

College still seeks new entranceway

Project could affect parking, bus stops on Charles Street

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(Enlarge) The College of Notre Dame wants to move its entranceway, shown at lower left, from just south of Homeland Avenue to North Charles Street at Blythewood Road. Notre Dame's plans are intertwined with an effort by several city and state agencies and area neighborhoods to address parking on Charles Street. (Staff photo by Nicole Martyn)

moves forward with a relocated entranceway, said coalition president Cindy Leahy, of the Keswick neighborhood.

"Today, they have no funding. Tomorrow, someone could donate it," said Leahy, who is also president of the Keswick Improvement Association and an aide to 14th District City Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke.

"When the time comes, we'll (the coalition) dive into it," Leahy said.

Notre Dame encountered a storm of opposition in 2004, when it proposed closing its main entranceway on North Charles Street, just south of Homeland Avenue, and building a new campus entranceway farther south on Charles, opposite Blythewood, a small and winding road that runs between Charles Street and Wyndhurst Avenue.

College officials say the proposed driveway, where a footpath is now, would lead to the heart of the campus, and would connect with a planned loop road around the perimeter of the campus, providing quicker access for emergency vehicles and making the campus more pedestrian-friendly.

But the Blythewood Association, backed by the coalition of which it is a member, said the proposed entranceway would clog traffic, cause dangerous left turns onto southbound Charles, and make Blythewood Road a cut-through for motorists between Wyndhurst and Charles.

After professional mediation, the coalition in August 2005 endorsed a new driveway that would allow traffic to enter Notre Dame at its southern boundary from the north and the south, but would only allow traffic to turn right, or northbound, when exiting the campus.

Change may be in store for North Charles Street, from the elimination of bus stops to a proposed new entranceway at the College of Notre Dame.

College officials said the once-controversial plan for a new main entranceway opposite the intersection of Blythewood Road and North Charles Street is dormant, but still on the college's agenda.

It's also on the radar of the North Baltimore Neighborhood Coalition, which endorsed the entranceway after a long fight that led to professional mediation in 2005.

"There's no timeline and the project remains unfunded," said Sharon Proutt, special assistant to college president Mary Pat Seurkamp.

But Proutt added, "It is certainly not a project that's off the table."

The coalition of 13 area neighborhoods is still wary, and intends to hold the college to its agreement if and when Notre Dame

The mediated agreement calls for a Y-shaped design with separate entrance and exit legs -- each one way, so neither would be directly across from Blythewood Road. The two legs would join to become a single, two-way driveway leading up to the road on campus, near Gibbons Hall.

Notre Dame agreed to keep its existing North Charles Street entranceway open for at least 10 years, unless the coalition consented to closing that entrance sooner. That entranceway allows left and right turns to and from North Charles.

Notre Dame agreed to help the neighborhood coalition try to reduce parking on Charles, to promote visibility and to improve traffic flow.

And the college promised to have its Office of Campus Security monitor and help deter any cut-through traffic to campus from Blythewood Road.

Nearly four years after the mediated agreement was announced, the entranceway appears to be on a slow track. Prutt said no action is planned for at least 12 months and that Notre Dame is focused on taking the lead in a separate, areawide effort to address parking and public transportation issues along North Charles.

Parking and bus stops

That project, the Charles Street Parking Plan, involves the Baltimore City Parking Authority, the Maryland Transit Administration, Notre Dame and Loyola College, and the coalition, among other agencies and institutions.

But the planned entranceway, which is called for in Notre Dame's 20-year master plan that dates to 1997, is intertwined with the parking plans for North Charles. Those plans, as presented by Prutt to the coalition June 24, call for the elimination of two of five MTA bus stops on the east side of Charles, the side the Notre Dame campus is on. An MTA bus stop located near where the new college entranceway is planned would be eliminated, as would an MTA bus stop south of Homeland Avenue. Prutt stressed the MTA is proposing the elimination of both bus stops.

But Leahy, the coalition president, said the coalition questions that proposal, and has been told by its representative from the Villages of Homeland that residents there are complaining about the potential loss of the bus stop at Homeland Avenue.

"We don't want to be party to eliminating a service that people need," Leahy said.

Prutt said City Councilman Bill Henry who represents Homeland, also is concerned about losing that bus stop.

The Charles Street Parking Plan also calls for the elimination of on-street parking on the west side of Charles between a private driveway and Blythewood Road, to increase traffic visibility, Prutt said. That recommendation was made by the college, she said.

Leahy said that would reduce available on-street parking for Loyola, "which is always a concern for the coalition."

Loyola's fitness and aquatic center is located on the west side of North Charles and Homeland Avenue.

Prutt and Leahy said the impetus for the recent presentation to the coalition was that enough information has now been gathered to move to the next phase, getting reaction.

"We're in a feedback phase," Prutt said.

"There was a delay with various city agencies in getting accurate information about the existing parking, and there was no urgency," Leahy said. "(Notre Dame) finally got the information in the past few months. They're doing their due diligence."

Prutt said the College of Notre Dame wants to be a good neighbor, and she noted that her late mother-in-law, Francie Prutt, who died last fall, was longtime secretary of the Homeland Association and a resident of the Villages of Homeland.

The coalition for now is taking a wait and see attitude -- especially with regard to a new entranceway. So far, the coalition hasn't said much because the college hasn't done much.

"They were not pushing it," Leahy said. But she added, "We will be watching. We're an alert organization."

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