



HIGHWAY HASSLE — Dotted with commercial property on the south side, and mostly residential on the north, this view of Western Avenue looking west from the Albany city line may be altered somewhat in the future. Proposals by the

State Department of Transportation and the town's appearance and size of the highway have responded negatively to both plans. DOT

Western Avenue: A mur

By HARRY HAGGERTY

It appears a classic case of a municipality proposing what it feels is needed, and residents reacting. "We don't want it."

The case involves proposals by the Town of Guilderland and the State Department of Transportation on changing the size and appearance of Western Avenue.

The town is proposing zoning changes along the highway, also known as Route 20, that officials say are necessitated by a DOT proposal to widen the road from the Albany City line to Route 155.

One citizens organization, known as the McKownville Improvement Association, which has made its voice known on matters involving its territory for years, has publically opposed both proposals.

The association, headed this year by Donald Reeb of Norwood Drive, feels the improvements planned by DOT will lead to commercialization of Western Avenue, "which is what we are opposed to," says Reeb.

The town's plans call for the designation of two new zoning classifications, residential professional office (RPO), and residential neighborhood business (RNB).

The professional office zone would permit such uses as offices for doctors and lawyers in all or part of a structure located in a zone marked for residential use.

The neighborhood business zone would allow certain residential and professional uses, plus personal services, such as a beauty shop or repair shop.

Town planner Matthew Delany told residents at a recent hearing that the changes are also the result of population changes. He said the population plan projected in the town's Master Plan in the late 1960s did not take place, and commercial and residential lands are not being used effectively.

Town officials have called the two proposed zones, "transitional zones."

The reconstruction project, which is in the design stage and expected to go up for bidding in August., will provide for



and the town concerning the future have been made. Residents, however, have DOT plans to widen the road, citing safety

hazards as the reason, while the town is considering rezoning property along the road. (Staff photo)

municipality vs. the people

two 11-foot travel lanes for both westbound and eastbound traffic, a 10-foot wide medium lane designed to provide better turning safety, and two four-foot wide bikeways.

A DOT spokesman said that taking into account existing shoulder width, the highway will be widened by eight feet or less.

DOT designer Ray Gardeski said the project is "critical from a safety point of view, with the medium lane being the key to accident reduction, particularly left turn and rear end accidents. There is currently a lack of stacking lanes for turning."

Gardeski said that some property acquisition, or "strip taking," will be made along the project route and portions regraded. Gardeski said that the decision for the project was made "independent of the zoning plan of the town."

Gardeski noted, however, that the widening would be necessitated even more with increased commercialization.

The McKownville group drew up a petition stating its reasons for opposing the DOT project. Some 350 persons

signed the petition. Reeb said that a recent poll of McKownville residents turned up only 25 who favor the proposed changes.

Reeb said the major concerns of residents as a result of the DOT project are increased commercialization, more hazardous pedestrian crossings, increased parking problems and the adverse affects on residences in the area, and the possible destruction of numerous trees. He also said that the plan does not provide adequate protection for bicycle traffic, although Gardeski said the bikeways will be set off the edge of the travel lane to allow more area for travel.

"We don't want our area to become very bare and very commercial," Deeb said.

The association president said his group will meet soon to decide any further stands it wishes to take, and to consult with town officials.

Meanwhile, the town's plans for rezoning will be the subject of another public hearing soon. The board held a public hearing several weeks ago but due to an error in advertising the hearing, another will be scheduled.