

Draft

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING July 25, 2022**

**ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

PRESENT: Ronnie Reese, Chairman
Marty Pennell, Vice-Chairman
Kent Herman

ABSENT: Josh Lail
Larry Yoder

STAFF: Rick French, County Manager
Gary Herman, PIO
Connie Kincaid, Business Development Manager
Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

VISITORS: Scott Bowman, Board of Education
Bud Caywood, PZC/Bethlehem Plan Committee/BCDA
Dr. Jennifer Hefner, Superintendent
Micah Henry, The Taylorsville Times
Marty Loudermilt, Board of Education
Daniel Odom, WPCOG
David Odom, Board of Education
Averi Ritchie, WPCOG
Ramie Robinson, Board of Education
Gary Sain, SMP Investments
Jack Simms, Taylorsville Town Council
Mark Stafford, NCDOT

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners held a special called meeting on Monday, July 25, 2022 in Room 103 of the CVCC / Alexander Center in Taylorsville, North Carolina to discuss the Highway 127 widening project as well as a project swap proposed by the City of Hickory.

HIGHWAY 127 PROJECT DISCUSSION

Mark Stafford, NCDOT Division 12 Engineer, explained that overall budget shortfalls prior to and caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as rising costs for projects in the 2020-2029 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), had left little to no funding for new projects. Therefore, NCDOT halted the current prioritization schedule and developed a draft 2024-2033 STIP using projects from the 2020-2029 STIP. The initial draft 2024-2033 STIP was released in May and additional revisions are anticipated before final adoption.

Included in the draft 2024-2033 STIP are flexibility options that include project swaps between municipalities. All swaps must be agreed to by NCDOT and MPO/RPOs where affected projects

are located. Mr. Stafford discussed interest by the City of Hickory for a project swap with Alexander County as follows:

- A portion of funding allocated for widening Highway 127 in Alexander County would be used for unfunded improvements on Startown Road in Catawba County, resulting in Highway 127 widened to a 4-lane divided road only to Shiloh Church Road near Mt. Pisgah Church instead of Richey Road as originally planned.
- In exchange, the City of Hickory has initially proposed maintaining Alexander County's sidewalk and multipurpose path along Highway 127 as well as paying our 20% cost share portion for utilities.
- A new 2-lane bridge over Lake Hickory, built parallel to the current bridge, as well as improvements at Bethlehem Elementary School (southbound turn lane onto Bethlehem School Road with traffic signal) would occur regardless of whether Alexander County accepts the project swap proposal.

Rick French, County Manager, stated that he had recently met with officials from the City of Hickory and WPCOG to discuss specifics related to the swap. He hopes to schedule another meeting for later this week to continue negotiations.

In response to several questions, Mr. Stafford clarified that if Alexander County chooses not to accept City of Hickory's swap proposal, NCDOT would proceed as originally planned by widening Highway 127 from Cloninger Mill Road all the way to Richey Road, with right-of-way acquisition expected in 2024 and construction in 2026. Estimated project costs from Cloninger Mill Road to Shiloh Church Road (including the new bridge) total approx. \$54 million and the segment from Shiloh Church Road to Richey Road totals \$39 million.

After group discussion related to impact to property owners, area businesses, and Bethlehem Elementary School as well as review of provided project maps, Mr. Stafford advised that all project swap agreements should be submitted by late September.

Mr. French suggested a representative from NCDOT attend the August 1, 2022 Commissioners' Meeting to provide this update to the full Board of Commissioners. ****Following a phone conversation on Wednesday, July 27, 2022, this presentation was postponed due to a change in the State budget that would provide additional funding to NCDOT. As a result, further review of the draft 2024-2033 STIP is needed and the deadline for project swap agreements has been extended until May 2023.*

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 6:41 PM.

Ronnie L. Reese, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board