

Historic District against city's traffic plan

DEAR EDITOR:

While last week's Morgan County Citizen's headline suggested "Traffic Plan Draws Engaged Crowd," the article failed to capture the sentiment of the nearly 150 people who overflowed the town hall meeting to express their concerns to Madison's Mayor and City Council. The "hyper alertness" of the vast majority of the people — as Councilwoman Betsy Wagenhauser described them — came from their clear opposition to the poorly conceived proposal Madison on the Move.

The immediate pushback that had followed the city's online release of its draft traffic plan led Councilman Eric Joyce to recommend the town hall meeting on the subject, for which I thank him, as well as City Manager John Klimm for calling for additional meetings.

Those who spoke carefully obeyed Mayor Fred Perriman's request not to repeat the same points, but the sentiment of the crowd could not be misconstrued as it rejected the major proposals of the traffic plan. These include turning Kolb Street and Oil Mill Road into major thoroughfares for accessing the 1,763 acres of what was Pritchard Farm and the rest of the undeveloped lands on the northwest side of the railroad tracks so that traffic flows through the residential streets on the other side of the tracks into the downtown. The plan calls for turning parts of First Street/Old Post Road as well as Second Street/Academy Street to one-ways to facilitate vehicles in and out of the downtown while adding parking along these residential streets. Despite the City's protestations to the

contrary, this is what the plan calls for!)

While there are other problematic proposals — such as wasting taxpayer resources on dedicated golf-cart paths when the growing number of EVs make the use of these dangerous novelty vehicles obsolete, applying a Manhattan-like grid, and historically incompatible "street retrofit sections" — the crux of the problem with the plan is the damage it would inflict on the southern half of Madison's National Register Historic District.

Now the City claims it treats all citizens the same regardless of where they live and on its face that would seem fair. But the truth is one group of citizens are singled out by the City for particular treatment — the homeowners in the Historic District — and consequently the City should afford them special consideration when its actions directly impact upon them.

When someone buys in the Historic District they surrender a share of their property rights by agreeing to follow the rules and regulations set forth in Madison's Historic Preservation Ordinance. In sacrificing these rights, they protect for everyone the integrity of the Historic District which last year generated \$61 million in tourism revenues for the community in addition to the increased ad valorem taxes they pay by virtue of the location of their home. Just ask one of Madison's realtors who market houses by capitalizing on the Historic District to push up property values throughout the city of its importance to the local real estate market.

SEE **ESKEW**, A8

...the trafficker found with over
20 grams of the illegal drug.

Pitts is currently being held at
the Morgan County jail.

ESKEW

From A7

In addition to being the target of daily tourists, many of the Historic District residents open their properties for the Tour of Homes — as occurring this week — or when the Georgia Trust comes to town as it did two years ago with a record-breaking tour, or for the hospital auxiliary's Festival of Friends, with the proceeds benefiting some charitable group. And yet they receive no special treatment by the city.

Indeed, Madison on the Move did not even acknowledge the existence of the Historic District lumping this area in with all the others as "Traditional Residential Areas" and then like stab wounds cutting directly into the neighborhood with its traffic proposals.

Instead the City needs to listen to the residents of the Historic

District and reject outright the proposals in this plan. It needs to ask the railroads to close the crossings at Kolb Street and Oil Mill Road to vehicular traffic, keep First/Old Post and Second/Academy as they are, and rather than introduce parking on residential streets, build a parking deck in the downtown. This would require the city to finally access the cemetery off of Highway 83 — something Madisonians such as Irene Huff advocated for years — perhaps using Bull Street for this purpose, while redirecting connectivity for the new section acquired from Pritchard Farm into the old cemetery on the same side of the tracks. And the city must revise its Preservation Ordinance to add protections for its attractive streetscape which is a contributing factor to Madison's famed Historic District.

Glenn T. Eskew
Madison