

**Attachment 1:
Newton Bridge Road TAD Community-Identified Priority List**

8.19.24 (revised 1.30.25)

Mayor and Commissioners,

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Introduction:

Slowing of Traffic on Newton Bridge Road is our priority. Traffic Circles and other strategic initiatives are preferred.

Our group's general priority was infrastructure first, in the belief that would make the corridor more attractive to future development. As business owners in the area, we all specifically recognized a need to slow down traffic on Newton Bridge Road as a vital, yet achievable first step. Having seen the positive effect of the recent 4-way stops along Hancock Ave. leading into downtown, our first proposal is for strategically placed traffic circles, 3-way stops or other means of achieving meaningful steps toward community-driven goals for the District. Our report includes an initial detailed look at pros, cons, and challenges.

Thank you for taking the time to read through the details of this report including consideration of responsible means for appropriate funding of certain priority efforts.

The Newton Bridge TAD Advisory Committee recommends the following initiatives be undertaken.

Specific Recommendations:

1. Newton Bridge Road @ Kathwood Drive

- i. The TAD Advisory Board initially recommended that a project which seeks to establish stop signs at this intersection as a temporary initiative followed by development of a roundabout be initiated as immediately as possible. We were advised that Traffic Engineering performed a signal warrant analysis, and this intersection did meet warrant. This means that the volume of traffic is too high to recommend stop signs. Additionally, this location has multiple northbound and southbound lanes, which MUTCD states is not a recommended candidate for an all-way stop. Therefore, ACC staff recommended that our approach be adjusted toward other solutions.
 1. **There is a new development proposed just north on Vincent Drive. They have agreed to make intersection safety changes at the intersections of Vincent Drive and Kathwood Drive for the purpose of reducing crashes. When the Kathwood Drive intersection changes are implemented, temporary stop signs could be installed until a roundabout can be built.**
 2. **TAD Advisory Board intends to attempt to work with the developer to facilitate developer participation in a solution that is acceptable to Staff, the developer, and the TAD Advisory Board.**
- ii. We appreciate very much the engagement and collaborative efforts of Staff members who have given so much attention to District needs and related discussions. We strongly encourage a focus on both immediate progress and acceptable long-term solutions by all who may help to serve the needs of the District.
- iii. Speed of traffic throughout the length of Newton Bridge Road may be excessive, contributing to the real estate available for possible private investment being less attractive for housing, retail, and many types of businesses. Building on the overarching strategy of investment in self-organizing or propagating initiatives, slowing of related traffic holds a key to the success of the District at large.
 1. Traffic Engineering staff performed a speed study in 2021 and determined the 85th speed NB was 53.8 mph and SB 52.5 mph.
- iv. The intersection at Newton Bridge and Kathwood represents the intersection with the second highest historic crash rates within the TAD District. Highest crash volumes/severities within the TAD District is the interchange with Chase St @ Loop 10, which is at the other end of the area of focus of this Item 1 recommendation. It is notable that other strategic efforts are underway which may serve to support improvement of the interchange with the highest historic crash rates in the District.

- v. While being a central connection point for vehicles, bikes, and especially foot traffic between a host of District housing and public infrastructure that includes Holland Park, Greenway, public transportation, and retail, the intersection is unfriendly to nearly all types of traffic, is the scene of very common vehicle crashes, and is the location of the death of at least one high-school aged athlete en-route to community soccer practice at Holland Park. It may also eventually serve as a gateway for non-motorized access to the Greenway nearby, thereby providing for enhancement of the District's Civic contributions to the success of the District.
- vi. Depending on costs of ROW acquisition and other project factors, costs may range between \$1.5M (signalized intersection, vs \$10-20k all stop as a temporary life-safety focused approach) and \$3M (roundabout). Establishment of an initial Stated Cost Limitation of \$2.5M and corresponding funding strategy is recommended.
- vii. Funding shall come from existing Newton Bridge Road TAD funds and revenue, state and federal grants, and/or such other funds that may be subsequently approved and/or accepted by the Mayor and Commission for such purposes.

b. Newton Bridge Road @ Vincent Drive

- i. Staff recommends performing an all-way stop warrant at this intersection, seeking to establish stop signs at this intersection. While the TAD Advisory Committee and some Staff members have agreed that a traffic circle is preferable, if a traffic circle is not feasible, we agree with the stop signs recommendation as a temporary initiative followed by development of a roundabout as a long-term solution. This effort should be initiated following the successful initiation of the preceding prioritized specific initiatives.
 - 1. Per Staff, Traffic Engineering conducted an all-way stop study in October of 2024. It did not meet MUTCD warrants.
- ii. Speed of traffic throughout the length of Newton Bridge Road is, according to community feedback, unofficial commentary from law enforcement, and according to the observations of the Advisory Board, excessive and dangerous.
 - 1. Per Staff, Speed checked in 2024, 85th speed NB 47 mph and SB 50 mph.
- iii. Excessive speed of traffic is noted (via community input including comments from an area developer) as contributing to investment in a given real estate parcel being less attractive for housing, retail, and many types of businesses. Building on the overarching strategy of investment in self-organizing or propagating initiatives, slowing of related traffic holds a key to the success of the District at large.

- iv. The intersection at Newton Bridge Road and Vincent Drive represents the intersection with the third highest historic crash rates within the TAD District. Highest crash volumes/severities within the TAD District is the interchange with Chase St @ Loop 10, which is at the other end of the area of focus. The second-highest crash volumes/severities are attributed to the Kathwood intersection noted in the previous initiative.
- v. While being a central connection point for vehicles, bikes, and especially foot traffic between a host of District housing and public infrastructure that includes Holland Park, Greenway, public transportation, and retail, the intersection is unfriendly to nearly all types of traffic, is the scene of very common vehicle crashes, and is a fairly blind intersection for drivers who are turning. It provides little to no support for connectivity between area housing and the very successful civic amenity of Holland Park. It may also eventually serve as a gateway for non-motorized access to the Greenway nearby, thereby providing for enhancement of the District's Civic contributions to the success of the District.
- vi. 1125 Newton Bridge Developer is to provide intersection improvements at Kathwood and Vincent. Engagement of this and other developers in the District, with a focus on the above considerations and including review of this report by Developers working in the District, is recommended.
- vii. Depending on costs of ROW acquisitions, and pending a roundabout warrant study and other project factors, costs may range between \$10 – 20k (all-way stop), or \$2-3M (roundabout). Establishment of an initial Stated Cost Limitation of \$2.5M and corresponding funding strategy is recommended.
- viii. Funding shall come from existing Newton Bridge Road TAD funds and revenue, state and federal grants, and/or such other funds that may be subsequently approved and/or accepted by the Mayor and Commission for such purposes.

c. Corridor Street Lighting Immediate Improvements

- i. Based on recommendation of Staff and assertion by staff that operating costs once installed will be handled by ACC departments according to standard practices, the Advisory Board would like to prioritize improving lighting along the entire corridor, starting with specific areas where traffic speed is high and where traffic patterns shift.
- ii. Upon completion of a lighting audit, we would like to target addition of lighting to existing ROW poles as these require less investment.
- iii. Initial phase of lighting improvements project will utilize up to 40% of currently existing funds for this project. The project will be overseen and managed by the appropriate ACC staff.
- iv. **We seek approval from the Mayor and Commission to utilize a portion of existing available funds in the NBR TAD account for the purpose of initiating this project.**

d. Sidewalks, Kathwood to Vincent on Newton Bridge

- i. We recommend that a project which seeks to establish safe walking paths connecting Kathwood to Vincent along Newton Bridge Road is developed and initiated as immediately as possible following the successful initiation of the preceding prioritized specific initiatives.
- ii. Speed of traffic throughout the length of Newton Bridge Road is excessive making safe access to the investments already made by the Citizens of Athens-Clarke County in public assets difficult if not impossible. As a result, opportunities for possible private investment in housing, retail, and many other types of businesses in the area is less attractive. This is a missed opportunity. Building on the overarching strategy of investment in self-organizing or propagating initiatives, increasing safe access to public amenities is a key to the success of the District at large.
- iii. 1125 Newton Bridge Developer is to provide intersection improvements at Kathwood and Vincent. Engagement of this and other developers in the District, with a focus on the above considerations and including review of this report by Developers working in the District, is recommended.
- iv. Depending on costs of ROW acquisitions and other project factors, costs may range between \$500k and \$3M or more. Establishment of an initial Stated Cost Limitation of \$2.5M and corresponding funding strategy is recommended.
- v. Funding shall come from existing Newton Bridge Road TAD funds and revenue, state and federal grants, and/or such other funds that may be subsequently approved and/or accepted by the Mayor and Commission for such purposes.

e. Road Diet: Newton Bridge, Chase to Kathwood

- i. We recommend that a project which seeks to establish a “road diet” including traffic study to identify expected LOS (Level of Service) to determine if the full road diet would be appropriate along Newton Bridge between Chase Street and Kathwood be initiated.
- ii. Though we do not recommend that this priority supersede the top priority (Newton Bridge at Kathwood intersection) above, where funding of the secondary and tertiary priorities above may be challenged, it may be advisable to support this initiative at a higher priority level than as listed here.
- iii. Speed of traffic throughout the length of Newton Bridge Road is excessive making safe access to the investments already made by the Citizens of Athens-Clarke County in public assets difficult if not impossible. As a result, opportunities for possible private investment in housing, retail, and many other types of businesses in the area is less attractive. This is a missed opportunity. Building on the overarching

strategy of investment in self-organizing or propagating initiatives, increasing safe access to public amenities is a key to the success of the District at large.

- iv. ACC TPW Department would support this initiative, pending results of an Expected Level of Service study.
- v. It is anticipated that the initiative will involve two phases over a period of approximately three years. Cost for the initiative is estimated at \$80k to \$220k and will require further analysis by Staff.
- vi. Funding shall come from existing Newton Bridge Road TAD funds and revenue, state and federal grants, and/or such other funds that may be subsequently approved and/or accepted by the Mayor and Commission for such purposes.

f. Chase/Dairy Pak/Newton Bridge Intersection

- i. We recommend that a project which aligns with projects already underway which connect to this intersection, which seeks to provide for a light level of service increase, which seeks to extend the specific focus on slowing of speed of traffic in the District, and which ultimately supports the Overarching Recommendations above is developed and initiated as immediately as possible while not undermining the prioritized initiatives recommended above.
- ii. The initiative underway related to improvements to Chase Street and the Chase/Newton Bridge/Dairy Pack intersection, in accordance with the preferences of Georgia Power/Southern Company, an investor-owned tax-paying private entity, does not currently include a traffic circle and other measures that would specifically align with the priorities of the TAD. Based on research by the Advisory Board and specific input from ACC TPW, it may be inadvisable to attempt to modify this initiative underway.
 - 1. Research conducted by the TAD Advisory Board indicates that a decision to NOT utilize a traffic circle at this location (defaulting to traffic signal instead) was made due to the preferences of Georgia Power. The Board would like to express concern with the undocumented desires of a private company being cited as cause for such a decision.
- iii. **We seek support from the Mayor and Commission in encouraging ACC departments with related competencies and influence to work with the Chase Street improvements project team to identify opportunities to align with TAD initiatives and priorities and specifically to seek to enhance the slowing of traffic within the intersection and surrounding area.** And we seek support for clear recommendations that related efforts do not extend the project timeline already underway.

g. Barber St. Two Way Bike Facility and Sidewalk project

- i. The Advisory Board recognizes that this project is currently underfunded and may be paused. Recommendations made herein are specific to the project once funding is realized.
- ii. This project currently prioritizes Prince Avenue to Newton Bridge according to research provided by ACC Staff. **Given the TAD's overall strategy, it is recommended that this prioritization is reversed such that Bike Facility and Sidewalk investments by ACC start at the Newton Bridge end of the corridor (rather than starting at the Prince Avenue end of the corridor).**
- iii. It is further recommended that efforts and public investments made on this project incorporate connectivity to public amenities such as public offices, parks, and greenway, further enhancing the district's primary corridor's walkability, bike and pedestrian safety, and attractiveness related to private investment.

Context of above recommendations:

Purpose: Newton Bridge TAD Advisory Board is tasked with gathering citizen input and formulating priorities for use of TAD related resources and recommendations regarding steps to achieving related goals. Our members have met consistently over our term and have provided for multiple public input sessions as part of our efforts. This letter provides for what we understand to be the deliverables requested related to actionable initiatives and recommendations which tie to the stated priorities of the TAD as defined by the Advisory Board.

Background: The Newton Bridge TAD Advisory Board has conducted a series of research related initiatives in effort to inform this document. During the course of our work, we've reviewed the publicly available information from other TADs in ACC as well as other TADs within the State of Georgia which may have some parallel attributes. While each entity observed has different priorities and opportunities unique to the given jurisdiction, a number of similarities are apparent which seems to indicate that our efforts are in line with expectations. Our reviews have included review of historical information related to the establishment and intent of the ACC TAD initiative at large. Most importantly, we researched the opinions of citizens residing or working within the TAD and aligned the recommendations herein with this input.

Overarching Recommendations: Thematically, the recommendations we're making are intended to produce sustained output in support of the priorities of the TAD, over time. It is important that we include in our recommendations this consideration. Neighborhoods and districts don't evolve overnight and the energy and focus of a given group of constituents may change as progress is made or as delays are realized. With this in mind, we recommend that any initiatives undertaken by the TAD are well documented in terms of intended outcomes and in terms of anticipated timelines. Benchmarking and evaluation of initiatives underway as well as the priorities that bolster these efforts should be reviewed in relation to the timelines set forth as initiatives are approved. And sustained effort to remind the citizens of the TAD about where the initiatives have come from, progress along the way, and any revisions to the associated timelines should be part of the Advisory Committee's and the Mayor and Commission's tasks. Reporting, recursive engagement of citizens for input, and review of priorities and plans are recommended to ensure a successful initiative. Further, periodic review and refinement of stated priorities of the TAD, including citizen input, is recommended as well.

Similarly, the TAD Advisory Committee recommends that investments made by the TAD include prioritization of those with the potential for compounded outputs. That is, these investments should be more focused on initiatives that will continue to produce outcomes as opposed to those that are simply used to resolve one-time expenditures. Invest in initiatives that will beget sustained vicarious investment over initiatives that seek to resolve an instance-specific obstacle. A change in the speed of traffic that allows for walkability will more likely produce an increase in the viability of a given development project as well as subsequent projects. A contribution to a

development project to offset a given expense may only support a more short-term goal. Leveraging a strategy that involves self-organization and sustained investment growth (both public and private) begets sustained tax revenue growth and sustained support for affordable housing initiatives, our schools, and youth development. Invest in initiatives that will beget further initiatives. Align initiatives to produce compounding outcomes. Keep a long-term perspective when considering short-term opportunities.

Stated Priorities: The Newton Bridge TAD Advisory Committee's stated priorities and recommended allocations are as follows.

- iv. Public Infrastructure at 100% for the coming 5-10 years. These public infrastructure initiatives are specifically noted in the recommendations below. They are intended to support attracting of economic development opportunities by adjusting some of the current conditions within the District which may serve to make the District more attractive to private investors. The specifically identified recommended initiatives are intended to focus on safety and on connecting citizens with public amenities and housing locations within the district. By producing a safer and more lifestyle friendly district, economic growth, additional housing, and opportunities for our schools and our youth will follow.
- v. Economic Development Opportunities 0%. Although a stated priority, it is our recommendation that TAD funds investments be focused on the top priority of specific public infrastructure for the coming 5-10 year term.
- vi. Housing 0%. Although a stated priority, it is our recommendation that TAD funds investments be focused on the top priority of specific public infrastructure for the coming 5-10 year term.
- vii. CCSD & Youth Development 0%. Although a stated priority, it is our recommendation that TAD funds investments be focused on the top priority of specific public infrastructure for the coming 5-10 year term.

Responsible Funding:

The Newton Bridge TAD is already realizing surplus/accruing funds which are designated for use by our community in support of the District and according to Mayor and Commission consensus. However, the current funds in hand are inadequate to support the specific initiatives recommended in this document without some help. As the current income stream to the TAD is well established and supported by legislation, it may be considered an acceptable source for servicing of debt which may be held by the TAD.

The TAD Advisory board is not suggesting specifically the use of Bonds as the appropriate debt instrument as there are several other resources which may be leveraged including GTIB, Loans, Grants, and other sources.

We are requesting that the Mayor and Commission task appropriate Staff with providing for available options which they would support, whereby, the guaranteed annuitized income already being realized by the District (not speculative revenue based on future growth projections) may be utilized for the purpose of facilitating.

We recommend that the Mayor and Commission facilitates the establishment of certain debt to income ratios which are deemed acceptable for the District. Subsequently an initiative is undertaken to establish mechanisms by which the TAD may acquire capital funds, via debt, which is within these established ratios and where the established annuitized revenue of the TAD is used to service such debt. We recommend that the outcomes of this initiative include a means by which debt may be rolled over, allowing an ongoing system that allows for the TAD to support opportunities that it recommends, according to established priorities, and with the approval/direction of the Mayor & Commission and the support of and facilitation by ACC Staff.

FY24 revenue to the TAD is slightly higher than \$200k. Conservatively, an applicable interest rate for an applicable bond, based on 20 or 30 year amortization, may range upwards of 6% (at the time of this document's assembly). Depending on a number of factors, current TAD revenue may support a \$2.5-\$3mm debt issuance. Availability of such capital may facilitate initiation of the Newton Bridge @ Kathwood priority.

Note that FY24 revenue does not include assessments related to projects underway in the District which will significantly improve revenues ongoing.

Conclusion:

Recommendation regarding future members of the Newton Bridge TAD Advisory Board:

Future Reprioritization and refinement of initiatives undertaken by the District are anticipated and encouraged. As the District grows towards its priorities, new opportunities will be realized. The current Members are enthusiastically supportive of the efforts of those who follow us and strongly recommend that these efforts are considered openly by all stakeholders and are supported by future civic leaders including citizens, volunteers and appointees, ACC Staff, and elected officials. We recommend that future boards are encouraged to well document priorities, discussion points, research undertaken, and input from all sides of a given set of considerations or priorities. Concurrently, we recommend that future boards review the details of this specific document and other related documents for the TAD as part of the onboarding of new board members, elected officials, and staff.

We respectfully ask that you review this document in detail, request clarifications where deemed necessary or desired, and move to ratify the resultant final document through entry in public record, publication, and/or other appropriate means of encouraging public awareness of and engagement in the efforts of the Newton Bridge Tax Allocation District Advisory Committee.

Thank you for your consideration,

Newton Bridge Road TAD Advisory Committee:

David Barbe

Daniel Epting

Mike Leggett

Leon Leathers

Peter Dugas