

February 12, 2016

To: City of Ann Arbor Planning Commission  
From: Michael Homel, Secretary, Woodcreek Homeowners' Association Board  
Re: Second Site Plan for "South Pond Village"

Developer Michael Furnari's first site plan for "South Pond Village" was before the Planning Commission from January to April, 2015. The commission recommended denial, 6-2, for reasons I detail below. Some on the commission and on City Council asked for other access routes. Responding to this feedback, around July, 2015, the developer offered a second site plan. It has a road from the north end of SPV to Huron River Drive and a road through Algebe Way into Meadowside Drive and out to Chalmers. Council did not act on the second site plan; instead in August, 2015, it referred it to Planning Commission, and it appears on your agenda Wednesday, February 17.

The WHA board, the elected representative of the 87 homeowners of the Woodcreek subdivision, supports the north access ("old farm road"). However, the WHA board strongly opposes the Algebe traffic route. We would support a site plan with Algebe as access only for emergency vehicles, a second route for fire, police, and EMS use. Michael Furnari has repeatedly told us he would support Algebe as emergency access only.

We cannot accept any site plan that would increase the number of homes using Chalmers from the current 115-125 up to nearly 200. We are aware of statistical traffic models that claim little additional traffic impact on Chalmers or on wait times for traffic entering Washtenaw at Chalmers. Do the math yourself, and you will agree such self-interested traffic models fit neither common sense nor residents' daily experience. It is already difficult and dangerous to exit Chalmers onto Washtenaw much of the time from early morning to early evening. There is no traffic light at this intersection; owing to the many other lights along Washtenaw, an additional light at Chalmers is unlikely. Chalmers traffic already has long waits to enter Washtenaw either westbound or eastbound at many times of the day, including often on Saturdays and Sundays. Those who want to go east on Washtenaw have especially exciting adventures, dodging two lanes of westbound traffic. It is dangerous when one lane stops to let Chalmers traffic enter, but Chalmers drivers cannot know if the second westbound lane of traffic will stop or continue moving. Then comes a second adventure--- who will unexpectedly appear in the middle turn lane at the same time a Chalmers driver gets there, waiting to move into eastbound Washtenaw? If 75 more homes used Chalmers, the danger at Washtenaw would worsen, and wait times to enter Washtenaw would sharply increase. Increasingly impatient drivers might take more chances. Remember that the traffic burden from 75 SPV homes would not only include residents' vehicles (perhaps 150) but also visitors; USPS, Fed Ex, and other delivery trucks; and lawn and snow service vehicles. One person (who does not live in our neighborhood) called for banning left turns from Chalmers to Washtenaw. That's no solution. That would bring both defiance and congestion-increasing turnaround maneuvers further west on Washtenaw. That is because many of us use US-23, I-94, and/or eastbound Washtenaw into Ypsilanti in our daily commuting. Therefore, we urge Planning Commission to accept the north access route to Huron River Drive and close off SPV access to Chalmers except for emergency vehicles.

Another problem with unpaved Chalmers Drive is that it is often in unacceptable condition. It frequently has many holes, some of them deep and unavoidable, especially when drivers face oncoming traffic. And the north end of Chalmers is narrow, winding, with poor sight distances. Some cars have gone into ditches along the road, while others have destroyed roadside mail boxes. Within the last couple years a fatal accident at Chalmers and Huron River Drive suggests that increased use of Chalmers undermines safety in our area.

If SPV traffic used Algebe, the physical condition of Chalmers would worsen. The city pressured the developer into an unspecified financial contribution toward paving Chalmers. This would also entail a property tax assessment on each SPV house, each Woodcreek house, and each Chalmers house. However, Chalmers homeowners have always firmly opposed paving, and their testimony last year shows they still do. First, they would each have to pay a lot of money, and many of them are people of modest means, including many retirees. Second, paving would increase Chalmers traffic considerably, turning it into even more of a cut-through between Washtenaw and Huron River Drive. Already, Jimmy John's drivers and others race along Chalmers, endangering others. I empathize with Chalmers residents' resistance to paving and their determination to keep Chalmers a low-traffic road.

City planning staff wants Algebe Way as an auto route. A main motive is to have two access points to SPV in case of emergency. As stated above, we accept Algebe Way as emergency access only. But we do not accept a double standard by city staff. When the city approved the site plan for the Woodcreek sub, it did so with a single access point. Therefore, it need not insist on two access points for SPV. That would send traffic from 75 homes through our neighborhood's Meadows Drive and into the already overburdened Chalmers Drive.

Examine the city's road categories and width standards for each category. You will find that Algebe Way is too narrow to be a connector road between neighborhoods. Approve Algebe Way for emergency access only and you will sidestep this problem. But if you approve Algebe Way as a regular road, the city will face extended and effective resistance, based on its own planning criteria.

From the 1980s and 1990s, planning documents for this area (Woodcreek Area Traffic Circulation Study) have included a north route to Huron River Drive. Despite this, for the last year and a half, city staff has opposed the "old farm road" road. Staff has also opposed other solutions to a difficult access problem, such as the city right of way along the west edge of Arborland, where there is an existing traffic light at Washtenaw. Instead, city staff has put city homeowners last by insisting on the worst possible route for traffic---- Chalmers into Washtenaw. City staff cites its concern about natural features. We also care about natural features. However, as citizen representatives, you should value the daily health, safety, and welfare of 115-120 Chalmers and Woodcreek households above the modest impact on natural features at the north end of the SPV site. If you do not like that trade off, then work with us to fashion a better outcome than site plan one or site plan two.

To conclude, the 48-acre site is zoned for single family homes, and we have not opposed that usage. If the city approves the second site plan with Algebe Way for emergency use only, the developer gets what he wants. And Woodcreek and Chalmers won't suffer Chalmers Drive and the Chalmers-Washtenaw intersection becoming more congested and more dangerous than they already are every single day.

Michael Homel, Secretary, Woodcreek Homeowners' Association Board