

# COUNTY PRESENTS REVISED PLAN

by Marianne Kligman

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Monmouth County Engineer Theodore Giannechini and professionals from the Orth-Rodgers engineering consultant firm presented their revised road improvement plan to the Lincroft community last month at Brookdale Community College.

The plan, which has been under study for several years, was first presented to the community in June, 2002 to resounding disapproval by many Lincroft residents.

Mr. Giannechini explained that Monmouth County had addressed most of the community's stated concerns in trying to create a balance of community desires and the need to improve traffic flow through the Route 520 corridor.

Orth-Rogers was hired by the County to address problems of congestion and safety along the 4.2 mile stretch of Route 520 from Crawford Corners Road in Holmdel to Shrewsbury Avenue in Red Bank. This meeting concentrated on the areas between Brookdale College and through the center of the Lincroft Village, the areas of greatest community concern.

Mr. Giannechini stated that this was not a final plan and the County would entertain written comment on it up to December 11, 2003. They have met with, and would continue to meet with individual and affected business owners.

However, Mr. Giannechini did emphasize that a great deal of planning and time went into the revised effort and he felt it addressed safety and traffic congestion concerns. He also stated that, due to a meeting that day with the Lincroft Village Green Association (LVGA) and their consultant, Michael J. Wallwork, they would consider the possibility of a Roundabout at the Brookdale entrance if the community supports it. (See related article—What About a Roundabout.)

Joanne Willey, senior Project engineer for Orth Rodgers, outlined the major changes in the area, which included:

1. Jug handle at Brookdale College on the Lincroft Bible Church property and a "slip lane" for right turns on the Brookdale property to deal with back ups for turns into the college. This will force elimination of Post Office exit. The Post Office parking lot will be reconfigured for two-way traffic with one entrance in and out. (A Roundabout would be considered as proposed by the LVGA.)

## 2. Traffic circulation changes

- A brick median would be placed just west of the main intersection of Route 520 and Middletown Lincroft Road for elimination of all left turns in and out of the Lincroft Pharmacy shopping center and Lombardi Plaza for safety considerations. Also impacts the Exxon.

- The access road behind Acme would be converted to a two way street, giving The Lincroft Grove (Lombardi shopping center) access to the rear to compensate for reduced access to Route 520

- A three way stop and raised median at entrance to access road between Acme and Jersey Pride

- Dunkin Donuts parking lot would accept two-way traffic with 90 degree parking (parking currently is configured on an angle.) Right turns in and out only permitted at entrance by Exxon. Lefts and rights, in and out permitted at current exit only.

## 3. Raised green-planted islands for traffic calming

- East of Hurley's lane in front of St. Leo's Church

- North of Lincroft Commons shopping center on Middletown Lincroft Road

- South of gas stations on Swimming River Road

- All along stretch between Brookdale entrance and Little League ball fields

## 4. Road Widenings

- Route 520 West of Phalanx Road and in front of Lincroft Commons and library (across street from Lincroft School) –11 feet in its widest section

- Swimming River Road at intersection to Route 520 necessary for right turns at gas station since slip lane for right turns will be eliminated.

- Northbound on Middletown Lincroft Road in front of Fleet Bank just past Lincroft Commons' side Entrance

Σ Phalanx Road at intersection to facilitate truck turns

## 5. Cross Walks

- New cross walk on Middletown Lincroft for seniors to cross to Lincroft Commons

- Shorter short walks at main intersection due to elimination of two slip lanes for right turns on both sides of intersection at Middletown Lincroft Road.

In the public comment section Lincroft Village Green Association director Carol Baker thanked the panel for doing so many of the things Lincroft Village Green Association had requested.

Gone from the plan were the major widening of Route 520 and Middletown Lincroft Road as well as a jug handle at Phalanx to which the Lincroft Village Green Association had strongly objected.

Lincroft Village Green Association co-presidents Mary Ellen Hintz and Winnie Scutieri were also very appreciative of the County's willingness to consider a roundabout for Brookdale's entrance in lieu of jug handles. However, they, as many other people, pointed out several weaknesses of the plan, particularly allowing two-way traffic at the Dunkin Donut shopping center.

Jill Henry stated that she and Winnie Scuteri went out with a tape measure to investigate the feasibility of two-way traffic in that shopping center and didn't think it was possible. She stated that many of the SUVs were the same size as the parking spaces being proposed. Lincroft resident and Middletown Planning Board member John Deus called the idea insanity.

Lincroft Village Green Association members argued that a traffic circulation pattern behind the Dunkin Donuts shops should be opened up rather than convert that narrow shopping center into two-way traffic.

Susan Dugan argued against the widening of Route 520 in front of the Lincroft School, stating, "That one lane was our only traffic calming. Now they will speed right in front of the school (to pass those turning left in the school.) I really fear for the safety of the children." Lincroft Principal Dr. Michael McKenna asked the county to listen to her parents concerns and not widen the road in front of her school.

Ted Giannechini responded that it was very common to extend two lanes past an intersection.

P. Norman Deitch, Director of Traffic Engineering Services informed the community that the County had successfully convinced the Department of Transportation (DOT) to reduce the speed limit signs on Route 520, extending a 35 mph from the school through to Holmdel and replacing the 50 mph limit by the Navy Road with a 45 mph sign.

Holmdel Mayor Larry Fink informed him that it was still 50 mph in Holmdel and would appreciate the lower speed limit, which his town has requested of the DOT for some time.

Lincroft Village Green Association consultant and international roundabout expert Michael Wallwork explained how a roundabout at Phalanx Road would be a great safety feature, eliminating left turns out of the school and slowing traffic.

Several business owners also registered their concerns. Scott Brownfield, owner of the Exxon, felt the median (which eliminates left turns into his station on Route 520) would force people to make a left at the intersection and cross two lanes of traffic at Swimming River Road.

The owner of Jersey Pride feared the county would be creating a major and dangerous intersection at the Acme by making the one-way access road a two way

street. Mr. Giannechini did not agree and stated that the intersection would be raised with several stop signs to slow traffic.

Business owner Barry Goberman in the Lincroft Grove (Luigi and Subway Shopping Center) feared that that his center's left turn access to Route 520 would be cut off before access to the back road could be achieved, which would hurt the center's businesses.

The Lincroft Grove landlord has attempted to gain that access, but the landowner of the access road (also the Acme landlord,) has steadfastly refused.

Middletown Planning Director Tony Mercantante has likewise been unsuccessful in negotiating access for that shopping center with the Acme landlord.

The business owners fear protracted litigation, should a condemnation action be necessary by the County, which could delay their access through the back road. Mr. Giannechini assured Mr. Goberman that the project wouldn't proceed until that access was established.

Mr. Deus as well as several other residents commented that the plan didn't address the main problem of traffic congestion in the center of town.

Rose Stallmeyer argued that the situation would be exacerbated with the elimination of the "slip right turning lane" since traffic currently backs up on Swimming River Road from the main intersection to the reservoir on some days.

Jill Henry, as well as Barbara and Bill Thorpe on Swimming River Road, requested that more alternate route planning be done to reduce the traffic congestion on Route 520. They emphasized pursuing the state for establishment of an Exit 107 on the Garden State Parkway since

most of the traffic is going to the Route 109 interchange.

Mr. Giannechini responded that this was not likely since the Garden State Parkway would have to build another tollbooth at a 107 interchange.

However he did state that he is working on other alternate routes to Brookdale Community College at a Laird Road and Phalanx connection, which should reduce congestion on Swimming River in the future.

Mr. Deus commented, "We are addressing the problem wrong. The problem is traffic and speed and pedestrian safety. I have been exposed to Roundabouts and the darn things do work. They are safer and move traffic more efficiently. If we could do something different, we could regain our village."

To that Mr. Giannechini and the Orth Rogers staff jokingly suggested they put roundabouts up and down all of Route 520. The audience cheered that suggestion.



LVGA Director Carol Baker addressed the County Engineers in their presentation of the revised plan for Route 520 improvements in the Lincroft Village. The LVGA group members were mostly positive since the engineers had addressed many of their concerns from the previous plan but offered some suggestions on improving the revision.