Alternative Visions for Northgate Mall

By Waugh Wright and Karalyn Colopy

On October 6, Walltown resident Brandon Williams gave a virtual presentation at Duke’s John Hope Franklin Center about the ongoing organizing around the redevelopment of Northgate Mall. Williams is leading the organizing efforts along with the Northgate Mall Neighborhood Council (NMNC), of which Trinity Park is a part. He spoke about the success they have had in creating a broad-based coalition of residents supporting affordable housing, environmental sustainability, and other issues.

In particular, Williams showed a drawing of developer Northwood Ravin’s proposal, based on their plan presented at a public meeting in September 2020:

Northwood Proposal (spatialized)
The plan has two phases. Phase One includes 4-story mixed-use buildings (ground-floor retail with housing above) around a central “Community Park.” There are also a few small office buildings and retail buildings on the site. Both parking decks are reused. In Phase Two, taller (10-12 story) buildings would be built close to I-85 and Gregson, likely office and hotel.

While Williams likes that the developer’s proposal includes housing, green space, and a lot of retail space, some of which could meet community needs, he named significant objections. For example, the green space, labeled “Community Park,” is isolated from the surrounding neighborhoods, with no pedestrian connection to Walltown Park, making the space feel private rather than public. In addition, the housing is fairly low density and is expected to be market rate, i.e., no affordable housing (at least in Phase One).

To help imagine alternative visions for Northgate, the NMNC worked with NC State’s Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning. They developed 3 alternative concepts, showing how the developer’s plan could be modified to provide significant community value, including:

- Green spaces re-arranged as a green corridor from the center of the site out to Guess Road, making a strong gateway connection to Walltown
- A satellite campus of Durham Tech and artist space, or a grocery store with office space above, in the former Sears building
- 2 transit stops
- A perimeter walking trail
- A trail under I-85, or possibly a pedestrian/bike overpass
- Affordable housing above retail in the Randy’s Pizza building
- Streets within the site arranged to create circulation patterns in keeping with nearby traffic flow
Because the developer will need to seek a zoning variance to build the taller 10-12 story buildings that are planned for Phase Two, the NMNC may have some leverage to negotiate the plans. In reporting on Williams’ October 6 presentation, the Duke Center for International and Global Studies described the potential significance of this and how it fits with a more hopeful vision of community engagement in development practices:

“While Williams reported that the developer has yet to meaningfully engage with Walltown residents on plans for the redeveloped Northgate, Durham City Council has publicly committed to [Walltown Community Association] to not allow any rezoning of the development without engaging with the group. This gives Walltown residents meaningful leverage, as Northwood Ravin would like to rezone the area in order to increase building height capacities to put in a large hotel. With this assurance from the Durham City Council, these construction height increases will not be able to take place without public input from the community.

“Moving forward, Williams believes that city and county planning departments should be required to facilitate robust community engagement practices when new developments will have a significant impact on its surrounding neighborhoods. Additionally, Williams advocates for housing policies that support, protect, and empower longtime homeowners and renters.”


For links to Williams’ presentation and slides, as well as the Duke article, visit trinitypark.org
Neighborhood Clean-Up Opportunities
By Julia Borbely-Brown

Thanks to all who responded to the call for clean-up volunteers in the June 2021 newsletter!

Traffic Circles & Medians
A little periodic TLC (weeding, clearing litter, trimming, planting) in the traffic circles and medians can make a huge difference! Two of our neighborhood traffic circles have now been officially “adopted”:

- Englewood/Dollar traffic circle: Many thanks to Steve Falzarano and his neighbor who have been taking care of this one for a few years (and will continue to do so)
- Knox/Dollar traffic circle: now adopted, thanks to Zoe Englander!

Two more need your help:
- Knox/Watts traffic circle
- Markham Ave. median

This work can be simply weeding a few times a year for an hour. Or, for creative gardeners who want a larger palette, it could be a complete re-imagining of the plantings. Would you like to help?

In addition, the large median at Trinity/Watts/Buchanan will continue to require several volunteer days each year. Please look for the appeals on the listserv or send me your email if you want a more personal invitation. It is amazing what 3-4 people can accomplish in just one hour. And weeding, planting and mulching is terrific exercise!

“Adopt-a-Block” Litter Pick-up
I am also seeking neighbors willing to “adopt a block” - to keep a small area of our neighborhood free of litter. The commitment entails about an hour of work twice per month:

- Walk around the four sides of a square block
- Pick up all the trash you find (wear gloves) and put it in a bag
- Toss it in your home garbage bin

Volunteers who stick with it for at least 6 months will get an exclusive edition “Trinity Park Trash Crew” t-shirt in yellow or rose.

Durham Public Schools Magnet Policies Revisited
By Laurie Williamson

This December, the Durham Public Schools (DPS) Board of Education will be voting on a new magnet school policy for elementary schools. The new policy will impact school assignments beginning with the 2023-24 school year and will affect decisions for families in the Trinity Park and George Watts Elementary community.

DPS invited community input in this necessary update in a series of “Growing Together Engagement” sessions from October 26 through Nov 10. These sessions were the first phase of a 18-36 month multi-phase comprehensive process to update our magnet school policies, school boundaries, and assignments for K-12. Next, DPS will share possible alternatives for magnet program placement, along with a draft of a reshaped magnet policy (part 2). The proposals will also be informed by a community conversation on race, class and privilege in our schools hosted by the Durham Public Schools Foundation and Student U.

For updates regarding this initiative, sign up at Engage.DPSNC.net

And speaking of Ellerbe Creek...

On November 6 we had a successful workday cleaning up sections of Ellerbe Creek, the stream that runs through the east end of Trinity Park. Keep Durham Beautiful and the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association want to know if Trinity Park neighbors would take this on in a more formal way and organize a creek clean-up 3 or more times each year. Are you interested?

Please contact me at juliaorbelybrown@yahoo.com if you’re interested in maintaining a traffic circle/median, adopting a block for litter pick-up, or participating in future Ellerbe Creek clean-ups. Thank you for caring for our environment!
Neighborhood Improvements: Rain Gardens, Artwork, and Ellerbe Creek Cultural Signage
By Karalyn Colopy

Thanks to Duke’s Doing Good In the Neighborhood grant program, Trinity Park benefitted from several improvements this summer:

Rain Gardens

The rain gardens on the George Watts school playground protect downhill areas of the neighborhood, including Ellerbe Creek, by preventing soil erosion during rainstorms, and slowing and filtering runoff. They also make a beautiful gathering spot open to the public outside of school hours. With a grant from Duke of $1100 in June, TPNA and the George Watts PTA paid for critical maintenance of the rain gardens, replacing fallen rocks that support the sloped surfaces, and removing debris from the drainage outflows. TPNA and the PTA also held a rain garden workshop on July 17 with help from Robert Meehan of the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association (ECWA). About a dozen Trinity Park neighbors and school families pitched in to weed the gardens and learned how they protect our waterways. Thanks to neighbors Annie Ambrose and Sarah Musser for organizing the workshop, and to all who volunteered to help.

Volunteer and Trinity Park neighbor Jane Brown said, “Seeing the beauty of the rain gardens up close and knowing how they protect water quality made me want to put one in my own yard. We’re working on the plans now and expect to install it in the spring!”

DID YOU KNOW??

Installing a rain garden can be less expensive than you might think. ECWA’s Meehan advised neighbors who are interested in creating a rain garden of their own to check out Durham’s Community Conservation Assistance Program, a cost-reimbursement program in which a homeowner pays the upfront costs of installing a rain garden (usually about $1000) and then gets 75% back as a reimbursement. “In this case, the average rain garden costs the homeowner about $250. However, the cost could be even lower if you provide some of the costs yourself (labor, for instance),” said Meehan.

Brass Labels for Trinity Park Art

With a $1400 grant from Duke through the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership, awarded in partnership with TPNA, the Trinity Park Foundation purchased (and will soon install) long-hoped-for bronze labels for the three works of art located in The Trinity Park. See page 8 for details.

Ellerbe Creek Maintenance and New Cultural Signage

With a grant of $9000 from Duke, TPNA partnered with Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association to make two big improvements along the Ellerbe Creek trail in Trinity Park.

• Removing invasive shrubs: ECWA hired a summer Stewardship Technician to organize workdays to help remove invasive shrubs along the greenway. This increased visibility and safety for trail users and will help native plants and animals to flourish.

• Creating a cultural display about African American heritage: TPNA and ECWA collaborated with NCCU history professor Dr. Charles Johnson and local history buff Algin Holloway to research African American heritage in the watershed. We developed cultural signage to be installed along the trail, similar in style to existing signage highlighting ecological features. The new display features bios of three distinguished African Americans who grew up in the watershed. We hope that this might be the first installment of a potentially larger exhibit with more local history - the Ellerbe Creek Hall of Distinction! Look for the display to be installed along the trail in the coming months.
Organized in 1984, the InterNeighborhood Council of Durham (INC) is a coalition of Durham’s neighborhood and homeowner’s associations. Its mission is to promote the quality, stability and vitality of Durham’s residential neighborhoods. Just as an individual neighborhood gains strength when its residents work together, so multiple neighborhoods gain strength by working together.

The easiest way to keep informed of developments at INC is to join the INC listserv (http://www.durham-inc.org/ and then follow the instructions on the e-mail List tab). You can also go to an INC meeting or attend a Trinity Neighborhood Association (TPNA) meeting, where a brief update on INC issues is usually presented.

INC normally meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:00 on Zoom. (In the before times, we would meet in person in Building 2 of the Golden Belt building at 807 East Main Street.) Although meetings are open to the public, voting on INC resolutions is restricted to delegates of member neighborhoods. The Trinity Park delegate votes on INC resolutions as directed by the TPNA board and tries to use common sense on procedural matters and other votes.

At the time of writing, our INC delegate is Philip Azar. Philip has been serving in this role for 10+ years. A huge thank you to Philip for his many years of service!

A sampling of issues that INC has engaged in:

- Nudging the City to be more receptive to neighborhood concerns such as collecting liens on nuisance properties, enforcing basic traffic laws on neighborhood streets, and not automatically renewing business licenses for businesses that have sold alcohol to minors or allowed other criminal activities to occur on their premises.

- Receiving reports from city and county staff on budgets, beautification efforts, and the proactive rental inspection program.

- Providing input on initiatives of other resident-led groups, such as Durham Open Spaces and Trails and the Durham Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Commission.

- Deciding whether to support a specific zoning, historic designation, or street closing request of importance to one or more neighborhoods.

- Identifying and celebrating Neighborhood Heroes for outstanding service to their neighborhoods.
The City of Durham implemented the Shared Streets pilot project last fall, to increase the options for safe travel and exercise in urban areas during the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven streets throughout the city, including Watts St., were selected for the project. Temporary signs and partial traffic barriers and signs were placed at several intersections along Watts St. to discourage thru-traffic. While many cyclists and pedestrians have enjoyed the added sense of safety on Watts St., the pilot project has now ended (as of November 1), and the City has removed the barricades and signs.

Going forward, the City is working to ensure that temporary installations like these are properly maintained with the support of neighborhood residents and that “champions” who help maintain them can be compensated for their time and effort.

Coincidentally, Watts St. and four of the other Shared Streets (sections of Glendale, Spruce, Taylor, and Maple) are also designated as “Neighborhood Bike Routes” (sometimes also called “bike boulevards”) -- existing quiet streets that can be prioritized for bicyclists and pedestrians through increased signage to make drivers more aware. The goal of Durham’s Neighborhood Bike Routes program is to create a safer bike and pedestrian network for bicyclists, children, senior citizens, those with disabilities, etc.

The vision is that anyone living in the Urban Tier should be able to access the network of bike/ped friendly streets within a few blocks of their home. Durham is hoping to create 15 miles of bike boulevards in the coming years.

This past summer, the City invited bids for the construction (signage and painting) of phase 1 of Neighborhood Bike Routes, for a total of 7 miles (out of the desired 15 miles). Construction is likely to begin in Spring 2022. The project is being managed by the City of Durham General Services Department. Watts St., which was previously striped to allow for bikes to travel southbound on the one-way portion from Trinity Ave. to Lamond, will have additional signage placed on it so that residents know it is part of the larger Neighborhood Bike Routes system.

While the City has received additional funding from a federal grant program to complete the 15-mile network, planning has not started for the additional miles. If you’d like to voice support for completing the network, reach out to Dale McKeel, dale.mckeel@durhamnc.gov.

Bikes, Pedestrians, and Traffic Barriers on Watts St.
By Josh Hawn and Karalyn Colopy

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(for online version of the article: https://durhamnc.gov/3763/Neighborhood-Bike-Routes)
Update: New Labels for Artwork by Shelley Dekker

With a $1400 grant from Duke through the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership, awarded in partnership with TPNA, the Trinity Park Foundation purchased (and will soon install) long-hoped-for bronze labels for the three works of art located in The Trinity Park. With the placement of these labels, we are thrilled to be able to honor creativity and recognize the artists and artisans who bring beauty and vitality into our everyday lives.

It has been 18 years since Andrew Priess’s metal sculpture in appreciation of neighborhood pioneer Max Rogers was unveiled in the park. The untitled steel and copper sculpture stands within sight of Max’s former home on Trinity Avenue and references Max with its nod to the bullet nose grill of the Studebaker he drove around Durham. Max was instrumental in forming the TPNA and saving the green space of the current park from the development of a large apartment building.

The other two artworks in the park were both completed in 2019 and have quickly become beloved. Brooks Burleson spent weeks constructing and carving his Bug Walk from stone and other discarded materials. Neighbors walking by gave opinions on bugs that should come next in the walkway, which ended with the fan-favorite ladybug closest to the gazebo. Steve Little and Evie G. Watts constructed the new Trinity Park sign, entitled Corner of Watts and Trinity, from steel. The sculpture represents a street map of the neighborhood with the space where the park lies designated with a turquoise square. Neighbors are encouraged to look at the sculpture and find the spots where their own houses are located.

Looking ahead, the Foundation is eager to purchase and install labels for the remaining artworks in our neighborhood and make other needed improvements to the park and medians, as well as encourage more tree planting throughout the neighborhood through tree planting grants. We look forward to kicking off a fundraising campaign this fall. To support the Trinity Park Foundation, please send your tax-deductible gifts to P.O. Box 725, Durham, NC 27702. Thank you for caring for Trinity Park!
Meet My Neighbor: Julie O’Brien  Interviewed by Scott Doron

Name and family members: Me, my kids James (10) and Ellen (7), our poodle Charlie, and our cat Hercules

Occupation: I’m a behavioral scientist. I’m the head of behavioral science & coaching for US Bank, and I teach behavioral science for products of design at SVA in NYC. I love all things social science, tech, and startup-related. And in my spare time I climb! James and Ellen, of course, don’t have occupations, but they do have passions! James loves history and Ellen loves art. And like lots of kids these days, they both love Minecraft, Animal crossing, and Zelda.

Address: 1014 Monmouth Ave.

Why did you move to TP? We’ve been in Durham for 5 years, with a brief stint in NYC that was interrupted by Covid. Now that we’re back and staying in Durham for good, we wanted to find our dream house in our dream neighborhood -- and we did! Trinity Park reminds me of where I grew up in DC, so it creates some nice nostalgia for me. Plus, it’s walkable to everything in Durham, which is pure luxury, everyone is incredibly friendly, and it’s beautiful here. We feel so lucky and are happy to settle here.

What surprised me most about TP is.... How many kids there are! I also love how porches are like 2nd living rooms, and sidewalks are like 3rd living rooms.

If I could improve one thing about TP, it would be..... Of course less traffic on Gregson, Duke, and Buchanan.

Membership

Why join TPNA?

TPNA, one of the oldest and most active neighborhood associations in Durham, has been integral in building community, preserving historic architecture, and collaborating with the city on smart development. TPNA works to keep the neighborhood safe and enjoyable for all by working on issues like zoning, crime, traffic, and safety. Membership dues are vital in these initiatives. Our urban neighborhood is a diverse mix of roughly 40% homeowners and 60% renters. Get involved to make sure issues important to you are voiced. We encourage all residents, homeowners and renters alike, to contribute to our vibrant community by joining TPNA.

One year membership.....$15
Two year membership.....$25
Five year membership.....$50
Lifetime membership.....$200

How to join TPNA?

Online via Paypal: http://trinitypark.org/wordpress/membership/

Prefer to send in a check? No problem. Print and mail the Membership Form found at the above website and a personal check to TPNA at:

TPNA Membership Chair
PO Box 725
Durham, NC 27702
Introducing Plein Air Durham Arts Festival, Seeking Neighbor Support

By James Keul

The inaugural “Plein Air Durham Arts Festival” will happen next spring, the weekend of April 29, 2022 at the Golden Belt Campus. During the three-day festival, 18+ artists from the Triangle and beyond will paint scenes within Durham County from direct observation (without the use of photographic references), culminating in a “wet paint” sale and awards ceremony. In addition, there will be a timed “paint-off” on Sunday May 1, where participants create paintings within a 4-hour period, which are then judged, and awards are given. The paint-off will be open to artists of all ages. All artwork created during the event will be available for purchase by the public.

Plein air festivals have become hugely popular throughout the United States in recent years. They have the potential to bring in participants and supporters of the arts from far and wide. They are a boon to local businesses as well as an important way for plein air painters to gain recognition and make some sales.

In an effort to encourage more out-of-town artists to participate, we would like to offer some of our non-local artists the option of staying with locals. We are looking for neighbors who are willing to offer lodging for the duration of the festival, which would most likely be Friday and Saturday nights, April 29 and 30. If you are willing to host an out-of-town artist and would like to learn more about the festival and what hosting would entail, please email James Keul at keulcreations@gmail.com

Have You Heard the News? Leave Your Leaves!

By Mimi Kessler

At the November TPNA Board meeting, guest speakers Ellen Reckhow, former County Commissioner, and Chay’La Hart, NCCU Senior and outreach intern with New Hope Audubon Society, educated us about the “Leave Your Leaves” initiative, describing the important environmental and economic benefits of letting the falling autumn leaves remain in your yard.

Fallen leaves create important habitat for our favorite insects to lay their eggs. Many butterflies, moths and fireflies “overwinter” in leaf litter as caterpillars, chrysalises, or eggs. And the baby birds in the springtime will depend on those caterpillars for their food. Leaf litter also works like a sponge in heavy rain, mitigating flooding and filtering water as it flows to our drinking water sources, while keeping trees and plants hydrated.

Leaving your leaves will also decrease noise and air pollution (from blowers and trucks to haul leaves away.) Most landscape crews use gas-powered leaf blowers, which are loud and very polluting. Did you know that running one for an hour generates air pollution equivalent to driving 2016 Toyota Camry for 1,100 miles?! California has even enacted legislation to regulate them after July 1, 2022, and ban their sale before the start of 2024.

Instead of paying to have your leaves removed, try using them as mulch. You’ll save time and money, reduce pollution, and help the environment in many ways! For more information, visit Keep Durham Beautiful at https://keepdurhambeautiful.org/leaveyourleaves. Click on “Pledge” to take the pledge to leave your leaves, and you’ll get a yard sign to show your support. You can also watch Commissioner Reckhow’s and Ms. Hart’s presentation to TPNA under “News and Events” at trinitypark.org.
Upcoming Events

TPNA Monthly Meetings
1st Wednesdays @ 7pm—Dec. 1, Jan. 5, Feb 2 (Board planning retreat), Mar. 3, Apr. 6...

All Trinity Park residents are invited and encouraged to attend. Look for confirmation of meeting details, including Zoom link, on the Trinity Park listserv and Facebook page.

TPNA monthly meetings have been held via Zoom since March 2020. We look forward to the day when we can all safely gather again in person. But for the time being, we are continuing on Zoom or with a hybrid approach if feasible.

January 12 Annual Membership Meeting
Each year in January, all TPNA members are invited and encouraged to attend our Annual Membership Meeting, where we hold elections for board members and officers. We also present and vote on the annual budget. The 2022 TPNA Annual Membership Meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 12, 2022, at 7:00 pm on Zoom.

December 12 Luminaria, Fundraising Opportunity
Lighting luminaries throughout the neighborhood is a beautiful winter tradition and is scheduled to happen throughout Durham this year on Sunday, December 12. We’re looking for a charity or student group who would be interested in organizing it. It’s a good fundraising opportunity for a modest amount of effort. If interested, please contact Steven Falzarano at falzos8077@aol.com or Karalyn Colopy at karalyncolopy@gmail.com.

Spring Concert in the Park
We look forward to hosting the Durham Symphony Orchestra for a spring concert at the Park. Date TBD. Stay tuned!

RECENT EVENTS

National Night Out
Tuesday, August 3, was Trinity Park’s National Night Out - a community picnic bringing neighbors together with local law enforcement and government officials. TPNA provided hot dogs, pizza, drinks, and snacks, and neighbors brought favorite dishes to share. Julia Borbely-Brown also collected many donations of school supplies for Crayons2Calculators’ “Fill That Bus” school supply drive. Beth Emerson said, “It was great to be with you all, get to talk with some of our City representatives and Officers and enjoy our wonderful little park. What a nice community we have in Trinity Park!” Thank you to all who came to volunteer, donate, and socialize.

Halloween
After last year’s pandemic pause, TPNA hosted a Halloween celebration, with a few Covid-friendly changes from previous years. We gave out candy and glow sticks in the park as usual. But in lieu of the traditional costume contest and kids crafts, which tend to be crowded events, trick or treaters and their families were invited to take their pictures at the gazebo in our first-ever Halloween alien-themed photo booth. A few hundred folks stopped in to enjoy the festivities over the course of two hours. Thanks to organizer Steve Falzarano, unofficial photographer Larry Apple, and all the volunteers who helped make this beloved holiday both fun and safe.
**Seeking New Board Members!**

Several TPNA board members will be retiring at the end of 2021, and we need a few enthusiastic individuals to step in starting in January 2022.

Board membership is a great way to serve your neighborhood community, stay abreast of local and neighborhood issues, and get to know some new people. Plus, it’s fun! Board members attend monthly TPNA meetings, a yearly retreat, and occasional short special meetings or email discussions. In addition, each typically serves on a committee that interests them and helps with neighborhood activities when possible—the Home Tour, for example. The Board meets monthly, on the first Wednesday of the month. Meetings generally last about an hour, maybe as long as two if there is a big agenda or discussion item.

To be eligible for election to the Board, you just need to be a member of TPNA (see page 9) and have been a resident of the Trinity Park neighborhood for at least one year at the time of election. Board members volunteer for one three-year term, and may stay on for a second term.

If you or someone you know is interested in joining the Board or in learning more, contact Karalyn Colopy, TPNA President, at karalyncolopy@gmail.com. Thank you!