



UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

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16 October 2000

Mr. Marley Sanderson
Director of Transportation
North Central Florida Regional Planning Council
2009 NW 67th Place
Gainesville, FL 32653

Dear Mr. Sanderson:

One of the transportation improvements proposed for the SW 20th Avenue area is an extension of SW 24th Avenue east across SW 34th Street to meet Archer Road in the vicinity of Surge Area Drive. The right-of-way for such an extension would apparently come, at least in part, from the University of Florida's Natural Area Teaching Laboratory (NATL).

To inform you about NATL, I enclose a descriptive pamphlet, a recent usage survey, and the last annual report. To learn more, browse NATL's Web site at <http://csssrvr.entnem.ufl.edu/~walker/natl.htm> or visit NATL (enter across from the Entomology and Nematology Building on Natural Area Drive).

The Natural Area Advisory Committee, whose members are listed on the back of the NATL pamphlet, makes management recommendations to UF Administrative Affairs. The Committee has recommended that the University oppose the 24th Avenue extension on these grounds:

Constant traffic along NATL's south border will hurt academic uses. Only the southern half of NATL is reserved for academic use. The northern half is open to the public, making it unsuitable for class or individual projects in which equipment and markers remain on site or in which wildlife must be observed without frequent disturbance. Traffic will interfere with classes and special projects because it is noisy and visually distracting. Hearing a bird or insect song or studying the alarm calls of squirrels will be difficult. Being close to a traffic artery is not conducive to studying nature or to teaching a class about nature.

A year ago, in order to reduce the impact of 34th Street traffic on NATL, the University constructed an earthen berm, 7-ft high and 710 ft long, extending south from the DPI compound to the southwest corner of NATL at Regency Oaks Apartments. This reduced but did not eliminate the impact of 34th Street. It also reduced the size of NATL's upland pine ecosystem, because the fires used to maintain it must be stopped at a fire lane along the inside base of the berm.

The academic area of NATL will be reduced. Even if none of the right-of-way for the extension comes from NATL, the area for academic use will be reduced because a berm similar to the one along 34th Street will be required. The value of a natural area is highly dependent on its size. NATL's samples of upland pine and hammock ecosystems are already small. No similar areas of upland pine or hammock are conveniently close to campus and safe. The size of a valuable and irreplaceable University resource should not be reduced.

Wildlife will be harmed. Not only will there be direct harm, from road kills, but the noise, lights, and fumes of constant traffic will make NATL less suitable for wildlife.

Wetlands and drainage may be impacted. Unless the proposed extension curves south to join Archer Road well west of Surge Area Drive, it will impact wetlands in NATL—specifically a large pond and a sinkhole that the pond drains into. The sinkhole also drains wetlands east of Surge Area Drive. On occasion (most recently in February 1998) the sinkhole is unable to take runoff water fast enough and Surge Area Drive must be closed for more than 24 hours because of flooding. Even if the extension avoids the sink and the wetlands it drains, two large retention ponds that lie between Archer Woods Apartments and Regency Oaks Apartments on NATL's south border will need to be re-engineered.

In summary, the Committee opposes the proposed extension of 24th Avenue east of 34th Street because its adverse effects on NATL's value to the University of Florida are unacceptable.

Sincerely,

Don Dickson
Chair, Natural Area Advisory Committee

xc: Fred Cantrell, Administrative Affairs

3 enclosures