

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

The DEIS is available for public review at:

Appalachian State University
Carol Grotnes Belk Library
Boone, North Carolina

Watauga County Public Library
140 Queen Street
Boone, North Carolina

Blowing Rock Public Library
1022 Main Street
Blowing Rock, North Carolina

Corridor maps, as well as copies of the DEIS, are available at:

Blowing Rock Town Hall
1036 Main Street
Blowing Rock, North Carolina

Caldwell County Public Library
120 Hospital Avenue
Lenoir, North Carolina

NCDOT-Resident Engineers Office
160 Den-Mac Drive, Suite A
Boone, North Carolina

Guilford County Public Library
219 North Church Street
Greensboro, North Carolina
Mecklenburg County Public Library
310 North Tryon Street
Charlotte, North Carolina

The DEIS is also available for review on the project web site: <http://www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321>

Wake County Public Library
1910 Clark Avenue
Cameron Village Shopping Center
Raleigh, North Carolina

Feel Free to Contact the Study Team

If you have any questions or wish to be added to our **newsletter mailing list**, please call John Page or Reggie Scales on our **toll-free project information line**, 1-800-263-2434. You may also **write the study team** at:

Ms. Missy Dickens, PE or Mr. John Page, Project Manager
Project Development and Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade &
Environmental Analysis Branch Douglas, Inc.
NC DOT 909 Aviation Parkway, Suite 1500
1548 Mail Service Center Morrisville, NC 27560
Raleigh, NC 27699-1548

You may also e-mail your comments to blowingrock321@dot.state.nc.us or visit the project's website at www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321 for more information.

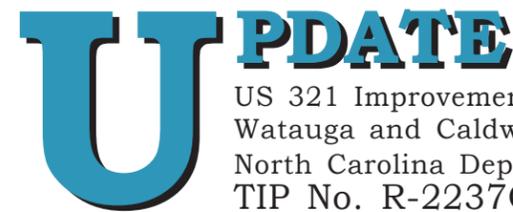
This newsletter is being sent to those who have requested to be on the mailing list in the past, as well as all property owners within 500 feet of the centerline of each of the corridor alternatives. If you would like to be included on the mailing list, or if you would like to receive a copy of the DEIS on CD-ROM, please contact John Page or Reggie Scales at the toll-free project information line or email address.



Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.
909 Aviation Parkway, Suite 1500
Morrisville, NC 27560



No. 8 Summer 2002



US 321 Improvements Environmental Impact Statement
Watauga and Caldwell Counties, North Carolina
North Carolina Department of Transportation
TIP No. R-2237C

US 321 PUBLIC HEARING IS SCHEDULED

Bulletin Board

US 321 Draft Environmental Impact Statement Hearing Schedule

PRE-HEARING OPEN HOUSE WORKSHOPS

August 19, 2002
Chetola Resort and Conference Center
Manor House Tent
North Main Street
Blowing Rock
4 pm - 8 pm

August 20, 2002
Laurel Fork Baptist Church
229 Jake Storie Road
(Located off Aho Road)
Aho Community
4 pm - 8 pm

August 22, 2002
St. Marks Lutheran Church
5570 Blowing Rock Blvd.
(US 321 at Blackberry Rd.)
4 pm - 8 pm

PUBLIC HEARING

August 26, 2002
Clapp Gymnasium
Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds
1442 Goforth Road
Blowing Rock
7:00 PM

Directions to the Workshops and Hearing are enclosed.

THE DEIS

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the US 321 Improvements Project is available for review. A summary of the DEIS findings is included in this newsletter. To review a copy of the DEIS, you may:

- Visit one of the public review locations (see box on back page);
- Request your personal copy on CD by calling Reggie Scales or John Page on the project information line (1-888-263-2434); or
- Download a copy from the website (www.ncdot.org/projects/blowingrock321)

THE PUBLIC HEARING

A Public Hearing is scheduled for August 26, 2002 at the Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds at 7:00 p.m. The purpose of the hearing is to give citizens the opportunity to express their opinions about the project.

Three pre-hearing open house workshops will be held during the week prior to the Public Hearing to provide citizens an opportunity to:

- Learn more about the study
- Review the hearing maps
- Ask questions on an informal basis
- Provide comments

Locations and times of the workshops and hearing are listed to the left on the Bulletin Board.

HOW TO COMMENT ON THE PROJECT

Comments on the project may be:

- Mailed in
- Submitted in writing at any of the open houses or at the hearing
- Presented verbally at the public hearing.

Oral and written comments carry equal weight and both will become part of the hearing record.

Mailed comments should be sent by **Sept. 26, 2002** to:

Mr. Carl Goode, PE, Manager
Office of Human Environment
NCDOT
1583 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1583

Those wishing to speak at the public hearing can register at any of the pre-hearing open houses or at the hearing or by calling Mr. Goode at 919-250-4092. Verbal comment will be limited to 5 minutes although additional comments may be offered after all those registered have spoken.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

After comments from citizens and from state and Federal regulatory and resource agencies are reviewed, the NCDOT, FHWA and the agencies will identify a least environmentally damaging practicable alternative from those studied in the DEIS. NCDOT will then select a preferred alternative. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will then be prepared. The FEIS will include:

- Citizen and Federal and State agency comments along with appropriate responses; and
- A description of the preferred alternative and the reason for its selection.

How to Participate in the Hearing Process

- ✓ Review the DEIS
- ✓ Attend the open house most convenient to you to ask questions and review maps
- ✓ Prepare your comments either to submit in writing or to deliver verbally at the hearing.

GUIDE TO THE DEIS

The public often finds the size and amount of information contained in an Environmental Impact Statement overwhelming. The contents of the document are, however, required to provide information of interest to the general public, and also that required by law, desired by federal and state resource agencies, and of concern to special interest groups.

When reviewing the DEIS, begin with the Summary. It is presented first and contains the overview of the contents and key issues. The Summary is followed by a detailed table of contents, which can help direct you to sections of particular interest to you. At the end of the document, an index can help you locate discussions of specific topics.

Chapter 2 provides a broad discussion of the corridors including a detailed history on the development of the alternatives. Within this chapter each of the detailed study alternatives is described as well as their ability to serve the project's purpose. Chapter 3 discusses the existing conditions in the project area. Topics include neighborhood and community issues, historic resources, ecological resources, air quality and noise. Chapter 4 contains a discussion of the project's environmental impacts including community impacts, visual and aesthetics quality, historic resources, noise, ecological impacts, and construction impacts. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on impacts to the Green Park Historic District and avoidance alternatives in compliance with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, as amended.

Project Description

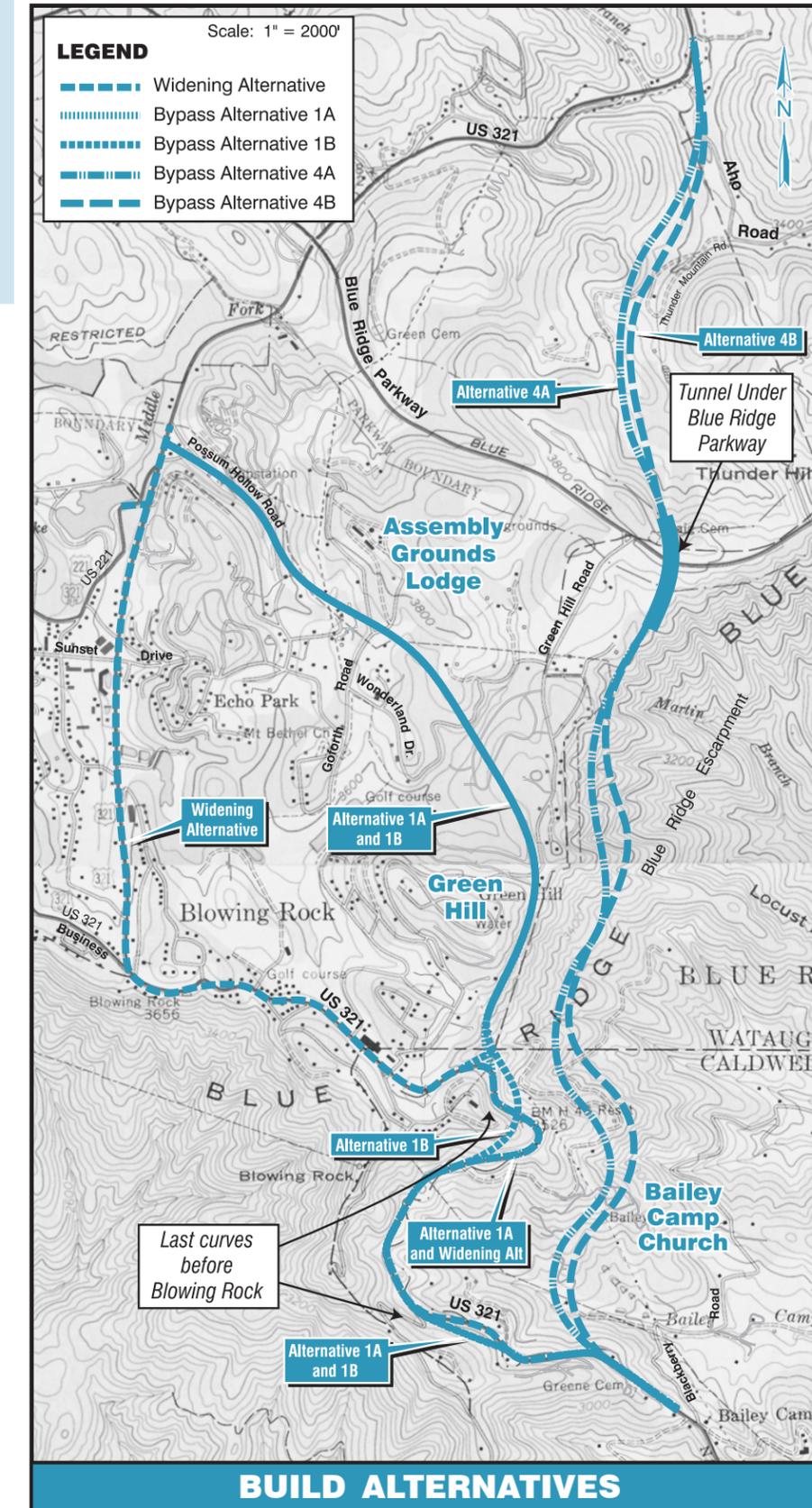
- In August 1993, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) that recommended widening US 321 from two to four lanes from NC 268 in Patterson to US 221 in the resort community of Blowing Rock. The proposed improvements are in northern Caldwell County and southern Watauga County. It was expected that the widening would improve traffic flow and reduce accidents. Current accident rates on US 321 within the Town of Blowing Rock are far higher than statewide averages for similar roads. The proposed improvements are included in county thoroughfare plans and the NCDOT's 2002 to 2008 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

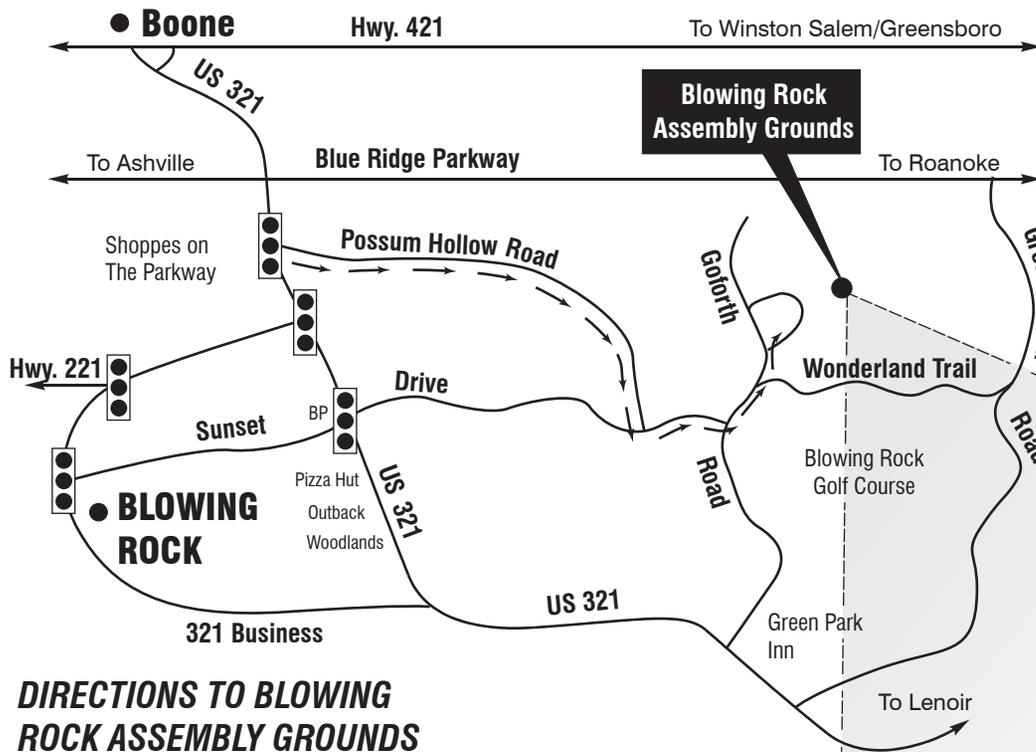
However, many residents of Blowing Rock preferred a project that included a bypass around Blowing Rock. Therefore, it was decided that a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) would be prepared for the northern 4.3 miles (6.9 kilometers) of the EA's project area (from Blackberry Road to US 221 in Blowing Rock). The DEIS compares a widening alternative with several bypass alternatives.

A No-Build Alternative fails to meet the "purpose and need" of the proposed project because it neither increases capacity nor decreases accidents. The alternatives include a Widening Alternative and two bypass alternatives each with two options: Bypass Alternative 1A, Bypass Alternative 1B, Bypass Alternative 4A, and Bypass Alternative 4B. All of the Build Alternatives meet the purpose and need of the proposed project. A brief summary of the impacts and costs of the five Build Alternatives is provided in the table below.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVE CORRIDORS

ALTERNATIVES	DESCRIPTION	COST (Construction and Right-of-way Cost in Millions)	DIRECT SOCIOECONOMIC & CULTURAL RESOURCE IMPACTS	KEY POTENTIAL NATURAL IMPACTS
Widening	This alternative would widen US 321 from two lanes to four lanes from Blackberry Road through the Town of Blowing Rock. Curves would be eased south of Blowing Rock and in the Norwood Circle and County Club Drive area of Blowing Rock. The project would include a four-lane section with shoulders until the Gideon Ridge area south of the Blowing Rock town limits; a four-lane section with curb and gutter and some turn lanes in Blowing Rock south of US 321 Business; and four lanes with a landscaped median north of US 321 Business. Several intersections also would be improved.	\$45.9	Displaces 16 homes and 8 businesses. Reduces community character within Green Park Historic District. Historic Resource Adverse Effect: Green Park Historic District and Green Park Inn	Acres of Natural Plant Community Used: 27 Habitat Fragmentation: Least Stream Crossings by culvert/bridge: 4/0 Wetland acres impacted: 0.07 Potential threatened or endangered species: 1
Bypass Alternative 1A	Bypass Alternatives 1A would follow the current US 321 alignment between Blackberry Road and the Gideon Ridge area. It would then follow along the side of Green Hill, pass under Green Hill Road, and then through the eastern part of Blowing Rock. It would rejoin US 321 at its intersection with Possum Hollow Road. The bypass includes four lanes and a 4-foot painted median. The alternative assumes that no improvements are made to US 321 north of its southern intersection with the bypass.	\$75.1	Displaces 24 homes and 1 business. Divides several neighborhoods. Reduces community character. Four residential areas would have substantial visual impacts.	Acres of Natural Plant Community Used: 39 Habitat Fragmentation: Moderate Stream Crossings by culvert/bridge: 2/2 Wetland acres impacted: 0 Potential threatened or endangered species: 1
Bypass Alternative 1B	Bypass Alternative 1B essentially follows the same alignment as Alternative 1A. Alternative 1B is different from Bypass Alternative 1A in that it includes excavation at Gideon Ridge, which eliminates the only curves that do not meet the project's design criteria.	\$92.2	Displaces 24 homes and 1 business. Divides several neighborhoods. Reduces community character (more than 1A with excavation at Gideon Ridge). Four residential areas would have substantial visual impacts; additional impact of the cut in Gideon Ridge Historic Resource Adverse Effect: None	Acres of Natural Plant Community Used: 36 Habitat Fragmentation: Moderate Stream Crossings by culvert/bridge: 2/3 Wetland acres impacted: 0 Potential threatened or endangered species: 1
Bypass Alternative 4A	Bypass Alternatives 4A would completely bypass the Town of Blowing Rock. It would cross a valley at its southern end, follow the Blue Ridge escarpment to a tunnel under the Blue Ridge Parkway, follow a side hill paralleling Thunder Mountain Road, and end at Aho Road north of the Parkway. The bypass includes four lanes and a 4-foot painted median. The alternative assumes that no improvements are made to US 321 north of its southern intersection with the bypass.	\$170.5	Displaces 8 homes and 1 business. Does not protect and maintain rural atmosphere of Watauga and Caldwell Counties. Reduces isolation of rural homes. Historic Resource Adverse Effect: Blue Ridge Parkway	Acres of Natural Plant Community Used: 93 Habitat Fragmentation: Greatest Stream Crossings by culvert/bridge: 13/6 Wetland acres impacted: 0.09 Potential threatened or endangered species: 1 Substantial impact on the Thunderhill overlook area
Bypass Alternative 4B	Bypass Alternative 4B follows an alignment similar to that of Alternative 4A. The major difference is that 4B utilizes a greater number of bridges to reduce earthwork, changes in the terrain, natural resource loss, and visual impacts. Bypass Alternative 4A includes five bridges; Alternative 4B includes 12 bridges.	\$250.3	Displaces 6 homes and 1 business. Does not protect and maintain rural atmosphere of Watauga and Caldwell Counties. Reduces isolation of rural homes. Historic Resource Adverse Effect: Blue Ridge Parkway	Acres of Natural Plant Community Used: 47 Habitat Fragmentation: Moderate Stream Crossings by culvert/bridge: 5/14 Wetland acres impacted: 0.01 Potential threatened or endangered species: 1 Views affected: Less impact than 4A





DIRECTIONS TO PUBLIC HEARING

Adequate parking will be available at the Assembly Grounds, however, citizens are encouraged to carpool or rideshare to minimize congestion at the facility.

From Possum Hollow Road: Follow Possum Hollow Road 7/10 mile to stop sign. Turn left onto Sunset Drive, continuing 2/10 mile to stop sign. Turn left onto Goforth Road, continuing 3/10 mile to the fork at Blowing Rock Assembly Grounds. Turn right into Assembly Grounds. Assembly Grounds staff will direct drivers to planned parking areas.

DIRECTIONS TO BLOWING ROCK ASSEMBLY GROUNDS

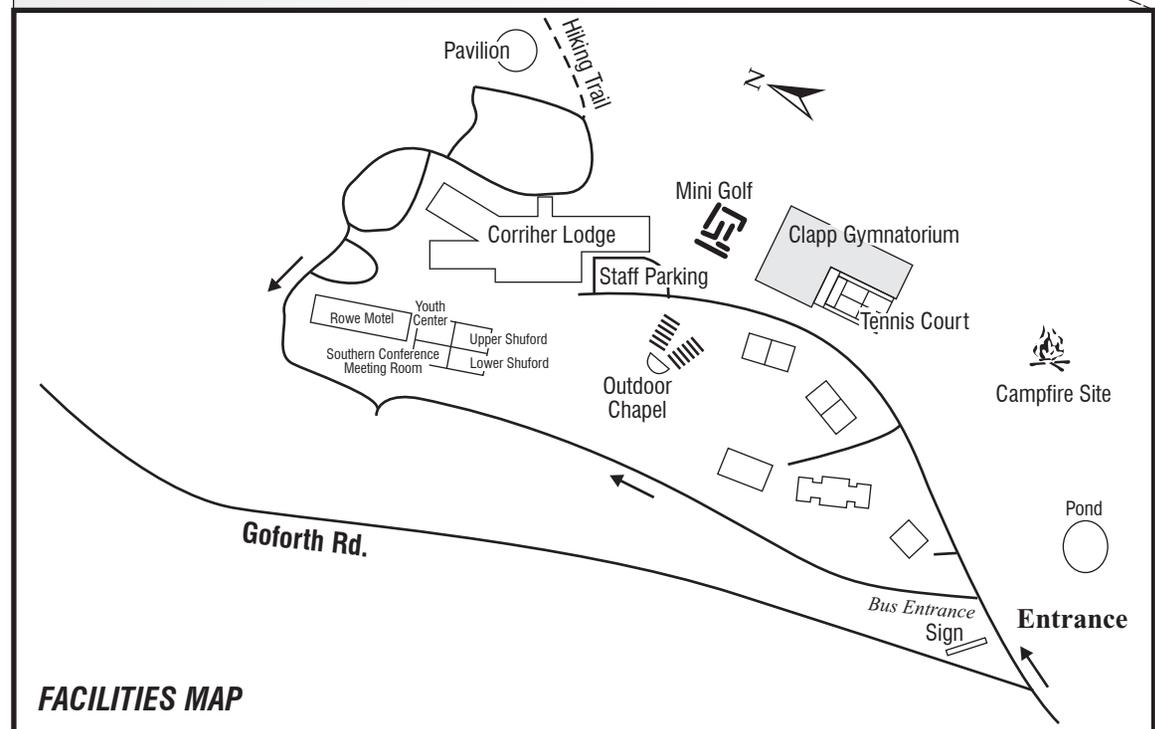
From US 421 (from Wilkesboro/Winston Salem via Parkway): Enter onto the Blue Ridge Parkway from US 421 at the Parkway School. Travel south (turn right onto the Parkway) across the Blue Ridge Parkway until crossing US 321 (mile marker 292). Exit the Parkway onto US 321 South to Blowing Rock. Continue on US 321 South to the first traffic light (Shoppes on the Parkway is on the right). Turn left at the traffic light onto Possum Hollow Road. (Follow the directions to Possum Hollow Road.)

US321 from Lenoir/Hickory/Gastonia: From Blowing Rock continue on US 321, past Woodland's Barbecue, Pizza Hut and Outback. Continue through the first traffic light at the Scotchman/BP Station and the next light. At the third light, turn right on Possum Hollow Road. (Follow the directions to Possum Hollow Road.)

DATE: AUGUST 26, 2002

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

PLACE: BLOWING ROCK ASSEMBLY GROUNDS
Clapp Gymnasium
1442 Goforth Road, Blowing Rock, NC
(828) 295-7813





PRE-HEARING OPEN HOUSE WORKSHOPS LOCATION MAP

August 19, 2002

Chetola Resort and Conference Center

Manor House Tent
North Main Street

Blowing Rock
(828) 295-5500
4 pm – 8 pm

August 20, 2002

Laurel Fork Baptist Church

229 Jake Storie Road (SR 1616)
(Located off Aho Road)

Aho Community
(828) 295-7381
4 pm – 8 pm

August 22, 2002

St. Marks Lutheran Church

5570 Blowing Rock Blvd.
(US 321 at Blackberry Rd.)
4 pm – 8 pm

Directions to Blowing Rock may be found on the
Public Hearing Map (opposite side of this page).

