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RESIDENTS NOT CONVINCED THEIR VOICES ARE BEING HEARD IN BRIGHT 74 STUDY

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By: Denise Freitag Burdette

During the last scheduled Bright 74 Study advisory committee meeting held Wednesday, Oct. 26, at North Dearborn Library branch, it was stressed that the input of community members through open houses and surveys has been invaluable and appreciated.

But when the public was given two-minute windows to speak at the end of the meeting, it did not seem like the residents in attendance felt listened to or appreciated.

The meeting began with a quick overview of the transportation study, which began in October of last year, "to investigate options for improvement to existing roadways, potential new roadways, and/or a combination of both to improve safety, access and other travel needs between the unincorporated Bright Area of northeastern Dearborn County and Interstate 74."

Project manager Robyn Bancroft, of Ohio Kentucky Indiana Regional Council of Governments, asked by Dearborn County commissioners to manage and perform the study, then presented findings from the third and final survey, conducted for 30 days after the third and the third and final public open house held Sept. 14, at East Central High School, St. Leon.

She reported 568 surveys were received, the highest of the three open houses. Surveys were available to take during the open house, on paper or online. Of the people taking the third survey, 70 percent indicated they live in the Bright area.

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Earlier in the process, four concepts were presented for public input, including possible connector roads from Carr Road and State Line Road for more direct, safer commutes from Bright to Interstate 74. Another option included a realignment of Whites Hill Road as a connector road. None of the roads, however, were planned to include a new I-74 exit/on ramp, but instead providing a more direct way to reach current ramps.

After residents rallied together to gather to sign an online petition against the study this summer, with particular strong feelings expressed against any new connector roads, the study focus was shifted to the first option, maintaining current roads. The connector road options were dropped from the study.

Currently the petition has over 1,110 signatures.

But residents against the study have continued to express their concerns about moving forward with the study in any form. Many want to make sure Bright remains a more rural area.

Although basic improvements and maintenance to current roads have been supported, any extensive changes have some residents worried about additional traffic, unwanted development, and the possibility of widened roads and shoulders taking away and impacting their residential property. Major improvements have remained as a concept in the study for both North Dearborn Road, between Stateline Road and Whites Hill Road, and Whites Hill Road.

According to the third survey results, Whites Hill Road improvements proposed in the study for consideration were considered unimportant by 74 percent of survey takers, with 17 percent labeling them important and 9 percent unsure. The three answers available on the survey for the first set of questions were important, not sure, or unimportant.

Regarding suggested North Dearborn Road improvements, 74 percent answered unimportant, 19 percent important and 7 percent unsure. Overall enhanced maintenance of the roads fared a little better with survey takers, vs more specific improvements, but did not win over the majority. Fifty-four percent felt it was unimportant, 39 percent important and 7 percent were unsure.

Bancroft said committee members maybe scratching their heads to\about the maintenance question results, since many residents have stressed the need to maintain current roads over building a connector road. She believes many people put unimportant because the maintenance examples given included some possibilities not supported by some residents, such as the widening of North Dearborn Road.

Overall the idea of placing roadabouts at the North Dearborn/State Line Road and North Dearborn/Whites Hill intersections, as well as roundabouts in general, received a resounding no from survey takers. They also were not interested overall in considering additional local funding increases to pay for maintenance recommendations in the study.

During the third open house, many residents were heard complaining the survey questions were too slanted and did not offer enough options.

County plan director Mark McCormack, a member of the advisory board, said he was surprised that more people did not show support for enhanced maintenance in the survey. Many residents have expressed being in favor of widening roads when development plans come up for hearings before the county plan commission and board of zoning appeals.

Bright resident and business owner Brian DeBruler said at the end of the meeting, during public comment, that some of those residents may be saying that during hearings in an effort to stop an unwanted development, not because they are actually in favor of widening the roads.

Dave Wormald of AECOM, lead consultant for the study, then gave an outline of the possible final report recommendations. A final report is expected to be completed and posted online at <http://bright74.oki.org/> some time in November.

The final report will include short term and long term goal recommendations, said Wormald.

Short term recommendations, focusing on North Dearborn and Whites Hill roads, include:

- *Addressing drainage and slipage
- *Repair, replace or add guardrails needed
- *Widen shoulders where possible
- *Remove roadside obstructions
- *Add lighting at key intersections
- *Add mailbox turnouts
- *Improve signage

Wormald said the pavement on the two roads are in good condition overall, but there are some trouble spots. Guardrail may be needed on Whites Hill. Both roads basically have no shoulders and lighting may be need at the intersections.

Long-term recommendations focused on North Dearborn and Whites Hill areas, included replacing the bridge over the Whitewater River at Ind. 46 and improving sight distance at vertical curves/humps on U.S.

52 and Ind. 46 and the Whites Hill/Ind. 46 intersection. I-74 ramp improvements also could be reviewed, he said.

North Dearborn shoulders could be widened to meet state and county standards, he said.

On Whites Hill, grades could be flattened and vertical and horizontal curves smoothed out and the intersection with Gaynor Ridge improved, he said.

Improvements to both North Dearborn and Whites Hill would likely be conducted in phases, at an estimated total of \$16 million, said Wormald.

The study, however, is not parcel specific. That would be the next step if plans would move forward, he said.

Long-term goals suggested for the county as a whole included developing a sustained mapping system of road crash data, keeping an inventory of county right-of-ways and monitoring the possible future implementation of roundabouts, said Wormald.

It is also suggested the county take a look at other roads not included in the Bright 74 Study, indicated as important by survey takers including sections of North Dearborn Road extending to the stateline and Ind. 1, Jamison Road and Sand Run Road, he said.

McCormack said the county plan department would look into maintaining a mapping program on the crash data and inventory of county right-of-ways. He also commented, that regardless of the study outcome, the idea of this study had been sitting on a shelf for a long time and it was worth the effort to see it through.

Eight members of the public signed up at the beginning of the meeting to speak for up to two minutes after the advisory meeting concluded. About 20 residents attended the meeting.

Pinhook Road resident Al Powell said if the county talked to people face-to-face, they would know this plan is not wanted on a grassroots level, responding to McCormack's comments earlier in the evening.

Greg Vollmer said if the Bright 74 suggestions take the same time as the smaller road project currently taking place in downtown Bright, at age 66 he might be dead before anything takes place.

Lane Price said his family owns the land where a realignment of Whites Hill Road is suggested. His father gave land in the past to help fix the road and promises were not kept. His family has no trust with the county.

County transportation director Todd Listerman said the work was conducted before he came to the county, admitting what took place would not meet current standards. He assured the family any land would be paid a fair price according to law.

Price's sister, Melissa Price Dennis, who also lives on the family property, agreed there is a lack of trust.

"We love our rural farm community. ... I want you to hear us, we don't want this. ... We are not giving up any more land," she said.

DeBruler said many of the residents he has spoken to from the community do not feel heard, that their input has been disregarded.

"I think our priority has shifted a little bit," said OKI board president and county commissioner Kevin Lynch, pointing to the connector road concepts being dropped from the study.

But the study keeps moving forward, said DeBruler.

Ben Witt, who lives on Whites Hill Road, said he travels the road every day to his job in Harrison. He does not see why many of the suggested improvements are needed.

To review the Bright 74 Study documents go to <http://bright74.oki.org>.

To review the petition click [HERE](#).

Visit the Facebook page created by residents regarding the study go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/nobright74group/>

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