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Critics assail plans for parkway

Knoxville regional route is subject of hearing; process nearly finished

**By DON JACOBS, jacobs@knews.com
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While many opponents of the proposed Knoxville Regional Parkway contend that the route was selected to promote business development, Chuck Holland has a different view.

Building the 26.5-mile-long road to link Interstate 75 in Loudon and Anderson counties will drive Holland's business out of state.

"We've been here for 16 years because we like the area, even though 99 percent of our business is out of state," Holland said of the management consulting company he started in 1982 and moved to a building along Pellissippi Parkway.

"If they're going to destroy the building, it'd just make sense for us to go to an airline hub, probably Atlanta," Holland said.

Holland was one of 167 people who attended a public meeting Thursday night at Karns Elementary School to review the nearly finalized plans for the regional parkway. Participants were able to study detailed maps of the planned road and how it might affect their property.

Participants could submit comments that will be considered by the 18-member Knoxville Regional Parkway Design Resource Team before making its final recommendations to the Tennessee Department of Transportation. The resource team was tasked with selecting the path of the road within a 1,000-foot-wide corridor chosen by TDOT and determining where any interchanges should be located.

Holland's business, Qualpro Inc., is housed in a 22,000-square-foot building that lies in the path of a ramp that connects the proposed parkway with Pellissippi Parkway. Holland has 30 "highly paid employees," said Ken Holland, the founder's son.

"It doesn't make any sense to put it here," Chuck Holland said.

"Twenty-five to 50 years from now, the blue route would be best. I never dreamed that they would go with this one. I assumed cooler heads would prevail," Chuck Holland said.

His sentiment was repeated more than a dozen times by other people attending the meeting.

The so-called blue route, which would have swung toward Oak Ridge and into Roane County, was rejected by TDOT as too costly because of bridges required to cross rivers.

"I think the majority of people are resigned to this," said Robert Shaw, who represents the Citizens Against the Beltway Orange Location on the resource team. "It's been dragged on so long, there are no surprises anymore.

"There are many issues outstanding concerning the local roads. Anytime you run a major road through, it's going to disrupt local traffic."

Albert Robinson is concerned that his house on Rather Road will be cut off from Oak Ridge Highway by the parkway. With the parkway elevated 19 feet at Rather Road, he wondered how a bridge will be built over the parkway to accommodate Rather Road residents.

One of Robinson's neighbors, Paul McMillin, is simply angry about the whole process. The retired Los Angeles police officer returned to his native Solway and built a 4,100-square-foot, \$600,000 dream home.

When getting permits to build the brick home he finished in 2000, no one mentioned the possibility of a parkway slashing through his parcel of paradise. At that time, a route had not been definitively selected. Maps show the proposed road coming within 600 feet of McMillin's house.

"About all I can do is sit on my front porch and honk at the trucks," he said. "It's not the money or the home, it's the disruption of our lives, not to mention the devaluation of my property."

Mike Evans was happy to see that some trees would separate his house from the parkway, which will claim eight or nine of the 18 acres he has on Strader Road. The road will cut off his route to Bull Run Creek, which his property abuts.

The 52-year-old Evans said a more westerly blue route would have made sense for the parkway.

"I have no problem with progress, but I don't consider this progress, but development," he said. "It's only progress if it helps people."

Uncertainty about the route forced Evans to delay building a home on his property for his daughter and her family. He opted to complete the house and hope the road would spare it.

"Whatever they're going to do, I wish they'd do it and not leave people in limbo," he said.

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