1952

In May 1952, Sharon Township voters approved the rezoning of the 72 acre Graceland Farm for commercial use. This action raised the issue of the need for a route from Olentangy River Road to North High St., and an article in the Columbus Dispatch in June 1952 described three possible routes. (See inset)

Judged by newspaper articles from that time, the rezoning from rural to commercial was a primary concern, demonstrated by the vote—1,430 in favor, and 1,278 opposed.

Several newspaper articles at the time featured residents of West Jeffrey Place and Rathbone Road stating their opposition to the Rathbone route, which would have destroyed 40+ homes on Rathbone and impacted a number of homes on West Jeffrey Place. The Rathbone route required the City to purchase additional right-of-way, which it decided not to do.

In October 1952 the Casto organization completed the purchase of Graceland Farms for a reported price of $300,000 to $400,000. Casto announced it would construct a shopping center on the land, with an investment of approximately $10,000,000.

1968

In September 1967, City Council passed an ordinance authorizing the Director of Public Service to enter into an agreement for engineering services in connection with the construction of Morse Road from a point in the vicinity of Indianola Avenue west 1.3 miles to its intersection with Olentangy River Road. The ordinance called for the appropriation of $100,000 for these services.

Three ‘alignments’ were identified at the time (map below):
• **Recommended Alignment:** Rathbone Avenue;
• **Alternate Alignment 2:** passing between the southern boundary of Graceland Shopping Center, north of the Delawanda neighborhood (through the trailer park which still exists) joining Morse Road just east of High St.;
• **Alternate Alignment 1:** passing north of Graceland Shopping Center east through the School For the Deaf property, joining Morse Road west of Indianola.
An organization opposed to the ordinance, Citizens for Good Planning (CFGP) was formed, and its spokesman was Dr. C. Macpherson who resided at 162 W. Jeffrey Place.

CFGP needed 5,000 signatures of Columbus voters to place a referendum on the ordinance on the May 1968 ballot. They obtained over 10,000 signatures, and the referendum appeared on the May 7, 1968 ballot. A majority voted against the ordinance, preventing the appropriation of funds and the potential linkage of Morse and Bethel Roads.

Carrole Roberts, a resident at 175 W. Royal Forest Blvd. for over 50 years (with husband, John), says

“The 1968 effort by the small neighborhoods of Old Beechwold and Delawanda to sway the entire city to vote against the connector was truly inspiring. Made me a believer that the “little guys” can win. The night of the election we went to the Donnally’s (Patty & Bill who resided at 177 Rustic Place) and partied!”

1984

In 1984, Timothy Crowley, a Weisheimer Road resident and Chairman of the Morse-Bethel Connector Committee, initiated a petition drive to reverse the 1968 referendum. Citizens for Good Planning, with spokesman Donald Calhoun who resided at 216 West Beechwold Blvd., stood in opposition to the petition drive.

In early September 1984, although City Council knew CFGP was challenging the validity of the petitions, Council voted to place the issue on the November ballot. In mid-September, the petitions were filed with the Board of Elections, and CFGP filed a formal protest alleging the petitions were not properly notarized. The Board of Elections upheld the protest, and the issue did not appear on the November ballot.
1998

In July 1998, City Council commissioned the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) to examine alternatives for a Morse-Bethel connector. MORPC recommended routing a connector through Graceland Shopping Center to High St.

Citizens for Morse-Bethel Connector, led by Mr. Crowley, was successful in getting enough petition signatures to place a referendum for a Morse-Bethel connector (Issue 39) on the November 1998 ballot. The recommended path for the connector was Rathbone Road.

In opposition, a political action committee (PAC) was formed to replace CFGP—it was named Citizens for Columbus Neighborhoods (CCN), and was led by Tom Pappas (Pappas & Associates is a Columbus-based public policy consulting firm; Tom and Tami resided at 4935 Olentangy Blvd. until 1995). CCN mounted a city-wide effort to garner voter support against the referendum.

There was considerable financial support for the connector from businesses, primarily automobile dealers, located on Morse Rd.

Ninety-seven Old Beechwold residents donated in excess of $40,000 to CCN. Residents of the Delawanda neighborhood also contributed, and participated in a ‘candlelight vigil’ with Old Beechwold residents. Carrole Roberts: “And again in 1998 we took to the streets. Neighbors who weren’t ‘activists’ but truly believed that the connector was a mistake.”

On November 3, 1998, 60% of voters cast their ballots against Issue 39, preventing the linking of Morse and Bethel Roads.

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Any future proposal regarding a connector is likely to require a city-wide referendum before any funds can be appropriated for study.

It is believed that Old Beechwold’s listing on the National Register of Historic Places would present a deterrent to any use of federal funds for a connector, and our listing on the Columbus Register of Historic Properties would also be a factor.

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This synopsis of the Morse-Bethel connector initiatives omits the identification of many individuals who worked to defeat those initiatives. Deep appreciation is owed to those who resided, or still reside, in the Old Beechwold and Delawanda neighborhoods and who contributed when needed during the last 65 years!

Carrole Roberts: “The leaders you mentioned were absolutely necessary but also the footworkers who scoured the city with info, registration, persuasion and passion. And these were not political people for the most part. They had a cause.”

John Alexander
4837 Olentangy Blvd.

March 2017