

Greiner access road decision on hold for further study

by ANDREA KIMBRIEL

Editor



This graphic demonstrates the approximate dimensions and layout of a proposed access road being requested by Benderson Development Company LLC. The access road, highlighted in red, would allow egress and ingress from Eastgate Plaza to Greiner Road. Transit Road would be to the left of this representation provided by the Clarence Planning Department.

Recoon said such access roads are routinely created when a major arterial road is clogged and traffic could benefit from an alternate route. He said Transit Road provides a classic example of this, and normal practice is to provide relief valves if they can be done safely.

People going west on Greiner headed for Eastgate Plaza must currently take two lefts — the first onto Transit Road and the second into the plaza.

Recoon said the New York State Department of Transportation, Erie County, the Harris Hill Fire Company and previous Town and Planning boards and the two adjacent properties have offered material in support of the project.

More study needs to be done before the request to create a controversial access road from Eastgate Plaza to Greiner Road can move forward. That was the Clarence Planning Board's decision as it issued a positive declaration pursuant to the State Environmental Quality Review Act during its meeting on Jan. 26.

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The proposed road is in response to a Town Board request five years ago, said Eric Recoon, a vice president at Benderson Development, the applicant for the project.

It was discussed during a Nov. 17 Town Board meeting and a Dec. 8 Planning Board meeting.



Eric Recoon of Benderson Development Company LLC, left, and Dennis Kennelly, of T.Y. Lin International, present information to the Clarence Town Board during a public meeting on Jan. 26, regarding a proposed access road from Eastgate Plaza to Greiner Road. At right, Danielle Buchbinder of Vista Avenue presents her concerns about the proposal during the meeting. Photos by Jim SmerecakPurchase color photos at www.BeeNews.com

The company T.Y. Lin International was hired to produce a traffic study, which indicated that the level of traffic on Greiner would remain unchanged, according to Recoon, whose comment was greeted by skeptical laughter from the audience.

An independent study by another consultant came to the same conclusion, he said.

The road will be designed so people can exit only onto eastbound Greiner. Westbound Greiner traffic would be able to turn left onto the road to enter the plaza but not to leave it.

Dennis Kennelly of T.Y. Lin said the traffic study was done after consideration of the busiest hours in the area.

"The bottom line of our statement is there is no increased traffic coming to our site ... we're making the road better," said Kennelly.

Residents of the Eastbrooke Place/Greenhurst Road area have expressed concern that increased traffic would be pushed into their quiet residential areas as people look for ways to avoid Transit.

Kennelly said that cutting through those neighborhoods would be circuitous and therefore an unlikely route for those going to and from the shopping plaza. He said the independent consultant ran new numbers and came to the same conclusion.

People are also concerned about pedestrian safety, and Kennelly said eliminating the shoulder would actually make it safer for those who now walk in the road.

Benderson is proposing the installation of sidewalks on the south side of Greiner to Eastbrooke Place and sidewalks to the north between the Walgreens on the corner and Greenhurst Road. In the 66 feet of right of way, there would be 3 feet of buffer, 5 feet of sidewalk, 5 feet of greenspace to the curb, an 11-foot travel lane, a 10-foot turn lane, an 11-foot travel lane, a 5-foot curb and greenspace area, 5 feet of sidewalk and a 3-foot buffer, he said.

James Boglioli, an attorney representing Benderson, said the company is willing to agree to a deed restriction preventing it from expanding the driveway in the future.

Wendy Silvati, vice chairperson of the Planning Board, said she's read both traffic studies, and although she does understand the claim that it will not increase traffic, she doesn't see how it will improve traffic on Transit Road.

Recoon said 13 percent of the current traffic could benefit from the addition of the access road. The applicant wants to improve the congestion faced by those in the shopping center, but it will also get people off Transit Road, he said.

He said the traffic study showed 26 eastbound cars on Greiner would be making a left into the plaza during the peak hour in the morning and 105 in the peak hour in the evening.

Planning Board members wondered how it might slow down traffic, although Benderson representatives said the changes would create gaps in traffic on Greiner Road and improve the traffic situation.

Al Schultz, Planning Board chair, said the town has received 43 comments about the project: three in support and 40 in opposition. About 117 people signed a petition against it, most being residents of the Greenhurst Road/Vista Avenue, Eastbrooke Place/Ledge Lane area.

According to Schultz, three major concerns were expressed: pedestrian and bicycle safety, the effect on Greiner traffic and the number of people cutting down side roads to avoid Transit, such as traveling from Eastbrooke Place to Sheridan Drive.

Josephine Woloszyn, who lives at the intersection of Greiner and Transit, said she thinks the road would increase traffic coming from Williamsville and East Amherst. Many people already turn around in her driveway, and she envisions this becoming more common once travelers become aware of the access road.

David Beckinghausen, another Greiner Road resident, fears that an increase of those turning left from Greiner to the access road will clog the turning lane.

For Andre Thomasula, concerns of safety are predominant. The Eastbrooke Place resident's 17-year-old daughter was killed after being struck by a car while riding her bicycle on the shoulder at the corner of Maple and Transit. He said a New York State trooper estimated that she was riding 2 feet from the curb at the time.

The space between the curb and the travel lane, which representatives of Benderson said was currently 6 feet wide, would be decreased to only 2 feet if the change is made.

Thomasula said he isn't concerned about people turning into the shopping center, he's worried about those leaving, who might decide to go by Eastbrooke to Sheridan or Greiner to Harris Hill and then travel west.

He said people already speed through the neighborhoods where people enjoy walking their dogs and riding bicycles in the street.

Deborah Brent of Greenhurst Road said she's afraid people will turn left out of the access road, although they will be breaking traffic laws if they do so. A number of residents are also concerned that they will be unable to easily turn left from Greenhurst during peak hours.

Although most residents present at the meeting spoke against the proposed project, Ismet Hallac expressed his approval. He owns property in the vicinity and believes the road will be beneficial to shoppers in the plaza.

"It is the responsibility of the

Town of Clarence to hear from the rest of the population," he said.

Silvati said it seems more information is needed before the Planning Board can make an educated decision and recommended issuing a positive declaration to further assess the impact. The motion passed unanimously and will require further study to be done on issues including, but not limited to, congestion, pedestrian and bicycle safety, traffic exiting to the east on Greiner Road, the potential for U-turns or using Eastbrooke Place or Vista Avenue for egress.

"This is, as you know, a difficult decision, and as the chairman pointed out, there is a great deal of emotion that centers around it," Silvati said. "This board tries very hard to make decisions on factual information, as well as other information that is presented, so having the applicant prepare an environmental impact statement will give us the ability to collect more data, perhaps better data."

A positive declaration put an end to further discussion of that issue during the meeting, but people will still have the opportunity to provide public input in the future, said Schultz.

The applicant is responsible for the costs associated with the review, said James Callahan, director of community development for the town. The applicant must now pursue developing an environmental impact study to review issues that could have negative results and find ways to mitigate problems, said Schultz.

Once completed, a draft of the environmental impact statement will be available for review at Town Hall, 1 Town Place, Clarence.