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Road proposal stirs painful memories

Residents recall Hayti's demise

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DURHAM - The City Council lent its support Monday to further study of a proposed route for the East End Connector, a new bypass to connect U.S. 70 and the Durham Freeway.

Of four options put forth by the N.C. Department of Transportation, the city's elected officials voted 6-1 to favor the path that would cost the least and require the destruction of the fewest homes and businesses.

But many who spoke to the council before the vote asked that the road not be built at all. All four of the proposed options would bisect established neighborhoods that residents described as mostly black and largely elderly.

That led some to invoke a painful chapter in Durham's history. In the early 1970s, black residents of the Hayti neighborhood were forced out to build the Durham Freeway.

"We in the black community remember when the same thing happened to Hayti," said the Rev. Sylvester Williams, who told the council not to build the road. "Is that's what's to happen to us now?"

Vivian McCoy, whose street potentially would be affected, said the road project's moving forward could possibly kill older residents.

"If this should happen, acquisition of senior citizens' properties, homes, will perpetrate stress, cardiac arrest, strokes and even sudden deaths," said McCoy, who also described herself as a senior. "Don't think it won't happen. I would hate for the death of a senior citizen to be put on the city council's back. ... We're not going to be Hayti. That will not happen to us. If we have to take you to court, we will."

Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to build the road rests with state transportation officials. The council was only asked to advise on the route.

But in an effort to help those affected, the council voted to support the formation of an ad hoc committee of residents to work with DOT as study of the preferred route moves forward.

If all stays on schedule, the new road could be completed by 2013.