

Cheekwood's growth shouldn't come at neighbors' expense | Opinion

Metro's own traffic study identified solutions. Instead of addressing them, Cheekwood is expanding parking capacity while more traffic continues flowing through residential streets.

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- A dispute has arisen between Cheekwood and its neighbors over traffic from the venue's increased attendance.
- A Metro-funded study found Cheekwood's traffic exceeds recommended levels and suggested connecting to Highway 100.

Cheekwood's leaders want Nashvillians to believe it's under attack. It's not.

It's being asked to do what every homeowner, nonprofit and business in Davidson County must do: follow zoning laws and respect neighbors.

Residents living beside Cheekwood aren't trying to close it. They're trying to keep their families safe as a highly profitable nonprofit outgrows the residential infrastructure around it. Cheekwood asks the public to ignore the facts that Metro taxpayers paid to learn, and

diverts attention with a disingenuous campaign to “save” the organization despite Cheekwood’s \$61 million in assets and \$33 million in cash and liquid securities.

What the traffic study actually found

Metro spent over \$500,000 in taxpayer dollars on an independent study answering one question: What is happening on these local streets?

The answer was clear. Cheekwood’s traffic demand exceeds recommended levels by nearly three times. Each of the 15-plus comparable institutions studied nationwide relied on arterial access roads, such as Highway 100, as required by law.

The report [concluded](#) that Highway 100 is the “most immediate and logical” arterial road connection to Cheekwood. A proposed road through Warner Parks, now tied up in court, isn’t the only possible solution. The study identified four other options. The difference between them is funding: Metro will be on the hook to pay only if the solution connects to a Metro park. The other options require Cheekwood, a private entity, to use its own funds.

That may explain why a Metro Planning Commission member affiliated with Cheekwood leadership recommended prioritizing the Warner Parks option over all others.

What this dispute is really about

So why is the taxpayer-funded answer from traffic experts being ignored, and only the taxpayer-funded solution being discussed?

Cheekwood is moving forward with a major, multi-level \$35 million garage that will hold as many vehicles as a Walmart parking lot before providing Highway 100 access. That is the dispute. Not flowers, art or schoolchildren's field trips – not whether Nashville loves Cheekwood. We do.

Should a destination drawing nearly 400,000 annual visitors, up 64% since Covid, keep routing traffic through narrow residential streets while increasing parking capacity to [750 spaces](#)?

Cheekwood changed. Neighbors didn't.

This isn't a case of "we knew what we were getting into. Neighbors bought homes beside a botanical garden, not a year-round event venue and regional visitor destination. Since 2020, Cheekwood's attendance and programming have grown dramatically, with outdoor concerts, beer and food trucks, private events and other high-impact uses. We haven't changed. Cheekwood has.

Cheekwood wants the benefit of growth without the burden of responsibility.

The people paying the price

Now imagine this is you. You open a certified letter and learn that garage blasting is scheduled in 60 days, a few hundred feet from your home. It didn't come from Cheekwood leadership. Nor was it a follow-

up after neighborhood meetings disclosed garage plans. Nor did it follow a signed commitment that damage will be covered.

It came from a subcontractor needing to document the current state of your property for potential blasting damage. Your foundation. Your walls. Your drainage. Your children's bedrooms. It'll be your insurance problem to prove later.

That isn't neighborly. It's institutional arrogance dressed up as civic virtue.

Neighbors aren't asking Cheekwood to close. Many are members, donors, volunteers and lifelong patrons. They ask Cheekwood to be what it claims to be: a good neighbor. Good neighbors do not ignore the \$500,000 taxpayer-funded traffic study findings. Good neighbors do not increase capacity first and maybe solve safety later. Good neighbors don't call hundreds of families a "self-serving faction" in the press for asking about gridlock, blasting, blocked emergency access and unanswered questions.

Good leaders don't use diversion tactics or cry wolf when facts are inconvenient.

Cheekwood can thrive. The neighborhood can thrive. But not if one must absorb the cost of the other's expansion. Nashville should reject Cheekwood's false narrative.

This isn't "Save Cheekwood" versus "Save the Neighborhood." It's simple: build proper access first, follow zoning rules, protect nearby homes, and stop portraying residents as villains for asking local

government and a powerful institution to obey the same rules as everyone else.

Cheekwood is a Nashville treasure. But no treasure is above the law, and no institution earns the right to treat nearby families as collateral damage.

Joe Altman is a Nashville resident and Cheekwood neighbor