

University Development Initiative

Citizens Forum:

Speech to City Council, October 27, 2003

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council,

I am Joseph Martinez, president of the University Development Initiative. If you look around the room, you might see several members of UDI. Today, we are here out of concern. Our concern today lies mainly with the fundamental civic needs of our area, specifically the most important civic need of our era: infrastructure. UNC Charlotte, having been developed as a commuter school, lacks basic infrastructure geared towards students, specifically sidewalks. The area surrounding campus, which is a very heavily traveled area by pedestrians, does not have unsafe sidewalks-- not unsafe, but none at all. How students cross State Route 49, more aptly called University City Expressway, is not by crosswalks. There are 2 marked and signaled crosswalks on University City Boulevard—yet there are 9 places where students frequently cross that highway. I assure you, dodging cars moving at 45-60 miles per hour is no way to have to get to class.

There are no streetlights, let alone sidewalks or signaled pedestrian crossings on Mallard Creek Church Road, yet the apartment communities of University Terrace, opposite the University, house a large portion of our student body. Often driving along this road on a Saturday night is a dangerous game, as this dark and narrow portion of Mallard Creek Church Road is also where our fraternity homes are located. Your headlights catch

students walking to parties just in time to quickly move out of the way. You say you want to reduce DUI in Charlotte. How about providing means to allow students to drink and then safely walk home?

The Board of Governors of UNC Institutions has recently released strategic directives for the growth of the UNC system. One of these directives is to “Provide a safe, secure, hospitable, and non-discriminatory environment for all who study and work in UNC institutions.” In 2001, vehicles injured 73 pedestrians between the ages of 16-25 in Charlotte. One student was killed last year crossing University City Boulevard. Another student was severely injured crossing University City Boulevard at Suther Road. I would think that part of this “safe, secure, and hospitable environment” might be having a safe way to get to class.

In our petition, which we have brought to you today, almost 1200 people, including the Chancellor of UNC Charlotte, Faculty, Local Business Owners, Firefighters, and, of course, students, have called upon City Council to immediately take measures to make the area surrounding the University safe for pedestrians. A study for these safety measures should be initiated as soon as possible. City mandated Pedestrian Enhancement Districts have already improved areas such as Dilworth and South End. We want these same kinds of improvements to our area. Allowing a rural four lane divided highway along our University edge was a mistake, nonetheless, it can be fixed. Already having held a workshop on pedestrian safety that involved architects, transportation engineers, and even Charlotte City Planners, some solutions have already been conceived. With

additional study by the City and the involvement of the public, these problems can quickly be identified. With 6 million dollars available in state funds through construction funds, as well as the Governor's Highway Safety Program, these problems can be eliminated.

I urge you to read the petition, and listen to your citizens. Thank you for your time and attention.