

Main Street Reconstruction

Position of the City of Gainesville

November 13, 1998

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) is preparing to spend millions of dollars (\$3.7 million estimated construction cost) to reconstruct Main Street between North 8th Ave and Depot Avenue. The City has considered the proposed reconstruction of Main Street, and has taken the following general position:

The City believes that an essential "linchpin" for establishing and protecting a healthy, vibrant downtown is to ensure that the City's downtown corridors are designed to support a lively downtown, serving pedestrians, automobiles and transit and designed to support retail and mixed-use development. This type of vibrant mixed-use, multi-modal downtown is the overriding intent of the recently adopted "Traditional City" ordinance -- an overlay which applies to the downtown. Because Main Street is at the heart of downtown Gainesville, it is essential that modifications to this street protect and promote this quality-of-life intent.

The City therefore seeks to apply the following objectives to downtown Gainesville and Main Street:

- Make Main Street more "permeable." That is, enhance the section so that it is easier to walk across and therefore less of a "Great Wall" barrier between east and west downtown.
- Make our downtown more of a place to "drive to, rather than drive through."
- Promote our downtown as a "destination."
- Emphasize our downtown as a "Park Once" rather than "Park Many Times" environment.
- Strive for a lower design speed to enhance downtown livability and retail health.
- Recognize that the downtown must emphasize its strengths in order for it to successfully compete with other cities and with outlying areas in Alachua County. Instead of seeking to provide suburban amenities such as abundant and free parking lots, wide and high-speed roads, and "big box" retailers, which the suburbs will always out compete the downtown for, the downtown must promote features that it can successfully compete with: ambiance, walkability, transportation choice, pride, and a sense of place.

In light of the above concerns and intent, the City has taken the following specific positions regarding the reconstruction:

Turning (Return) Radius

It is the understanding of the City that FDOT is proposing to increase the size of the radius for a number of side street intersections along Main Street. The City strongly opposes this proposal, because it is extremely detrimental to a safe, walkable downtown atmosphere. Larger radii can dramatically increase the crossing distance for pedestrians -- thereby increasing pedestrian "exposure time" to moving motor vehicle traffic. In addition, a larger radius tends to increase the speed at which a motor vehicle makes a turn, which is extremely detrimental to pedestrian safety -- particularly because it encourages "rolling stops."

The FDOT's Transportation Design for Livable Communities (TDLC) contains a policy that allows "compact" intersections as a technique for slowing speeds. The existing radii seem more than adequate to accommodate turning vehicles and minimize pedestrian crossing distance. The existing radii at Main

and University appear adequate to accommodate the truck traffic turning at the intersection. Maintaining the current radii at all intersecting streets will save anticipated r/w costs (current estimates are \$1.04 million for total r/w).

Recommendation: Maintain existing radii on all intersecting streets from Depot Avenue to North 8th Avenue.

Design Speed

The City understands that the design speed of Main Street is currently 30 miles per hour. In order to promote:

- ambiance
- the health of retail, office, and residential and
- safety;

the City supports reconstruction using this lower design speed. The speed limit through the Downtown should be posted at 20 or 25 mph. In no case should the reconstruction increase the design speed, or make modifications that would result in an increased average motor vehicle speed along Main Street.

Recommendation: Speed limit through Downtown Area posted at 25 mph, from Depot Avenue to North 8th Avenue. The remaining limits of the project should be posted no greater than 30 mph.

Travel Lane Width

The City understands that the current travel lane width for Main Street is 12 feet, and that FDOT proposes to retain that width. The City position is that to promote the overall intent for the downtown, travel lanes should be no more than 11 feet wide. Street narrowing is an acceptable technique in the TDLC also. There is a substantial volume of delivery truck traffic in the downtown area and many times they have to park in the curb lane or the center turn lane to make deliveries. If the lanes are too narrow, we may create unsafe conditions for this activity, when delivery trucks have very few options available. In addition, we can expect there to be some bicycle trips and if the lanes are so restrictive, unsafe conditions will exist for them. The 11' on the curb lane will help with the problems that exist with the on-street parking program. Any extra pavement width should be allocated to the median/turn lane sections through the area of the on-street parking program.

Recommendation: The typical section should incorporate 11-foot travel lanes from Depot Avenue to North 8th Avenue.

Islands

In general, the City supports as much use as possible of raised, bricked, landscaped medians in the reconstruction, since this enhances the needed safety of mid-block crossings. Any medians should therefore be designed so that they can be crossed by pedestrians. The City also supports the installation of approved street trees within the medians. The TDLC supports the use of median refuge areas for pedestrians.

Recommendation: Raised landscaped islands should be provided throughout the limits of the project.

Bricks

The City calls for the use of as much brick surface as possible in the reconstruction. At a minimum, brick or stamped concrete should be used for the crosswalks. Crosswalks must be distinguished from other road areas by strong contrasting color and texture. Speed tables at side street intersections through the Downtown would be effective at lowering overall speeds. The Main Street and University Avenue intersection should be entirely brick to make it a focal point of the Downtown.

Recommendation: At a minimum, the crosswalks should be constructed of bricks. Speed tables should be incorporated at South 2nd Avenue and North 2nd Avenue, which is the limits of the 25 mph zone. The entire University Avenue intersection should be brick. The curb lanes from Depot Avenue to North 8th Avenue should be brick.

On-Street Parking

The City calls for the maximum feasible installation of additional on-street parking in the reconstruction. Such parking provides dramatic benefits for retailers, offices, residences, and pedestrians. On-street parking should be provided, and preferably angled parking should be used. On-street parking is an acceptable technique for providing a buffer between pedestrians and moving vehicles in the TDLC. Our study of on-street parking indicates that the LOS would fail during the peak hours if the parking were permanent. Many other communities allow on-street parking anytime other than peak hours in AM and PM. Most of the parking is by meter.

In addition, the City supports a redesign of Main Street so that an existing on-street parking problem can be addressed. Currently, because the curb lane is 12 feet wide, moving cars will frequently and illegally “squeeze by” cars parked on-street in the curb lane when this lane is used for on-street parking, instead of moving into the inside lane. The problem is probably due to the curb lane width, which is apparently too wide. Too much of a gap is left between the parked car and the inside lane, encouraging some to drive within the gap. FDOT should redesign the travel lanes to correct this problem, as noted above.

Recommendation: Project should be designed to accommodate the on-street parking program, so that parking is allowed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except during the AM and PM peak hours, and extend from Depot Avenue to North 8th Avenue

Street Trees

The City calls for the installation of street trees as part of the reconstruction. Street trees should be selected from the approved list of street trees in the City landscape ordinance, and should be approved by the City Arborist. They must be large enough to provide adequate shade, reduce heat island effects, and form a tree canopy. They must be formally aligned along the street, instead of clumped or zigzagging. If a diversity of species is used, the trees should at least be of similar size and shape.

FDOT indicated in their August 1998 memorandum that they have committed to streetscaping and working with the City Arborist.

Recommendation: Support FDOT's commitment to provide streetscaping and working with the City Arborist.

RTS Bus Enhancements

The City calls for enhanced transit stop facilities along Main Street: bus bays, shelters, information kiosks, enhanced landscaping, benches, trash cans, etc. as can be accommodated within the overall project. The City RTS bus system has seven routes (4,5,6,7,10,11,24) that cross Main Street. The major connection points are the intersections of Main Street and University Avenue, and of Main Street and South 1st Avenue. Five routes (5,6,10,15,24) go through the intersection of Main Street and University Avenue, and seven routes pass through the intersection of Main Street and South 1st Avenue.

Recommendation: To support transit service, install bus bays, shelters, information kiosks, benches, and trash cans as appropriate and feasible from Depot Avenue to North 8th Avenue, with particular attention focused on the Main Street/University Avenue intersection and the Main Street and South 1st Avenue intersections. Transit enhancements should be architecturally compatible with the downtown area.

Lighting

The FDOT has committed to providing historic low lighting. We need to determine what type of light fixtures/poles we would like to specify if they are to be different than what currently exists. By "low" lighting we are assuming FDOT intends to provide lighting similar to what exists.

Recommendation: Support FDOT's commitment to provide historic pedestrian level lighting.

Granite Curbs

The FDOT has committed to reusing some of the granite curbs. Public Works has stored some granite curb at the 39th Avenue Center that may possibly be used to enhance this effort if we chose.

Recommendation: Support FDOT's commitment to reuse granite curb.

Sidewalks

The TDLC supports the use of wider sidewalks to provide walkability. There are some sections of the project where there is an existing grass strip between the sidewalk and the curb. To provide wider sidewalks this grass strip should be replaced by extending the sidewalk to the back of curb.

Recommendation: Widen sidewalks to connect to the back of curb, as appropriate, between Depot Avenue to North 8th Avenue.

