# MEMORANDUM

To: Ralph Hilliard, Planning Manager
From: Thomas Hawkins
Date: December 29, 2008
Re: Discussion of Rules Regulating Subdivision Form

Recently you and I briefly discussed whether the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code regulate the form of residential subdivisions. I spent some time following our conversation reading the relevant rules, and concluded that, in Gainesville, subdivisions are supposed to consist of modestly sized blocks arranged to develop a multimodal transportation network. This memorandum provides citation and explanation for my conclusion.

## I. The Land Development Code requires the arrangement, location, function and width of streets in subdivisions to contribute to the development of a multimodal transportation network.

When considering approval of proposed subdivision design plats, the Land Development Code requires the City Commission to determine whether "the proposed subdivision is in conformity with the general goals and objectives of the city with respect to the officially adopted comprehensive plan."[1] Further, the Land Development Code directs that "[p]articular attention shall be given to the arrangement, location, function and width of streets, [and] their consistency with the goal of developing a multimodal transportation network."[2]

## II. The Comprehensive Plan calls for interconnected, multimodal streets which form modestly sized blocks.

At least three portions of the Comprehensive Plan address changes and additions to Gainesville's transportation network. Transportation Mobility Element Policy 2.1.10 states:

> In new development or redevelopment, walking and bicycling shall be promoted by establishing modest, human-scaled dimensions such as small street blocks, pedestrian-scaled street and building design, [and] ample sidewalks to carry significant pedestrian traffic in commercial areas.[3]

Urban Design Element Objective 1.3 and its related policies state:

> **Any additions or changes to the existing city street network pattern shall be designed to provide interconnected patterns that promote effective circulation of car, transit, bicycle, and foot traffic, and to**

[1] City of Gainesville Land Development Code, § 30-183(i)(2).
[2] Id.
[3] City of Gainesville 2000-2010 Comprehensive Plan, Transportation Management Element Policy 2.1.10.

**take some of the pressure off the major arterial streets in the city as the city grows.**[4]

**Gridded, interconnected street networks** with a generally north-south, east-west orientation are encouraged. Streets should be connected with other streets to the maximum extent feasible.[5]

**Blocks** are encouraged to be generally rectangular in shape. Block length and perimeter are encouraged to be modest.[6]

**Alleys** for rear access, when feasible and appropriate, are encouraged.[7]

The design of the street network shall make **walking** within the neighborhood and to neighborhood edges **convenient and pleasant**.[8]

Future Land Use Element Policy 1.2.7 states:

> The City should strive, incrementally, and when the opportunity arises street by street—to form an interconnected network of neighborhood streets and sidewalks supportive of car, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit routes within a neighborhood and between neighborhoods—knitting neighborhoods together and not forming barriers between them. Dead ends and cul-de-sacs should be avoided or minimized. Multiple streets and sidewalks should connect into and out of a neighborhood.[9]

As you know, when the City Commission considers approval of a proposed subdivision, its decision must be consistent with these Comprehensive Plan policies.[10]

## III. Existing subdivisions which contribute to a multimodal transportation network exemplify numerical standards for determining whether proposed subdivisions do so as well.

Neither the Land Development Code nor the Comprehensive Plan provides numerical standards for the arrangement or placement of streets. However, many existing Gainesville subdivisions exemplify what block sizes and street arrangements contribute to a multimodal transportation network. In each of the following examples, I identified blocks as groups of lots and open space circumscribed by a public right-of-way (excluding alleys). I measured the perimeter of the blocks by summing the frontage of each lot, the frontage of each parcel of open space, and the width of each alley.

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[4] City of Gainesville 2000-2010 Comprehensive Plan, Urban Design Element Objective 1.3, emphasis in original.
[5] Id. at Policy 1.3.1, emphasis in original.
[6] Id. at Policy 1.3.2, emphasis in original.
[7] Id. at Policy 1.3.3, emphasis in original.
[8] Id. at Policy 1.3.4, emphasis in original.
[9] City of Gainesville 2000-2010 Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Element Policy 1.2.7.
[10] § 163.3194(1)(a), Florida Statutes (2008); and City of Gainesville Land Development Code, § 30-183(i)(2).

University Heights is a residential neighborhood in west Gainesville that is served by transit, and is walkable. According to the University Heights plat, streets running east to west are evenly spaced every 250 feet; streets running north to south are evenly spaced every 620 feet; and each block has a perimeter of approximately 1,740 feet.[11] Also, the entire perimeter of the subdivision is public right of way.[12] This has allowed the subdivision to seamlessly knit together with adjacent subdivisions, without a barrier between them. Recall that this is a criterion for subdivision approval under Future Land Use Element Policy 1.2.7.

College Park is another residential neighborhood in west Gainesville that is served by transit and is walkable. According to the L. T. Roux Subdivision plat, which subdivides a portion of College Park, streets running east to west are spaced every 165 to 200 feet; streets running north to south are evenly spaced every 350 feet; and each block has a perimeter of approximately 1,030 feet.[13] Like University Heights, the L. T. Roux Subdivision provides public right of way along all of each edge.[14]

You might have noticed that both of these subdivisions are more than seventy years old and predate our modern environmental protections. Today, subdivisions are often adjacent to ecologically sensitive lands and pre-existing neighborhoods. An applicant for subdivision of a property that includes sensitive lands would not be able to subdivide that entire property into regularly occurring blocks that covered the entire parcel. Nonetheless, the applicant would need to propose a street layout that would develop a multimodal transportation network.

Townsend is an example of a new neighborhood constrained by wetlands on one side and existing development on the other side. The neighborhood's approved planned development ordinance shows streets connected to form modest sized blocks.[15] In the single family residential portion of Townsend, streets running east to west are spaced every 225 to 235 feet; streets running north to south are spaced between 510 and 360 feet apart; and the blocks have perimeters of 1,195 to 1,470 feet.[16]

Each of these neighborhoods contributes to Gainesville's existing multimodal transportation network. As a result, we can use these numerical standards to determine whether blocks are modest, in accordance with Urban Design Element Policy 1.3.2., or whether the interconnected street network supports car, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit routes within and between neighborhoods, in accordance with Future Land Use Element Policy 1.2.7. For each of the several Comprehensive Plan Policies related to development of a multimodal transportation network, the dimensions of Gainesville's

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[11] See, Map of University Heights, Official Records of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, Alachua County, Book MB104, Page 10 (1928).
[12] Id.
[13] See, The L. T. Roux Subdivision of Lot 8 of B. W. Browns addition to Gainesville, Fla in SE ½ of NE ¼ of Sec. 6 Tp. 10S R 20E, Official Records of the Clerk of the Circuit Court, Alachua County, Book A, Page 155 (1924).
[14] Id.
[15] City of Gainesville Ordinance No. 980726/0-99-60, August 9, 1999.
[16] See, Id. at Exhibit C, Page H1. Note that Page H1 is part of a planned development zoning ordinance, not a subdivision plat, and the ultimate subdivision may differ.

existing multimodal transportation network exemplify numerical standards for determining whether proposed subdivisions are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

## IV. A Florida Department of Transportation handbook identifies well-connected streets, pedestrian scale blocks, and a lack of cul-de-sacs as characteristics of single-family residential developments which contribute to a multimodal transportation network.

Because not all property owners and developers are familiar with Gainesville's existing subdivisions, I researched other guidance on residential subdivision design. My goal was to find authoritative guidelines for subdivisions which contribute to a multimodal transportation network. I discovered that the Florida Department of Transportation recently published a resource, Accessing Transit, that specifically addresses, in graphical form, how the arrangement of streets within a single family residential subdivision can provide for multimodal access.[17] My research was not exhaustive and I do not suggest that Accessing Transit is the only, or even the best, guidance for subdivision consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code. Nonetheless, this resource is one example of a discussion on single family residential subdivision design which contributes to the goal of developing a multimodal transportation network.

[17] Higgins, Harrison, AICP and Ivonne Audirac, PhD, Accessing Transit Design Handbook for Florida Bus Passenger Facilities, Version II, 2008, Florida Planning and Development Lab Department of Urban and Regional Planning Florida State University for Florida Department of Transportation Public Transportation Office (July 2008).

Accessing Transit shows the following figure under the heading "Transit-discouraging Residential Development:"[18]

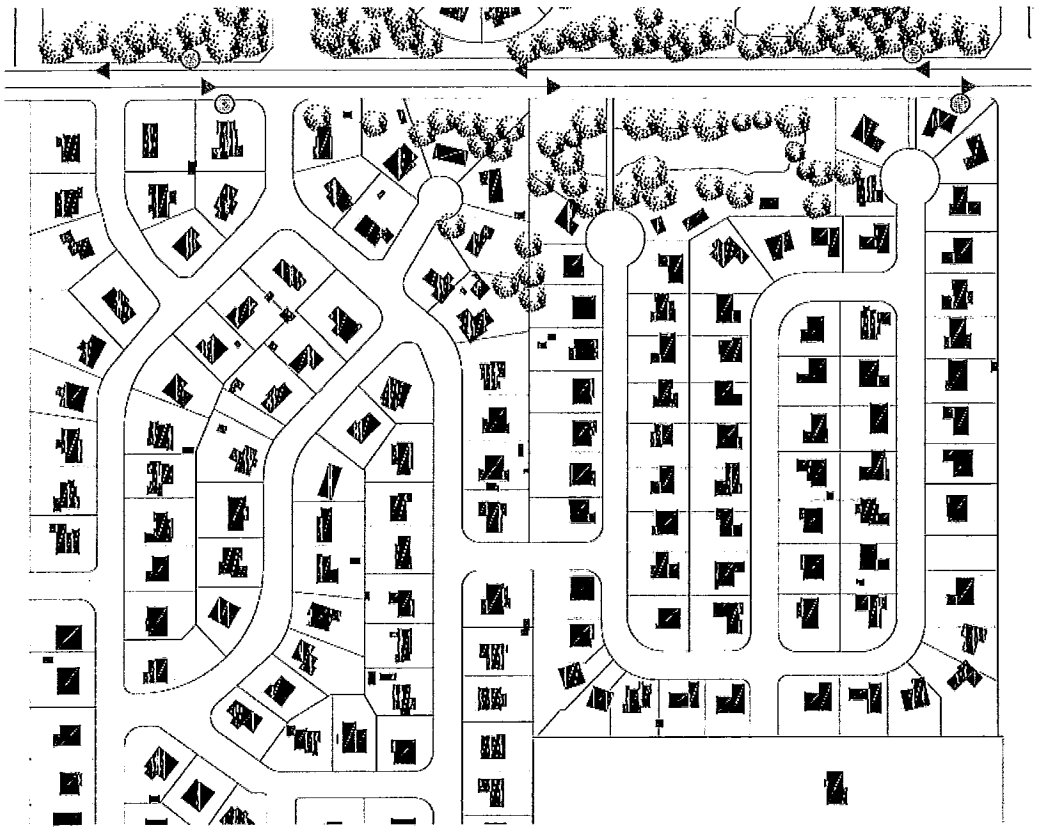

**Figure 4.3** Traditional single family residential development with cul-de-sacs. Bus stops are indicated in red dots in plan. Bus stop locations are indicated by red dots and bus routes are shown in blue.

The explanatory text points out that the streets in this example are arranged into large blocks and cul-de-sacs.[19] This subdivision design is not consistent with the goal of developing a multimodal transportation network.

[18] Id. at 103.
[19] Id.

In contrast, Accessing Transit shows the following picture under the heading "Transit-oriented Residential Development:"[20]

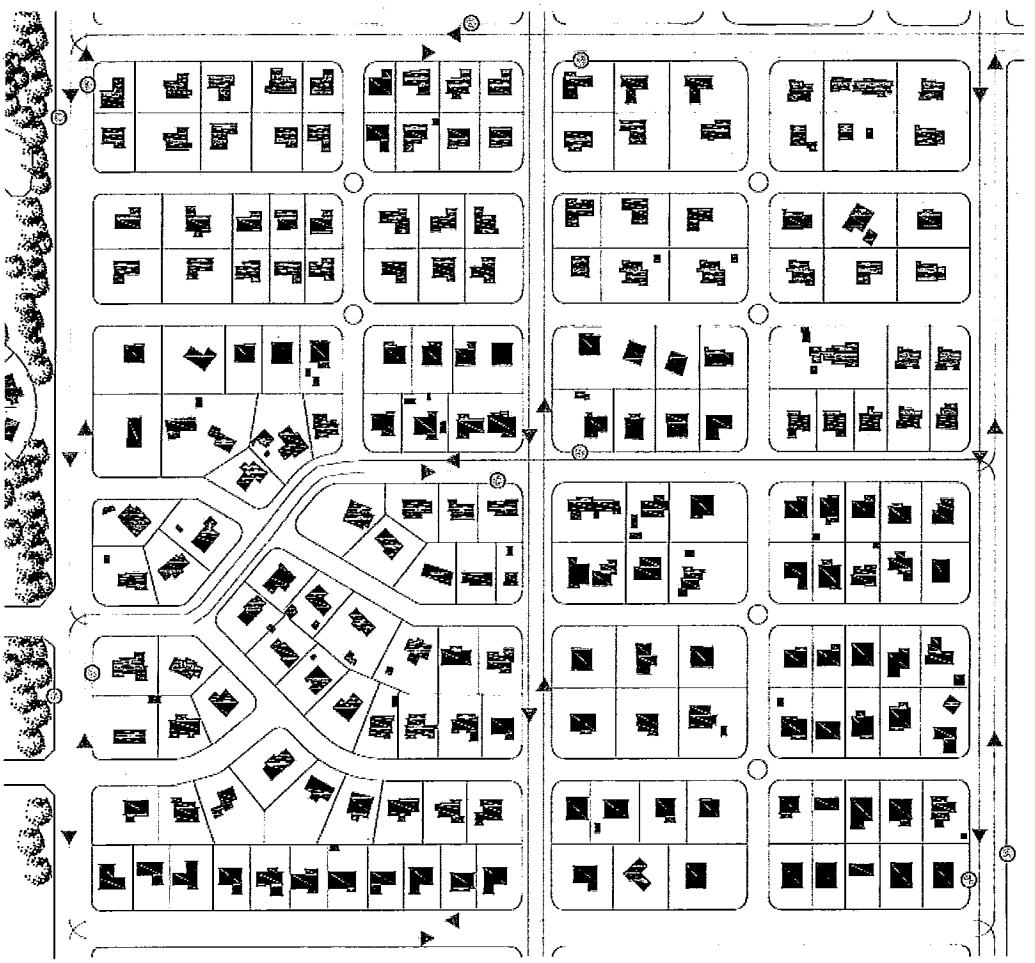

Figure 4.4 | Transit friendly single family residential development. Bus stops are indicated in red dots in plan.

The explanatory text points out that the streets in this hypothetical subdivision are well-connected and arranged into pedestrian scale blocks.[21] This subdivision design contributes to a city-wide multimodal transportation network because it is accessible to pedestrians and because every subdivision has a cumulative affect on mobility. Accessing Transit says:

> Transit accessibility and pedestrian accessibility are closely linked. Development that supports various kinds of accessibility balances the infrastructure needs of transit users, pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and freight haulers. Although individual development projects have limited

[20] Id. at 104.
[21] Id.

> effect on transit use throughout a network, the cumulative effect of projects over time has important implications for transportation modes and their associated infrastructure.[22]

The notion that even seemingly isolated subdivisions will contribute to a transportation network is important. Once Gainesville approves a subdivision, the arrangement of streets is likely to endure as long as the city exists. The City Commission should only make such a permanent planning decision after careful consideration and adherence to the Comprehensive Plan.

## V. Conclusion

Gainesville law provides objectives for subdivision design. Generally, I understand those objectives to include:

- Creation of small, generally rectangular blocks surrounded by gridded, multimodal streets;
- Provision of alleys where appropriate;
- Avoidance of dead end streets; and
- Provision of connectivity to existing and potential future development **to the maximum extent feasible**.

A cursory review of existing development suggests the following:

- The goal of contributing to a multimodal transportation network is generally possible regardless of whether a subdivision is adjacent to existing development or contains sensitive environmental features;
- A simple and effective technique to provide connectivity to future adjacent development is to circumscribe a plat with public right of way; and
- Appropriately sized blocks could have a perimeter of 1,000 to 1,700 feet.

Thank you for taking the time to review my comments. I hope they serve to further our conversation about Gainesville's growth and development.

[22] Id. at 97.