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DSG President Elliott Wolf has worked to make the areas surrounding East Campus safer.

Wolf leads campaign to improve local sidewalks

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Duke Student Government President Elliott Wolf, a junior, is spearheading an effort to protect pedestrians at the intersection of Broad and Perry streets after a traffic accident almost killed a graduate student Aug. 11.

An intermediary between the edge of East Campus and popular shops on Ninth Street, the section of Broad Street near Perry Street presents a threat to students, Wolf said.

"I think [Broad Street] is the major focal point of concerns about pedestrian safety," Wolf said. "It's an intersection that serves a significant amount of pedestrian traffic and is also very dangerous. I can't think of any others in the vicinity of the campus that are as hazardous."

In a Sept. 15 letter to Durham Mayor Bill Bell, Wolf stressed the potential for future injuries and urged officials to consider implementing new features at the affected area of Broad Street.

"Recent efforts by both the Duke administration and the Duke Student Government have sought to encourage students to regularly interact with the community," Wolf wrote in the letter. "Currently, however, students fear for their safety when crossing the street in order to walk only a block from East Campus to Ninth Street."

Wolf mentioned in the letter several short-term additions initially proposed by the Old West Durham Neighborhood Association that would provide relief to Duke students and the larger Durham community.

The suggestions—including visible signs alerting drivers to pedestrians, extended curbs, a raised crosswalk and a decreased speed limit—need only a "minimal investment by the city," Wolf wrote.

In response to Wolf's letter, City Council member Mike Woodard, who has sought changes to the crosswalk since he witnessed the accident last August, assured members of the community-based organization Partners Against Crime that he is working to gain approval from the North Carolina Department of Transportation and produce solidified plans.

He added that one of the city's senior traffic planners will meet with the NCDOT today to discuss a number of options.

Erin Kuhns, the graduate student in religion severely injured in the accident, said Woodard has not

fulfilled his pledge to swiftly address the issue.

"I believe he claimed that he would bring the matter to the city's attention," Kuhns wrote in an e-mail. "I would have expected a speedier response."

Previous pedestrian accidents on Broad Street, including the death of a Duke alumna in September 2004 after a collision with a Durham Area Transit Authority bus, have prompted city officials to install pedestrian features such as a crossing light at the intersection of Broad and Markham Avenue.

These efforts, however, are far from adequate, Wolf said, adding that three Duke students or community members have been seriously injured near the crosswalk in the last few years.

"They should put a light at the walkway because none of the cars stop," freshman Rob Bewkes said after a recent near-collision with an oncoming vehicle on Broad Street. "Maybe a push button with a light so they have to stop for us to walk."

Kuhns said accidents such as her's may occur due to an unfortunate combination of pedestrian nonchalance and motorist negligence, but the proposed improvements would still help protect students and local residents from future tragedies.

She added that the city cannot be held responsible for the decisions of pedestrians or motorists, but it does have an obligation to protect its citizens.

"When it comes to pedestrian safety, the City of Durham is certainly capable of doing so and has only to be willing," she said.

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