

How the Natural Area Advisory Committee views SW 24th Avenue

Summary: NATL is a valuable academic resource that should not be diminished unless the benefits to the University clearly outweigh the costs. In the case of a four-lane SW 24th Avenue through the southern edge of NATL, normal procedures for both transportation planning and changes in campus land use have thus far been avoided. The University's plan to delay a decision on the donation of right-of-way until June 2004 may worsen traffic congestion and seriously damage community relations.

On 20 Feb 2003 and 25 Mar 2003 Vice President Poppell and President Young endorsed the concept of donating right-of-way for a four-lane extension of SW 24th Avenue through the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory. Their endorsements led the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization (MTPO) to amend its 20-year transportation plan and the Alachua County Commission to switch from two lanes to four lanes in its engineering design of SW 24th Avenue west of SW 34th Street.

A four-lane SW 24th Avenue west of SW 34th Street was judged unwarranted by a 22 Jan 2003 traffic analysis authorized by the MTPO and by the Citizens and Technical Advisory Committees of the MTPO. The professional staff of the MTPO recommended keeping SW 24th Avenue a two-lane divided roadway and against amending the 20-year plan as adopted in December 2000.

Under these circumstances, the Natural Area Advisory Committee (NAAC) does not understand why UF would endorse a reduction in the area and quality of the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory. It believes that prior to such an endorsement the University should have required that the worth of the road be evaluated by traffic analyses and that the costs and benefits of the donation of campus land be openly weighed.

Similarly NAAC does not understand why eight months after endorsing the donation of right-of-way, the University has yet to sponsor open discussions of the worth of the road or the costs and benefits of the donation.

Finally NAAC does not understand why the University plans to delay its decision to donate its segment of right-of-way for a four-lane "East-West connector" until June 2004 while the segment immediately west of SW 34th Street is on a fast track toward construction at a cost estimated to be \$3.8 million more than the two-lane divided road supported by all parties until December 2002.

All of the above is why NAAC will request the Faculty Senate, at its November meeting, to ask the UF Administration to withdraw its 20 Feb 2003 and 25 Mar 2003 endorsements of the donation of right-of-way for a four-lane extension of SW 24th Avenue through the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory and Preservation Area 1.