workshop will be to present for public comment a draft concept for the future form and character of the area to include in the overall corridor plan.

Ms. VanBenschoten reviewed preliminary Route 7/Route 35 Intersection focus area goals for audience comment:

- Create a northern “gateway” to Ridgefield
- Human-scale, walkable environment
- Room for public spaces
- Connectivity
- Community resources/institutions as focal points for nodes
- Strategic parking supply
- Allows the ‘D’ word – density – more development opportunity

The remainder of the workshop was devoted to small group exercises discussing these goals as well as identifying issues and opportunities for the focus area.

Public Question and Comment Period:

- Public wants a traffic light at the intersection of 638 Danbury Road but is getting resistance from the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) because a light will hamper traffic movement. Any proposed development in this area will also hamper traffic movement. **Susan VanBenschoten responded that the CTDOT is interested in the balance between effective transportation facilities**

and the interests of the public, but their emphasis is on public safety at all times. She also explained that a traffic signal would need to be warranted based on national and state standards.

- One participant voted “No” to most goals questions because they own the plaza in the focus area; land use capacity is an issue and pedestrian safety is an issue with traffic speeds and access. Their property is limited by state-owned land boxing them in and restricting further growth.
- Enhancing access to sites and uses would be a goal; currently resources are not easily accessible due to constraints.
- improve aesthetics – restriction on uses currently not a good “gateway” impression
- Ridgefield police have given out 200 tickets, some for speeds in excess of 85 mph; traffic is moving too fast there – safety is an issue if development is to be considered. **The study team responded that effective design would implement traffic calming measures to slow traffic.**
- This area should be considered a gateway from upper Fairfield County to lower Fairfield County, not just a gateway to Ridgefield.
- Traffic is a #1 concern from a retail renters point of view – and causes flip-flop in opinion on goals for future development.

The following is a summary of the small group exercise findings.

FOCUS AREA WORKSHOP– Small Group Exercise #1

OBJECTIVE:

PLANNER FOR AN EVENING!

Imagine.....you are King or Queen of the realm, and also Chief Architect and Planner....you can wave your scepter and make it happenWhat would you envision for this special area for the future? Work with your planning team at your table and record your findings as we go along.....

The following text summarizes the various group responses.

Group 1:

- map should be extended to include Haviland Road
- keep retail use at Route 35; it is fine, but make aesthetic improvements
- remove Red Lion housing
- keep Pamby's, Siementi, Stone House
- expand use along corridor
- add traffic signal at Toll Brothers/Laurel Ridge for improved access
- add pedestrian access from Toll Brothers to potentially improved Route 7 use
- add bus stop at Pond's Edge, residential areas, and Stone House Commons/Toll Bros.
- put parking in back of commercial buildings on Route 7
- add primary traffic light improvement – 4-way at Route 7/Route 35

Group 2:

- get rid of old gas station (Mulvnaey) – only to replace and rebuild
- actual limitation – sewer capacity
- difficult to get from one to another
- existing residential 150-180 units is “home-run” for retail, other businesses
- Keep all development – issue is use/reuse
- offices are difficult to rent because the area is not attractive
- Uses of buildings – mixed uses – office/retail on first floor, residential above in LIMITED areas

- office above retail is more likely alternative
- house above could be affordable
- make “legally non-conforming” retail legal by rezoning
- Pond’s Edge – just south – large parcel and potential for variety of mixed use – property extends from Route 35 to Route 7
- Make walkable from Pond’s Edge to Route 7/Route 35 intersection
- sidewalks – either side of Route 7 and connect between adjoining properties
- General comments: mixed uses – throughout much of corridor; state right-of-way is an issue; parking lots encroach into right-of-way
- Add bus stops at intersection, Pond’s Edge, 638 Danbury Road (Toll Brothers/Nursing Home)
- Two 800-pound gorillas: 1. Eureka – could double population quickly if developed; 2. sewer capacity

Group 3:

- new condominiums are not desirable (on west side)
- not sure about availability of state-owned and Land Conservancy land for creating a 4-way intersection at 7/35
- Ulman’s site should be reconfigured
- planned bike trail is key component
- protect the little pond wetland area
- enough residential already
- crossing Route 7 is a major issue
- need a traffic light on Route 7
- keep Carvel for historic purposes

Please view [Route 7-35 Focus Area Results 5-05-2010](#) for further summary of attendees responses to focus area goals and visual preference survey.

The workshop adjourned at 8:30 p.m.