

LAUREL HILL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2019

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HISTORY: LAUREL HILL NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

- The Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association (LHNA) was created officially in 1987, but it was active as early as the 1950's.
- It's first cause involved protesting the potential placement of a water tower at the corner of Raleigh Road and Country Club Road, which is now the site of the UNC Institute of Government.
- In the 1970's the LHNA continued to work informally, through protest and petition, to retain the beauty of the neighborhood. Dues were first collected at that time during the "battle of the toilets" – a protest against the installation of sewer lines to the University tennis courts, which would have changed the landscape of the neighborhood in a significant way.
- In 1987, the LHNA was formed officially in response to the Long-Range Land Use Plan of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This plan included a "Laurel Hill Loop Road" and in a presentation at a UNC Faculty/Staff meeting on May 6, 1987, the plan called for "local homes and land to be acquired by the University." The LHNA successfully petitioned Chancellor Fordham and the Town of Chapel Hill to keep that from happening.
- In response to this initial conflict of interest with the University and the Town, the LHNA led the initiative for the neighborhood to be established as a National Register Historic District in 1987. This effort required an

enormous amount of work. It also required a fundraising appeal to the neighborhood, which was successful (\$4,500 was raised to make this effort possible – the equivalent of about \$10,000 today).

- The boundaries of the National Register Historic District were expanded in 2007 as more homes qualified, based on their age.
- In 1991, the LHNA succeeded in having a stoplight installed at the intersection of US 15-501 Bypass (Fordham Blvd)/Old Mason Farm Road/Carmichael Avenue. Also that year, the LHNA was successful in preventing UNC-Chapel Hill from closing Ridge Road permanently, which would have required a new “loop road” through the UNC Pinetum. The Pinetum borders several streets of the Laurel Hill neighborhood. In addition to negatively impacting the neighbors on those streets, the new “loop road” would have been ruinous for the Pinetum.
- In 1997, the LHNA created a National Register Historic District monument at the corner of Country Club Road and Laurel Hill Road. Unfortunately, the sign was stolen on Christmas Day 2016. It was replaced by the LHNA in December 2018. (NOTE: Please be sure to stop by and see it! The LHNA intends to create a similar monument at the Fern Lane entrance of the neighborhood.)
- The last Annual Meeting with the previous leadership was held in November 2002. Concerns at that meeting included: drivers who speed through the neighborhood, pedestrian safety, and traffic at Carmichael Avenue related to the St. Thomas More School. So many of the issues with which we wrestle today are ones that have been around for many years.
- In May 2018, a general meeting was called to elect new officers in order to reactivate the Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association. The following officers were elected:
 - (1) Shannon Kennedy, President
 - (2) Ron DiFelice, Vice-President
 - (3) Rob David, Recording Secretary
 - (4) Mark Sidell, Treasurer
- The previous directors of the Board remained active directors per the LHNA By-laws – even though they had not met since 2002 – and fortunately, they agreed to continue serving. Those directors are:
 - (1) Evan Rodewald
 - (2) Don Searing
 - (3) Ann Wilson

- On September 23, 2018, the LHNA Annual Meeting was held at the home of Shannon Kennedy and Alan Stephenson. There were more than 40 people in attendance. While there are many short-term and long-term goals of the LHNA, the primary focus is:
 - (1) RENTAL BLIGHT: Stem the growth of rental blight (caused by absentee landlords) in the neighborhood.
 - (2) ST. THOMAS MORE EXPANSION: Minimize the impact that this expansion will have on the neighborhood, especially the potential increase in traffic.
 - (3) LIGHT RAIL: Minimize the impact that this system will have on the neighborhood.
 - (4) GLENWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Keep the neighborhood updated on the developments at the school related to redistricting.
 - (5) NEIGHBORHOOD AMBASSADORS PROGRAM: Participate in the Town's Neighborhood Ambassadors Program, fostering greater community and communication within the neighborhood.

DUES NOTICE

At the September 23, 2018 Annual Meeting, it was announced that dues for the 2018-2019 year will be \$25/household.

If you wish to be an active member of the Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association – which allows you to vote at the annual meeting, have access to the neighborhood directory and receive future newsletters – please join today!

Checks made payable to: Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association

Checks mailed to: Mark Sidell, 7 Old Rocky Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Dues also may be paid with a credit card or PayPal. Please visit the LHNA website: laurelhillneighborhoodassociation.com and click the "pay your dues" link.

RENTAL BLIGHT

PLEASE NOTE: WE ARE NOT REFERENCING RENTALS THAT ARE MANAGED BY LAUREL HILL HOMEOWNERS. THE PRACTICE WE WISH TO STOP IS THAT OF ABSENTEE LANDLORDS BUYING HOMES IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND FILLING THEM WITH STUDENT RENTERS

Currently, there are five (5) houses in the neighborhood that appear to be student rentals managed (and we use that term loosely) by absentee landlords. If the neighborhood wishes to see this practice come to a stop, then neighbors must be diligent about notifying Town officials when Town ordinances are being violated – such as more than 4 unrelated people living in one house; illegal parking; inappropriate disposition of trash; noise violations; construction code violations. Here is a link to the Town Ordinances, which are organized well. Whatever the offense, you should be able to find it here, with instructions on whom to contact at the Town: <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/town-hall/government/code-of-ordinances>

RESTRICTIVE COVENANTS

Restrictive Covenants exist on every parcel of land in the Rocky Ridge Development, which includes every street in the Laurel Hill Neighborhood.

The neighborhood was created in the 1920's by W.C. Coker, the first professor of Botany at UNC-Chapel Hill. It was developed on his farm, which was named Rocky Ridge Farm. Professor Coker created covenants for the Rocky Ridge development at that time.

The covenants were updated in 1954 and recorded at the Orange County Register of Deeds. They remain in effect and are enforceable on every parcel of land in the Rocky Ridge Development, even if they are not referenced in the deed for that parcel of land.

It is the hope of the LHNA that homeowners will begin to reference these covenants properly in their deeds going forward and that real estate agents will be made aware of these covenants.

The LHNA is in the process of notifying each homeowner – as well as all local real estate companies – about the existence of the restrictive covenants. A copy of the Restrictive Covenants accompanies this newsletter and it can be found on the LHNA website: laurelhillneighborhoodassociation.com .

NEIGHBORHOOD AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

This program is part of new initiative created by the Town of Chapel Hill, which is focused on:

- ✓ enhancing the flow of communication between the Town and neighborhood communities;
- ✓ creating a database that allows for neighborhoods to communicate effectively with each other.

The Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association (LHNA) Board of Directors has expanded the scope of this initiative within the Laurel Hill neighborhood. The purpose of this expansion is to create a network that can assist with the following:

- ✓ develop a greater sense of community throughout the neighborhood;
- ✓ improve the information flow between the LHNA Board and the neighborhood;
- ✓ serve as an advocate for the neighborhood in our engagement with the Town;
- ✓ mobilize the neighborhood when needed (especially in times of emergency, such as hurricanes and snowstorms, so that we have an organized way to help our neighbors in preparation);
- ✓ identify important Town meetings at which the neighborhood should have a presence and coordinate that effort.

It would be wonderful to eventually have one Neighborhood Ambassador on each street. If you would be willing to serve as a neighborhood ambassador, please send an email to: info@laurelhillneighborhoodassociation.com . Amanda Kyser and Karen Jooste will serve as coordinators of this program.

CURRENT NEIGHBORHOOD AMBASSADORS

Buttons Lane: _____
Country Club Rd: Harriet Martin
Fern Lane: _____
Iris Lane: Karen Jooste
Laurel Hill Circle: Hope Thornton-Koonce

Laurel Hill Road: Amanda Kyser and Carolyn Mackman
Ledge Lane: _____
Pine Lane: _____
Old Rocky Ridge Rd: _____
Round Hill Road: _____
St. James Place: _____

LIGHT RAIL

If the current Light Rail plan proceeds, it will have a significant impact on the Laurel Hill neighborhood. The Light Rail will travel down Fordham Blvd from Highway 54 and then cross over to the Laurel Hill neighborhood side of Fordham Blvd at the intersection of Fordham Blvd/Old Mason Farm Road/Carmichael Ave/Fern Lane. In order to cross Fordham Blvd, a pillar will be erected on what currently are the steps of the old Aldersgate United Methodist Church (now called St. Thomas More South Campus). The Light Rail would then travel up Fern Lane, significantly impacting property on that street, as well as the Pinetum. It is likely that the entire neighborhood also will be impacted by the noise from the Light Rail as it travels behind our neighborhood on its way to UNC Hospitals. For more information on the Light Rail project, visit these two websites:

<https://gotriangle.org/lightrail/home> and
<https://www.affordabletransitforall.com>

GLENWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL REDISTRICTING

Although no changes are set to take effect until the 2020-21 school year, it is unclear where children in our neighborhood will attend public school at that time. Our neighborhood is currently zoned to attend Glenwood Elementary School, which houses the district's Mandarin Dual Language (MDL) program, as well as a Traditional Track (TT) program.

Six years ago the MDL program was expanded from one classroom per grade to two. The MDL expansion, along with population growth, has led to overcrowding at Glenwood, which is the district's smallest and oldest elementary school.

In September 2018, a divided Board of Education voted to approve further expansion of the MDL program in order to convert Glenwood into a whole-school Mandarin Magnet, which would require reassigning our neighborhood to a different elementary school. Although no redistricting plan has been approved by the Board yet, the proposal presented by the Administration would reassign our neighborhood to Northside Elementary, on the opposite side of downtown Chapel Hill, near the Carrboro border.

The approved plan has been met with controversy, including push-back from teachers at Glenwood. The Superintendent requested that the teachers propose an alternative plan that would allow the current faculty to remain intact, meaning the school would not be 100% MDL. The plan would retain a Traditional Track as well and it may keep the Laurel Hill neighborhood zoned for Glenwood.

An “Implementation Team” of seven classroom teachers, the ESL teacher, the school counselor, principal, vice principal, and three district administrators has been convened to refine the teachers’ proposal and vet it for feasibility. It is unclear, however, whether the Implementation Team’s final recommendation will be supported by a majority of the School Board. If no Board vote supersedes the 100% MDL plan already approved, then 100% MDL is what will be implemented for 2020-21. At that time, Traditional Track students in our neighborhood would be redistricted.

The current draft recommendations of the Implementation Team include maintaining two MDL classrooms per grade, and “capping” the rest of the school to two Traditional Track classrooms per grade. That is, there would be two lotteries for Glenwood, one for MDL and one for Traditional Track.

The recommendation is that each lottery would include a weighted preference for neighborhoods close to Glenwood, but it is not clear if all current Glenwood-zoned neighborhoods (including ours) would receive the preference. In the past, a zone-preference for the lottery to enter the MDL program has been rejected by the School Board.

The Implementation Team will be soliciting public feedback via an online survey, which will be shared via our neighborhood email listserv. The current timeline calls for a vote on the Implementation Team’s recommendations to occur in May 2019.

ST. THOMAS MORE EXPANSION

In January 2018, our neighborhood learned that St. Thomas More (STM) purchased Aldersgate United Methodist Church with plans to use it as an additional campus – “South Campus” – for daily mass, a pre-school, an after-school program, and a home for Meals-on-Wheels.

STM's plan to expand the parking lot behind the facility became an immediate concern for many people in the neighborhood. Additionally, STM's plan to redirect the traffic pattern of the parking lot caused concern for many – because the plan would redirect all traffic onto Laurel Hill Road.

Members of the neighborhood met several times with STM and the Town of Chapel Hill to express their concerns. In August 2018, the results of a Traffic Impact Assessment were presented. The study was organized by the Town; STM paid for it. At that time, the neighborhood learned that more than 400 additional cars likely would travel each day on Laurel Hill Road if all of STM's plans for expansion are implemented.

The neighbors at the meeting expressed concern about that increase in volume – not only for the safety of the members of the Chapel Hill community who walk, run, bike, and drive on Laurel Hill Road – but also for all the ways in which the increase would impact an already-overloaded (and ill-functioning) stoplight at the Fern Lane/Carmichael Ave/Fordham Blvd/Mason Farm Road intersection. Additionally, many members of the neighborhood found the Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) to be faulty – in that it set unrealistic expectations of how the stoplight would work (giving just a few additional seconds in the light cycle for cars to exit Fern Lane).

On January 14, 2019 the Town informed the neighborhood that Phase 1 of the St. Thomas More project has been approved. Phase 1 is very narrow in scope and does not involve any additional buildings, or additions to the parking lot, or changes in traffic flow on STM's South Campus. Phase 1 involves only ADA accessibility improvements, installation of bicycle racks, improvements to the sewer/stormwater system, and additional tree plantings on South Campus. The permit and plan can be accessed here: <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/town-hall/departments-services/planning-and-development-services/development-activity-report/st-thomas-more-south-campus>

Importantly, STM has not indicated when or whether it will submit its application for Phase 2 of the project. Phase 2 is essentially the project STM announced in January 2018 that caused significant concern. As noted, Phase 2 would involve a pre-school, after-school care, and relocation of Meals-on-Wheels to the STM

South Campus. Phase 2 also would seek to negatively alter the traffic patterns on Laurel Hill Road and the Mason Farm Road intersection.

A group of neighbors has been monitoring the situation closely for more than a year. Most recently, representatives from that group met with the Town on November 8, 2018. During that meeting, the Town committed that any additional land disturbance by STM would put further STM zoning requests into the Special Use Permit Process ("SUP").

Thus, if STM submits a Phase 2 zoning application to do anything significant at the site, the SUP Process means that the neighborhood would be entitled to participate and comment at each phase. This would include: (i) an initial scope meeting with Town Staff; (ii) public review and hearing by four Town advisory Boards, each of which in turn submits a recommendation to the Town Council; and (iii) a public evidentiary hearing before Town Council where the neighborhood may participate.

The above process has been confirmed in writing with the Town. Also, the fact that many neighbors objected to STM's TIA – which they believe is both procedurally and substantively defective – has been confirmed in writing with the Town.

In the event that STM does submit a Phase 2 application, the neighbors who object to this expansion will need assistance with the multiple tasks that need to be addressed in any SUP process – include the possible funding of an engineer's analysis to suggest modifications to the Mason Farm Road intersection on the STM side so that the burden of any STM changes does not unfairly burden the Laurel Hill Neighborhood. To this point, these concerned neighbors report STM has not been willing to consider any changes to the Mason Farm Road intersection but has suggested that the traffic burdens of any future changes fall entirely on the Laurel Hill Road Neighborhood.

If you would like to assist in this matter, please email the Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association: info@laurelhillneighborhoodassociation.com . The LHNA is not taking an official position on this matter, but the LHNA will serve as a facilitator to connect like-minded neighbors who wish to minimize the impact of the STM expansion.

Given the strength with which the concerns about STM's initial plans were highlighted by many members of the neighborhood, it is possible that STM has recalibrated its approach. Since our neighborhood has not received an update from STM, concerned members of the neighborhood plan to stay in close touch with the Town in the event of further activity.

Additionally, those neighbors report that they have documented multiple times – with both STM and the Town – their willingness to meet with STM to negotiate a global resolution to the concerns of so many neighbors. Their approach has been that the neighborhood, as good neighbors, would like for STM to be able to achieve its goals while at the same time work with the neighborhood so as not to unduly harm it. This group of neighbors has sought a dialogue and a negotiated resolution. At this time, they report that STM has not responded to these invitations.

LHNA BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

OFFICERS:

SHANNON KENNEDY, President
RON DIFELIECE, Vice-President
ROB DAVID, Recording Secretary
MARK SIDELL, Treasurer

The officers were re-elected at the 2018 Annual Meeting. Their two-year term ends in the fall of 2020.

DIRECTORS:

EVAN RODEWALD, Director
DON SEARING, Director
ANN WILSON, Director

The directors will be re-elected to serve another two-year term in the fall of 2019.

If you are interested in serving as an officer and/or a director, please send an email to: info@laurelhillneighborhoodassociation.com .