

Aiken City Council Minutes

March 25, 2003

Joint Meeting with Aiken County Council

Present Aiken City Council: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Cunning, Price, Smith, and Vaughters

Present Aiken County Council: Chairman Ronnie Young, Willar Hightower, Rick Osbon, Scott Singer, Lawana McKenzie, and Charles Barton

Aiken Planning Commission Members: Kay Brohl, Wilkins Byrd, Miles Hall, Bill Reynolds, Roscoe Stanley, and Ed Woltz

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Ed Evans, Clay Killian, Joan Wilson-Donnelly, Steve Cote and Mike Clark from Jordan, Jones & Goulding, and about 100 citizens.

Aiken County Council Chairman Ronnie Young called the meeting to order at 6 P.M. He welcomed those present and introduced the County Council Members present.

Mayor Cavanaugh introduced the City Council Members and the Planning Commission members present and stated the purpose of the meeting was for information and to receive the final report and hear a presentation by Jordan, Jones & Goulding on a proposed Whiskey Road-Silver Bluff Road Connector Study. He stated members of the Aiken County Council and the Aiken City Planning Commission were present to hear the presentation.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated traffic has been a big issue in Aiken, especially on the south side, for the last several years. He said there had been discussion over the years about constructing a road to connect Silver Bluff Road and Whiskey Road. He said about nine months ago City Council retained the consultants of Jordan, Jones & Goulding to do a study for a route for a proposed connector road between Whiskey Road and Silver Bluff. He said the consultants will present their study and make a recommendation for location of a connector road. He said the main purpose of the meeting is to present the alternatives studied, the process for the study and their recommendation for a connector road and to get comments from citizens.

Mr. Roger LeDuc, City Manager reviewed the connector road process to this point.

Mr. Steve Cote, from Jordan, Jones & Goulding, made the presentation. He reviewed the basics of the study—the purpose and process, the alternatives for the road connector and then the process for the recommendation that Alternative number 2 be chosen as the route for the connector.

Mr. Cote stated the study objectives were to study potential options for a connector road joining Silver Bluff Road and Whiskey Road, solicit and involve the public throughout the course of the study, and determine recommended alignment location for a proposed connector to preserve future right-of-way.

Mr. Cote stated the process had involved public meetings, data collection, traffic analysis, traffic forecasts, alignment analysis and cost estimation. He said the process had been ongoing for about eight months. Mr. Cote stated the study area involved the area south of Woodside Plantation between Silver Bluff and Whiskey Road to approximately one mile south of Anderson Pond Road.

Mr. Cote stated the study examined different alternative alignments for connector roads between Silver Bluff Road and Whiskey Road in south Aiken. The primary purpose of the connector road is to provide relief from the growing traffic pressure that exists currently along Dougherty Road and Pine Log Road (to the north of the study area). Much of this pressure appears to be caused by traffic between the commercial areas along

Whiskey Road, the Savannah River Site, and the growing residential and employment areas in south Aiken that must currently use Dougherty Road for access.

These selected alternatives were each analyzed in terms of discrete, objective factors such as cost, traffic impact, public input, connectivity, environmental impacts, property impacts, length, and safety. In addition, other factors were considered that relate to the actual design of such a facility itself, such as number of lanes, speed limit, non-motorized access (bike, pedestrian, horses), etc.

After extensive public input, factors for each alternative were combined in a weighted factor model that allowed alternatives to be compared objectively. Results from this model clearly indicate that Alternative 2 is the recommended alternative. This route connects Silver Bluff Road at Glenwood Drive and Whiskey Road near Talatha Church Road.

The performance of Alternative 2, however, could be significantly improved by making a slight alteration to the studied alignment. This alteration would minimize the wetlands encroachment of the original alignment and have other benefits as well. It is highly recommended that if Alternative 2 is chosen, that this slight modification be included.

In addition, it is recommended that the connector road be a 2-lane, parkway-type facility, with limited access. Although there is no evidence that a 4-lane facility will be required by 2025, (assuming a limited access road is constructed), enough right-of-way for a 4-lane facility should be acquired for later use. It is highly desirable that the initial 2-lane facility also include a multi-use trail that would allow access by bicycle, pedestrians, and horse riders.

Mr. Cote reviewed the seven alternative routes for the connector road. These included:

- Glenwood Drive – Chukker Creek Road.
- Glenwood Drive – Talatha Church Road (vicinity).
- Glenwood Drive – Chime Bell Church Road.
- Anderson Pond Road – Chukker Creek Road.
- Anderson Pond Road – Talatha Church Road (vicinity).
- Anderson Pond Road – Chime Bell Church Road.
- Herndon Dairy Road – Chime Bell Church Road.

Mr. Cote stated the proposed alignments for the road from Silver Bluff to Whiskey vary in length from about four miles to six miles. He pointed out the shorter the connector the lesser the cost. He pointed out a four-lane road versus a two-lane road is not double in cost. It was pointed out the Glenwood Drive options would cost about \$16 million for a 2-lane road and about \$22.7 million for a 4-lane for the modified Alternative 2 version. The routes farther south would get progressively more expensive because they would be longer.

Mr. Cote stated the modified Alternative 2 provides good traffic congestion relief and would improve connectivity in the south Aiken area. It has fewer property impacts than all the other alternatives, has the least environmental impacts of all the alternatives, including the original Alternative 2. Alternative 2 would also be at a moderate cost. He said it is not felt that a 4-lane road will be needed based on the 2025 traffic estimates and analysis of future land use in the area. However, it is felt that land should be acquired to plan for future expansion to a 4-lane road at a later date. It was felt that the road should have limited access and limited signalized intersections, with a limit of no more than 5 intersections, including the two end points, with three in the middle. From input from the public it was felt there should be some kind of pedestrian features such as trails, horse riding trails, or bicycle trails along the roadway to increase green space. He pointed out that the proposed modified Alternate 2 would fit in with the planned project to modify the Old Dibble Road Extension, extending it down to Anderson Pond Road. Mr. Cote stated he would now take questions from the Councils present.

Members of the City Council, County Council and the Planning Commission asked questions regarding the proposed alternative and how the consultants arrived at their recommendation.

Mr. Scott Singer, Aiken County Councilmember representing District 2 in Aiken County, stated all the proposed routes go through District 2 which impacts the citizens that he represents. He pointed out it seemed to him that the study contemplates what is going to happen within the study area, not necessarily outside the study area which is where the greatest traffic issues are today. He said he felt, however, that it is very important to plan ahead, and he felt it was very positive to be going through the process. His questions concerned why existing traffic patterns are considered to be a critical factor, not what future traffic patterns will be, why some factors were grouped together in determining property impacts, right-of-way, and whether consideration was given to use of current roads to cause less impact on surrounding areas. Mr. Singer stated he felt that there was some evidence that, based on future modeling, a connector road is needed. He said he felt the public should be shown the basis of that conclusion. He said he felt that future traffic patterns need to be the deciding factor as to what route is chosen, not existing traffic patterns.

Then there were questions and discussion from citizens present. There was discussion on why have a connector road. There was also discussion on alignment of the connector road with other roads east and west of Silver Bluff and Whiskey Roads so traffic could continue on around the city. There was concern about the proposed road and its effect on residential areas and increased traffic. There was discussion on whether the proposed road should or should not have access points. It was also pointed out that land use should be considered in planning the road and whether the developments would all be residential or if some commercial areas would be planned for the area so it would keep some of the commercial traffic off Whiskey Road. There was also discussion on the methodology in determining the route and the weight given to certain factors in determining the route. There was a question as to who was notified regarding public hearings on the proposed connector roadway. There was discussion as to whether the proposed connector road would relieve the traffic on Silver Bluff and Dougherty Road. Citizens suggested that statistics did not show that there would be any significant difference in traffic impact between the seven alternatives and felt that traffic impact should be dropped in the same manner that safety and access were dropped in determining a recommended route. Several citizens questioned the method of determining the route and the weight of factors used in the methodology. There was concern that a connector road would not necessarily help with the Whiskey Road traffic. It was pointed out there is only one access to the Mall and Sandstone, which creates a lot of traffic for Whiskey Road. There was discussion on whether widening Dougherty Road would help relieve some of the traffic congestion.

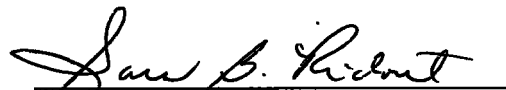
Mr. LeDuc pointed out that if development continues between Silver Bluff and Whiskey Road that other roads will be needed to help relieve traffic in the area. It was felt widening Dougherty Road would help, but it would not resolve all of the problems. He said if a road is going to be added to help with the traffic, now is the time to plan for the road to be built in the future.

Mayor Cavanaugh pointed out in considering the proposed roadway, it should be remembered that this will not be built immediately, but it will probably be seven to nine more years before it would be built. He also pointed out this roadway is planning for 10 to 20 years in the future. Another point is funding for the roadway. He stated ARTS funding is only about \$3 million per year for the entire county. He said if the group feels something should be done for the future, then some alternative funding should be considered as with only state funding the road will not happen for a very long time. It was pointed out the area is continuing to grow and traffic will increase in the area. He pointed out the one cent sales tax had helped the City and the County a lot to improve the quality of life and make some needed improvements. He said continuation of the one-cent sales tax might be a way to help fund a connector roadway and other road work. He also pointed out the city is continuing to make other connections between areas to help with keeping traffic off Whiskey Road.

A citizen asked for review again of the slide with the road alternatives and the score and weight for each factor. He felt there should be no selection on the alternatives until the matrix has had a thorough review by all the interested parties. He pointed out that several categories were not included in the weighting. Mr. Cote reviewed the scores. Many of the persons present expressed concern about the scores and weighting process.

Mayor Cavanaugh pointed out this meeting was an information meeting. He said the decision was up to the City and County Councils to decide on the issues. He said the City and County had a wonderful partnership and had been working together on issues. He pointed out a study has been done on the matter of a connector roadway. He said the City and the County Councils could select three people from each Council to work together to try to resolve the questions. He said the process would take some time. However, there is no funding at the present time to fund the project anyway. He said this is a long term project.

The meeting adjourned around 9:00 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk