



DOWNTOWN PLAN — WHITE PAPER

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cc: Project Management Team, Planning Commission, Transportation Commission

DIRECTION TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Five sets of white papers are being produced to present information on tools, opportunities, and potential strategies that could help Ashland become a nationwide leader as a green transportation community. Each white paper will present general information regarding a topic and then provide ideas on where and how that tool, strategy, and/or policy could be used within Ashland. You will have the opportunity to review the content of each white paper and share your thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas in a joint Planning Commission/Transportation Commission meeting. Based on discussions at the meeting, the material in the white paper will be: (1) revised and incorporated into the alternatives analysis for the draft TSP; or (2) eliminated from consideration and excluded from the alternatives analysis. The overall intent of the white paper series is to explore opportunities for Ashland and increase the opportunities to discuss the many possibilities for Ashland.

ASHLAND DOWNTOWN PLAN

This white paper presents general information on the previously prepared Ashland Downtown Plan and proposed changes and/or modifications to that plan prior to its incorporation by reference into the Transportation System Plan (TSP) update. The goals of the current Ashland Downtown Plan are still applicable and supported by the city and its residences. The proposed changes and/or modifications aim to build upon those goals and maintain alignment with the other elements of the transportation system plan.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

The current Ashland Downtown Plan (see Appendix A) was updated last in 2001. The primary goals of the 2001 update were to:

- Improve conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Manage parking supplies;
- Improve the street scape; and
- Promote appropriate infill development.

The goals and suggestions are still relevant and supported by City staff. They are also consistent with the general input and comments the TSP project team has heard to-date from the Planning and Transportation Commissioners. Finally, the 2001 Ashland Downtown Plan goals listed above coincide with the goals and objectives of the TSP update. Many of the improvements identified in the plan have yet to be implemented in Ashland and therefore, are still relevant projects to work towards implementing. The TSP update proposes to maintain the 2001 Ashland Downtown Plan objectives and integrate the treatments and strategies the Planning Commission, Transportation Commission and City staff have supported during the TSP update process.

Proposed changes and/or modifications to the plan presented in this white paper are:

- Improve pedestrian facilities;
- Incorporating green street treatments; and
- Provide bicycle facilities to make travelling through downtown more bicycle friendly.

Each of these items is discussed in more detail below and many are subjects of white papers reviewed and commented on by TSP project stakeholders (i.e., Planning Commission, Transportation Commission, Technical Advisory Committee, City staff, and the community).

Alleyway enhancements and shared streets are two topics discussed previously by the Planning and Transportation Commissions that were initially identified as potential downtown projects but are not incorporated into this white paper as amendments to the downtown plan. Input and discussions at the Joint Planning and Transportation Commission meeting on February 24, 2011 indicated Commissioners feel the alleyway enhancement projects in the downtown area are best left to the business and property owners along the alleys to initiate. The Planning and Transportation Commission plan to craft a policy or statement supporting enhancements to alleys to convert them to more of a pedestrian and bicycle place. However, due to the complications with accommodating delivery trucks and parking, they decided the actual implementation of alley enhancement projects is best left to the business owners and property owners to initiate given they will be most impacted by any changes. Therefore, alleyway enhancement projects are not identified as amendments to the downtown plan. Also, at the Joint Planning and Transportation Commission meeting on February 24, 2011, Commissioners indicated they had misunderstood the "Shared Street" term and upon realizing it is the concept that creates a single shared space for all modes (e.g., no sidewalks, etc.) they indicated there are not any streets in the downtown area on which they support implementing the shared street concept. Therefore, shared street projects are not identified as amendments to the downtown plan.

Pedestrian Facilities

The proposed changes and/or modifications related to pedestrian facilities are to incorporate wider sidewalks and some specific pedestrian treatments identified by the TSP project stakeholders as part of a previous white paper discussion and review.

Wider Sidewalks

In the 2001 Downtown Plan, about 80% of the sidewalks along East Main Street and approximately all of the sidewalks along Lithia Way were identified as less than 10 feet in width. Today, East Main Street has approximately 10-foot wide sidewalks from Oak Street to Gresham Street. The sidewalks along Lithia Way tend to be less than 10 feet in width. While 10 feet in sidewalk width provides space for pedestrian travel as well as some landscaping, even wider sidewalks to accommodate additional pedestrian activity would enhance the character and charm of downtown. Therefore, looking for opportunities to widen existing sidewalks to 15 feet is a suggested change to the 2001 Downtown Plan. The additional sidewalk space would provide an opportunity for storefront restaurant seating as well as additional amenities such as benches, landscaping, bicycle parking and others. A 15 foot sidewalk width that includes a five foot tree well is consistent with existing Ashland Street Standards. Temporary or demonstration projects through the use of street patios (see the Streetscape Patio white paper for more information) or similar concepts can be used to assess the removal of on-street parking for certain blocks in exchange for more pedestrian space. If the community supports the additional pedestrian space at the end of the trial period, the sidewalk could be permanently expanded.

Additional Treatments to Facilitate Pedestrian Travel

As part of the Other Modes (Active Modes) Transportation white paper, TSP projects stakeholders indicated the pedestrian treatments they were most interested in having implemented in Ashland are:

- Pedestrian countdown signals;
- Landscape buffers between the sidewalk and roadway;
- Filling existing sidewalk gaps;
- Pedestrian refuge islands; and
- Benches at transit stops.

Based on the interest to apply the treatments above in Ashland (or in some instances continue to apply them), the proposed change to the 2001 Downtown Plan is to integrate these treatments into the currently planned projects where possible and applicable.

Green Street Treatments

Recent discussions regarding green street treatments indicated strong support for actively incorporating green treatments into transportation related projects. In fact, 100% of those who provided input regarding the Green Streets Standards white paper strongly agreed or agreed such treatments should be explored in Ashland. Additionally, there is a need in Ashland to improve stormwater management and water quality through the use of green street treatments. Based on these considerations, the proposed changes to the 2001 Downtown Plan are, when possible:

- Integrate bioswales and/or similar treatments into the planning, design and construction of new roadway medians and/or reconstruction of existing medians;
- Incorporate Bioretention planters and basins into the planning, design, construction of new, and/or reconstruction of existing landscape buffers, curb extensions and other similar aesthetic vegetation treatments within downtown; and
- Integrate permeable paving into new paving, repaving and/or reconstruction projects of sidewalks, alleys and lower volume streets in downtown.

If these changes are agreeable to the TSP project stakeholders, the City would identify which projects currently identified in the 2001 Downtown Plan can incorporate the identified green street treatments.

Providing Bicycle Parking and Facilities in the Downtown Area

Suggested modifications regarding bicycle parking and facilities in the downtown area are discussed below. The modifications are based on input received from TSP project stakeholders.

Bicycle Parking

A key amenity for serving bicycle trips to downtown Ashland is providing bicycle parking. In the Other Modes (Active Modes) of Transportation white paper, different bicycle parking treatments were identified. Input from TSP project stakeholders identified additional bicycle racks and bicycle corrals as the most desired forms of bicycle parking for the City to expand in Ashland. As a result, the proposed modification to the 2001 Downtown Plan includes:

- Establish a citizens task force to recommend locations where bicycle parking is needed based on local input and first-hand knowledge; and
- Integrate bicycle parking into currently planned projects that overlap with the locations identified by the task force.

Rather than a citizen's task force to recommend locations for bicycle parking – this task could be a joint effort between the Planning and Transportation Commissions.

Bicycle Facilities

The 2001 Downtown Plan identified on-street bicycle lanes as additions to the cross-sections of East Main Street and Lithia Way. Since 2001, a bicycle lane has been added to Lithia Way. Discussions with TSP project stakeholders indicate there is strong interest in adding a bicycle facility to East Main Street through downtown and possibly improving the facility on Lithia Way to eliminate or reduce conflicts with right-turning vehicles and doors opening from parked vehicles.

The Bicycle Route and Connectivity white paper recently reviewed by TSP project stakeholders, suggests upgrading the Lithia Way bicycle lane to a protected bikeway and adding a protected bikeway to East Main Street through the downtown area. Additional enhancements identified for streets within the downtown area identified in the white paper include:

- Oak Street north of East Main Street (Bicycle Boulevard Lane)
- Pioneer Street south of East Main Street (Bicycle Boulevard)
- 1st Street north of East Main Street (Bicycle Boulevard)
- Gresham Street south of East Main Street (Bicycle Boulevard)
- B Street east of Oak Street (Bicycle Boulevard)
- Hargadine Street / Beach Avenue (Bicycle Boulevard)

Input received from TSP project stakeholders regarding the previous white paper proposals are summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of TSP Stakeholder Input on Suggestions for Downtown Bicycle Network

Street	Bicycle Network White Paper Suggestion	Definitely Explore	Modify and Explore	Eliminate
Lithia Way	Protected Bicycle Way	33%	50%	17%
East Main Street	Protected Bicycle Way	42%	42%	16%
Oak Street	Bicycle Boulevard	38%	31%	31%
Pioneer Street	Bicycle Boulevard	25%	44%	31%
1st Street	Bicycle Boulevard	50%	25%	25%
Gresham Street	Bicycle Boulevard	18%	18%	64%
B Street	Bicycle Boulevard	57%	36%	7%
Hargadine Street – Beach Avenue	Bicycle Boulevard	23%	33%	44%

It is clear from the input summarized in Table 1 that there is interest in improving and providing bicycle facilities in downtown on Lithia Way and East Main Street; however, there is also clear hesitancy in moving forward with a protected bicycle facility on those two streets (Gresham Street and Hargadine Street-Beach Avenue). Similarly, the majority of the bicycle boulevards suggested for streets that provide connections to and/or are parallel routes to the downtown area indicate a general desire for bicycle facility, but hesitancy in terms of whether or not that facility is

a bicycle boulevard. Based on the input, the proposed changes and/or modification to the 2001 Downtown Plan include:

- Add a striped buffer space to the bicycle lane on Lithia Way to create additional separation between automobiles and bicyclists;
- Add a bicycle lane to East Main Street with a striped buffer space to create additional separation between automobiles and bicyclists;
- Identify 1st Street as a potential bicycle boulevard; and
- Identify B Street as a potential bicycle boulevard.

Due to the lack of clear consensus regarding the suggested proposed bicycle facilities on streets in the downtown area, no additional changes and/or modifications are suggested. Preliminary feasibility studies regarding the striped buffered bicycle lanes on Lithia Way and East Main Street would be necessary to determine what impacts those would have on the existing cross-section. To fit a striped buffered bicycle lane on Lithia Way existing travel lanes and/or on-street parking may need to be narrowed. To fit a striped buffered bicycle lane on East Main Street one of the three southbound travel lanes would need to be removed.

NEXT STEPS

A series of proposed changes and/or modifications to the 2001 Ashland Downtown Plan are presented above. Based on input from the TSP project stakeholders, the proposed changes and/or modifications above will either be adopted as part of the 2001 Downtown Plan's incorporation into the Transportation System Plan or eliminated from consideration. This input will be solicited through the white paper review/scorecard process. TSP project stakeholder input will also be solicited regarding the 2001 downtown plan and if there are any projects or ideas within the plan are no longer relevant or are no longer consistent with the goals and objectives for Ashland. Finally, input on any additional ideas/desires for amendments to the downtown will also be solicited.