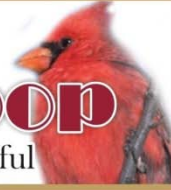


The Carolina Scoop

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By John Mayhew (Lincolnton)

Meeting Looks into Highway 16 Future

At one time, Highway 16 in Denver was viewed as one of the most dangerous highways in Western North Carolina according to Bo Moore.

The chairman of the Highway 16 Transportation Committee remembers when he was chairman of the Lincolnton/Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce and published a brochure on Highway 16.

"Transportation is the key issue going into the 1990s," Moore said Tuesday night. "And today, 20 years later, we're still talking about transportation."

Moore participated in a joint meeting of the Highway 16 Transportation Committee, the Lincoln County Planning Board, the Planning and Zoning Department and Lincoln County Commissioners.

"Back then (in the 1990s), we were fighting for stoplights and caution lights along Highway 16," said Moore, who announced the latest stoplight will go at the intersection of St. James Church Road and Highway 16.

Highway 16 Transportation Committee members outlined a vision for the future of the corridor, indicating the desire for a "Main Street" along Denver.

Greg Coffey said there needs to be a "sense of community" in implementing the plan over the next two decades.

"The community has to be a part of the process," said Coffey. "We have to build this vision as a community. (Highway 16) needs to look like a community and have a community feel."

For more than two years, the Highway 16 Transportation Committee met at least twice per month to work on the vision presented Tuesday night. Coffey told the meeting "a lot of analysis" went into the plan.

"We learned there was significant strip commercial development along Highway 16," said Coffey. "Some of it is nice and some is not very nice. We also have houses turned into businesses. (Some of the) development is very uncoordinated and a mish-mash."

Part of the "mish-mash" Coffey spoke of may lie in looking in land use in the eastern end of the county.

In analyzing current land use along Highway 16, 43 percent is commercial; 31 percent is residential and 24 percent of land use is unoccupied. Only two percent of land use is industrial.

Coffey said there are other issues along the 16 corridor the Transportation Committee learned over their series of meetings.

One major issue involves speed limits.

"People are frustrated about the inconsistent speed limits," said Coffey.

The corridor vision for Highway 16 includes more of a balance of business and residential; protecting the quality of life; ease of travel and a positive street view, where the corridor itself has "curb appeal."

The committee also recommended uses for open spaces including parks, recreation and even a bike trail.

"You need to have some way of integrating something for everyone in the plan," said Coffey. "Part of the open spaces could include incorporating what is being done with the Carolina Thread Trail."

One major facet of the Transportation Committee's plan is the creation of development centers, including regional, community and neighborhood development centers.

Coffey identified a regional development center as the intersection of Highways 16 and 73; community development centers include Highway 16 and Campground Road; 16 and Old Plank Road; and 16 and Triangle Circle.

Neighborhood development centers, meantime, may be created at Highway 16 and Hagers Ferry; 16 and North Triangle Circle and 16 and Webbs Road.

Coffey said these issues "kept coming up" during a series of public meetings held last year throughout east Lincoln, that the development centers are "something people want to see."

The Transportation Committee's plan impacts other plans either being developed throughout the county or plans already in place.

"The plan impacts the land use plan, for example, as well as other plans," said commissioner Jim Klein. "Sounds like the recommendations here are different from the land use plan."

Talk also centered around keeping the Highway 16 Transportation Committee together for the future.

"If you're willing to see this thing on and keep the committee together, then you can come up with a better plan in the long run," said Commissioner Bruce Carlton.

<http://www.thecarolinascoop.com/16mtg.html>