

Text accompanying GrowCove presentation slides
Sept. 7, 2018 at Goldsmith-Schiffman Elementary School

Bjoern Lanwer:

1. Welcome, 2. Meeting Agenda, 3. Introductions

Brad Garland:

4., What is GrowCove – History and Mission

5. Cove Geography & Population

(The Cove is comprised of land annexed into the City of Huntsville and unincorporated parcels in the vicinity, roughly bounded by Monte Sano, the Flint River, Keel Mountain, the northern boundary of Owens Cross Roads, Green Mountain, and Huntsville Mountain. For planning and representation purposes, multiple subareas can exist within the Cove – the maps shown are very preliminary. Approximately 13,000 people live in the Cove.)

Jennifer Nelson:

6. Why are we here?

Why are we here?

- The Cecil Ashburn / Sutton Road corridor project will have significant impact on us in the Cove, both during and after construction.
- We want to better understand the City's goals, plans, and methodology
- We want to work with the city to minimize impacts
- We want to help you disseminate accurate, timely information to minimize misunderstandings

7. Major Concerns

In recent months, we have heard many concerns from residents and businesses, ranging from:

- people feeling as though their concerns are not being listened to
- that this project is being forced upon them without sufficient information, discussion, or mitigation of negative impacts
- that unexpected issues will increase projected costs and disruptions
- that there was no transparency in project design and
- that it didn't go through appropriate public processes

Some people think the City of Huntsville doesn't care about them, and even want the Cove to secede.

We at GrowCove think that this is a terrible idea, and discourage it. The Cove is an asset to the City of Huntsville, and the health of this area is important.

And so we see a role to play in elevating dialogue and organizing it into something we can find solutions to, together.

You all received a handout with the bulk of concerns identified via GrowCove, and there is supplemental information available that provides more detail on these issues. In order to save time for our Q & A worksession, we are going to hit the high points right now, but in short, our request is that citizen concerns are satisfactorily addressed prior to any construction.

As the project was originally bid, we had expectations that we would have daily access across the mountain. Taking this away means a different outcome for residents and businesses on both sides of Cecil Ashburn, one that deserves further consideration.

Because people's work and school commutes are now affected, the biggest concern that we have heard repeatedly from other citizens is that they are worried about major delays and unpredictability in their new journeys.

To mitigate this, alternative routes and travel modes must be in complete, functional, and safe condition prior to their use.

Possible improvements to alternate modes and routes also set the stage for a more sustainable path forward. In particular we have an opportunity to develop ridesharing habits, which are more environmentally and wallet-friendly. Regional transit and commuter studies are in process that may shed more light on this subject - seeing the results of these studies could prove valuable for decision-making.

With regards to alternative routes, Governor's Drive is our primary "escape route". If resurfacing is concurrent with Cecil Ashburn closure, then both routes will be inaccessible at night during that time, potentially compromising timely responses and safety. A number of on-call physicians live in the Cove. We hope that emergency service providers present here tonight will be able to speak more on that scenario.

Little Cove Road is missing shoulders, lighting, subsurface drainage, and is prone to seasonal flooding. Both it and Rock Cut Road have a poor connection to 72 due to roadway geometry, and we don't feel that installing a temporary partial traffic signal at Rock Cut Rd that stops only EB traffic is the best solution in the short or long term.

There have been a number of serious and fatal crashes on 72 in Gurley, and both Cove and Gurley residents want the safest solution to access these geographies. Years of planning and discussion resulted in the realigned extension of Little Cove Road to 72 as shown in the LRTP. We feel that it is probably here where a full, permanent signal controlling all approaches should be installed. However, the Mayor of Gurley is present and may have more to say on this topic.

In a similar note, people want to know about the safety of site preparation activities such as tree clearance and blasting while the corridor is fully open, as has been proposed for time savings. Given the unstable soil and history of active landslides in the area, both during and after initial construction, will this be a problem again? Safety is our highest priority and if there is any risk that it would be compromised in order to have a more aggressive timeline, then let's consider some adjustments.

Another concern we have heard from citizens is business impacts. Our Jones Valley colleagues at Brusters anticipate that they will lose 25-35% of their revenues, some of which may be long-lasting as broken habits must be reinstated. It is likely that all of the Jones Valley commercial sector would see similar negative impacts, which may be enough to put some out of business. Can we find some opportunities for accommodations or safe, regular, scheduled corridor openings that will help businesses and organizations stay healthy, even if it adds on a couple of months to the overall timeframe?

Finally, we know through the LRTP and the RoR agreement that Cecil Ashburn is 100% locally funded. We feel this gives you the freedom to be flexible and set a calendar for this project that addresses citizen concerns and minimizes impacts through careful planning and preparation.

9. What do we want to do (Goals)

Overall, we want to minimize disruption and costs, both direct and indirect. We want to maximize safety, the smooth flow of traffic, communication and transparency for orderly implementation, accordance with long range plans, goals, and objectives

10-12. Recommendations

So what do we want? Full Transparency and collaboration. GrowCove desires to be a partner to the city. As a clearinghouse of information, and with a current mailing list of thousands of people via Grow Cove and CoveMonkey, we can help you manage expectations.

Out of respect for citizens, businesses, organizations, and visitors, we believe a proactive approach to mitigating as many potential negative impacts as possible in advance of construction is warranted. From our conversations with people in local government, we know that they are already looking into many of the items that follow, and look forward to status updates and continuing discussion.

First, we feel it would be helpful to complete relevant studies that would give more insight towards effectively reducing traffic congestion related to closure of a major route, as well as providing a vision of what we are ultimately working towards. This GrowCove recommendation reflects the desire of citizens to have orderly, planned growth and infrastructure vs the patchwork nature of much of our local development.

We also recommend completing any improvements to alternative routes prior to their increased usage, so as to maintain safety, predictability, and smooth traffic flow throughout the city.

To reduce the overall number of vehicles on the road, we recommend implementation of effective ridesharing and transit routes, and can work with the City to identify opportunities and the needs of Cove residents. High school students make up a not insignificant portion of daily commuters, and we want to be sure they can get home safely.

Accordingly, we look forward to discussing emergency services, and publicizing plans.

We also want to identify and implement opportunities to reduce impacts to businesses and citizens, via scheduled corridor openings, Cove-side replacement of certain Jones Valley and South Huntsville amenities on a temporary or permanent basis, and any other appropriate measures that keep people happy and able to remain in place as local residents and businesses.

Thank you for listening, and please let us know of any questions you have. We look forward to dialogue tonight.

Bjoern introduces Kathy Martin, PE for City of Huntsville presentation