

Special Meeting of the Downtown Leadership Council
September 24, 2013
Community Room at Walton Building, 300 South Providence Road
5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

Meeting began at 5:33 p.m. We counted 52 attendees, including 8 media representatives, with a net of 44 citizens in attendance. Citizens were given 4 by 6 comment cards and encouraged to use them to add context, background, or clarifications to the meeting discussion. (See the end of this document for a transcription of those comment cards.)

Pat Fowler gave opening remarks and stated that the intent for the two meetings is to provide a venue for more citizen participation at front end instead of citizens reacting after policies and plans are proposed. Using example of Walnut at College from the map, she pointed out recent access and circulation issues. Cars now seek shortcuts for getting around downtown, using parking lots and alleys.

Brent Gardner, the meeting facilitator, clarified that there are no proposals on the table about endorsing any specific actions, despite news reports to the contrary. He explained our format and opened the discussion.

To model the format, Janet Hammen explained the College Ave Jersey barrier proposal. While this is a City, MU, MODOT plan, they say it is not set in stone, but construction is supposed to start in the spring. MODOT pays with state transport grant, plus City and MU pay smaller portion (approximately \$79,000 each?).

Ideas and information shared by citizens regarding College Ave:

- We could try adding traffic calming devices, namely pedestrian bump-outs, speed tables.
- Hindering left turns will now make traffic go much faster.
- In south Columbia these traffic calming devices are being included with all new road development.
- Gathering Place Innkeeper has concerns about how cutting off access will affect their business. Will people try to loop around the barrier? She observes students daily.
- We should look at this like a school crossing. Make the traffic slow down.
- Study showed pedestrians have to wait in median about 1 minute when 45 seconds is the recommended maximum for safety.
- Suggestion about duplicating median similar to North Providence Road in front of Douglass HS.
- College used as a truck route for dump trucks, construction, etc.; lowering speed limit is imperative.
- Discussed impact of MODOT owning College Ave, thus they set policy, speed limits, complete repairs, etc..
- If Jersey barrier in middle, students waiting for crosswalk could create traffic hazard.
- Make median as green as possible; College is an ugly street; our experience is that no one will walk ½ mile to cross a street.
- Preserving left turns is important.
- Pedestrian safety important.

- MODOT may have had a vision for the future of College Ave that is no longer relevant given its current use. Did they intend it to go further North and South? Should it become or remain a 4 lane highway. To make it safer to current users, suggest narrow to one lane of traffic in each direction, then turn inside lanes into turning lanes and green space.
- Columbia does not have an interconnected grid of streets which adds to the problem. Only 2-3 ways into/out of downtown, most of them owned by MODOT. People will always try to find the quickest route to where they're going, including alleys.
- Could we try temporary barriers first, to see if they work?
- In Springfield MODOT has installed barriers, which are perceived to be ugly. Would it be possible for a design team to come up with a solution? Attractive wrought iron fence with landscaping, or what was done on Providence in front of DHS, can we put our heads together and offer suggestions?
- Council Member Hoppe stated that several years ago it was suggested that the City take over College Ave. This recommendation was not favored by City Council at the time. This idea could be brought up again before council.
- Does the city have leverage in negotiating with MODOT? If City would contribute a chunk of money, would MODOT go along if City will pay?
- Might we focus on traffic demand management? Are the problems we experience about amount/volume of traffic or more about type/timing of traffic? Should we ask for a study of who is using College Ave, where they're going, and when they are using it? Want to avoid making it safer at high cost for just 15 minutes of traffic/day.
- Incorporate what the Charrette report recommended, namely making it an urban boulevard by adding trees, medians, corridor plan. Should we extend Business Loop all the way to Stadium Blvd?
- College/Walnut has lots more students living there and driving in and out of that location, 700+, with road crossing problems. So College Ave south of Broadway is not the only problem – solutions need to address the issues north of Broadway as well.
- Where does MODOT's interest lie with regard to increasing or reducing access to major roads?
- Trans System, Inc. in 2001 recommended 5 parking garages north of Broadway, with the largest having a capacity of 350 cars. Locations to be distributed around downtown.
- Re College Ave, remember the part that fronts UMC has different set of issues than other parts that are not adjacent to campus. Difficult east-west access to downtown.
- Precedent for cooperation between City & MODOT: Nifong Blvd. City council had citizens group come up with a plan. MODOT will collaborate if you press them.

Topic changed to Lee School and the streets surrounding the school and adjacent to College Ave.

- Brent Gardner explained how the topic came up at DLC: at its last meeting, a question was asked whether it was worth exploring making some of the downtown one-way streets into two-way.
- Parent: car situation in front of Lee is hectic. If two- way, make sure the parking is maintained or an alternative parking plan is made, not just remove parking spaces.
- Stephens College: Lee children play in their yard. Walking school bus comes that way too. Need to minimize traffic.

- East Campus resident: last year we had parking/traffic safety committee meeting. Discussed a lot of topics with city, city traffic engineers, Brookside. Concluded cannot make Locust two-way safely.
- Crossing guard. Traffic and buses make area very hectic. Has to stand in middle of street to slow things down.
- Comment that citizen uses Locust as one of the cut-thru streets. They have to be one way.
- Lee Parents read in paper that 2 way was “being considered” by DLC. Group understands that the goal is to improve traffic flow, but in some areas it is better to decrease traffic rather than increase it.
- Does anyone know what parking is being planned for new Brookside? Group answer: none.
- What to do with C-2? What should be allowed? Fundamentally entwined with parking and transportation issues. One thing that must happen is serious changes to zoning requirements for C-2.
- Defunding of the Walking School Bus means more traffic in front of Lee again.
- What about making Hamilton Way go all the way to College then having it be a dedicated drop-off/pick-up lane, getting buses & parents off of Locust? Extending Hamilton Way would be a major disruption though.
- Charrette plan: must have multiple entries into downtown from College & Providence. This is a 20 year plan, not going to happen right away. There is a proposal in one report to extend Elm, for example.
- Would extending Hamilton cut through Lee campus?
- Urban school means no designated parking, no way for parents to park without paying. Including Lee and Lee parents in downtown planning would be appreciated.
- At Walnut & College intersection, as you are heading east on Walnut (out of downtown) there is a left turn lane. Need a left turn lane for cars heading west (into downtown) too. Traffic backs up all the way to William right now.
- Perhaps Lee & Stephens could cooperate, including City if needed. Stephens might have some land to offer to Lee, and City could provide alternate land to Stephens.
- Appreciate format of meeting, feels like Sweden.
- If Locust 2-way the area will lose any possibility of parking. Students would drive faster. But Paquin does not seem to be as busy. It would be nice to have more space for drop-off.
- Sacred Heart: less concerned with traffic than parking. Do not want to lose parking along Locust. They are happy with meters, worked out hangtag system with City.
- City worked hard with Lee to do a traffic study. Determined they need speed sign, barricade, etc. District provided crossing guard. Traffic and speed have increased with apartment buildings. Assured by Brookside that students weren’t going to be bringing cars. If we could work with Stephens that would be great. They have been very generous.
- Two-way discussion was desired by DLC to help relieve traffic circulation downtown.
- Maybe change Locust to pedestrian-only during school day?

Conversation moved along to Parking:

Brent asked Brian Treece to provide the history of C-2 use downtown.

Brian Treece: Prior to 1988, residential dwellings downtown required conditional use permit from Board of Adjustment. Property owner had to prove there was sufficiency of services. "Has to be in harmony" with existing neighborhood. Group of building owners approached council about leasing out second story apartments to residents. For next 10 years, gradual influx of residents into downtown lofts. Planning & Zoning brought up issue: where are these people going to park? But it wasn't considered a problem. Council never contemplated entire demolition of downtown blocks. Apartment buildings being built with no pretense that they are adding to urban feel of downtown. No intention of having commercial/retail on first floor, because there are no C-2 restrictions.

Discussion ensued:

- Multi-family, multi-story zoning is covered by zoning category R-4, but trumped by C-2 downtown.
- Council has had Work Session on C-2 changes. Citizens should encourage council persons to move quickly and support their proposed changes.
- Downtown worker resents having to pay to park. Before Brookside there was plenty of free parking. He and his co-worker now spend \$35/week. Wants unmetered parking downtown.
- Parking task force recommended issuing hangtags for downtown employees to use 10 hour meters, as these were underutilized. Low occupancy rate at those meters.
- Parking can be viewed as a safety vs. convenience issue. Parking is a convenience issue. How can we encourage alternate forms of transportation instead of parking?
- City is working on COMO connect bus routes. Info on city's website, and on Columbia transit website.
- Idea is to find alternative way of funding besides fares, which fund only a small portion of budget anyway. Make it free and utilization will rise greatly.
- University of Nebraska students do not pay to ride bus.
- Why not build taller parking garages? Not popular but not sure why. Use some of parking revenue to support alternative transportation. Great demand for spaces.
- 10 hour meters in front of Lee means college students park there, then parents are discouraged from being involved since nowhere to park. This happened over summer when parents weren't aware of what was going on.
- What is MU doing to help? How much parking do they have? 22,000 spots. MU allows parking after 5 p.m. only for on-campus students, about 6,000. How can students get access to the remaining 16,000 spots? Maybe contract with Brookside to allow parking at night. Not the entire solution but should be part of it.
- We wouldn't even be talking about this if there weren't 2000 new students downtown. UMC invited to meeting to be part of conversation.
- Request for DLC to post meetings of College Ave plans on DLC website.
- Thank you for format of meeting. How do we follow up?

Pat Fowler: Next meeting will be on October 22, 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Meeting notes and comments will be posted on DLC section of the city's website.

Meeting ended at 6:55 pm.

32 Comment Card were completed during the meeting:

**Re parking, Brookside should be required to provide satellite parking for their residents.*

**Consideration of parking tags and or permits for downtown workers and regular patrons in the North Village Arts District.*

**Regarding the bike boulevard crossing on College, on way here (presumably walking to this meeting) a student going west on Windsor turned north on College & flipped a U turn to go south. Need no U turn sign. Also cross post is knocked down that is allowing people to turn left from College thru median onto Ash. Please get these replaced.*

**1) Let MODOT keep College but give them some plans for an attractive median (like Providence by Douglass), then give them some \$\$ from the city, the university and git'er done. 2) Stop giving away C2 zoning to developers who have NO reasonable plans for mitigating the effects of their developments on parking and traffic flow. 3) Build tall parking garages to save space. 4) Revise C2 zoning to add reasonable restrictions. 5) Support alternative transportation.*

**It's a bad idea to make Locust (by Lee) a 2-way street because it will be harder for the kids to cross the street. Not as safe for kids or anybody. It is already crowded as it is.*

**Re Lee School Safety, defunding the Walking School Bus has had a deleterious impact on safety. WSB at Lee was used not just to provide kids with exercise (a good thing) but to pull traffic away from the school (parents could pick up and drop off at Stephen's Park). Re-funding WSB would be a big benefit in the big picture of safety, access, etc.*

**Re College Ave, How about an education campaign directed at students/combined with ticketing (assuming jaywalking is ticketable)? Re one way streets, I would actually like to see more one way streets with bike lanes, or at least one E-W (one East, one West).*

**Problems with Locust being a 2 way street: 1) safety of students at Lee; 2) Rm with bus and car traffic; 3) already have speed concerns; 4) pulling out & turning onto Locust very dangerous; 5) parking taken out – in an area where there is limited parking for parents, volunteers, or staff. Solution – create another outlet that could be 2 way & leave existing streets as they are downtown. C2 codes need to be revisited.*

** Ideas 1) appoint/form a design committee of professional people to make recommendations; 2) look at whole corridor (loop to Stadium); 3) explore punching College north to I-70; 4) Ask MODOT to work with Council and MU – appoint a citizen committee to work with MODOT (similar to the Grindstone Parkway*

process) ; 5) Make city buses free; 6) CPS and City should fully fund 'walking school bus'; 7) no more C-2 zoning (at least as C-2 is constituted now); 8) 10/22 meeting should/could be held in a larger room;

**Re College Avenue Corridor north and south of Broadway: Yes, there will be somewhat different implementation issues north & south. But, they are best addressed as an implementation subset of making College a signature corridor from north & south to downtown, UMC, Stephens, etc.*

**900 lb. gorilla question for DT transportation plan (foundational question): do we want DT to be much more walkable as an essential component of the vision for DT?*

**DLC, please endorse COMET (Columbians for Modern Efficient Transit). We are working to increase and expand public transit in Columbia which will go a long way towards addressing the traffic and parking issues growing in the downtown and East Campus areas.*

**Locust does not have space for 2-way traffic. It can barely fit the buses for the school. It is not safe the children to increase traffic on Locust with 2 way traffic (remember the big accident on Garth, next to Grant Elementary- that is a two way street.) Thank you for talking with the community!*

**Thank you for providing a forum to discuss our downtown community. Two-way traffic would be a disaster for our school.*

**Planning for traffic should begin with strategic plans of what we need and envision. Lee should be central to that, and traffic should be planned to accommodate those current and longer functions, not to create new issues or exacerbate already-apparent problems.*

**I'm very deeply concerned by suggestions that Locust and Waugh might be expanded in school zones near Lee School. Given student access, parent and bus drop off and pick up, and general issues of traffic, congestion and child safety, I think expansion of either the physical roadway of Locust or Waugh or expansion of two- way traffic is a bad idea.*

**Learn from the past and don't create new safety, circulation, and access issues by increasing traffic and congestion on Waugh, and Locust near Lee School. It multiplies existing problems, and adds safety issues as well. Redirect traffic away from Locust just west of College and Waugh two blocks south of Broadway. Don't promote more traffic and more opportunities for tragedy.*

**Don't try to deal with these issues piecemeal. Step back and create an integrated solution for Lee buses and access, traffic circulation and pedestrian/student safety. Partners need to be the City of Columbia, CPS, Lee Autonomous School Board and PTA, MU and the SBD, as well as Stephens College and Paquin Tower.*

**Absolutely opposed to barriers, concrete or otherwise. And the no-left-turn-east is an incredible hardship and traffic flow very changed on streets like William & Ann. Please consider traffic slowing devices: boulevard (with foliage), pedestrian bump-outs, speed tables, lower speed limit, blinking "slow-crossing" light like public school areas have. Or the idea proposed of changing College completely to two lanes with turn out lanes, etc. Barricade along College similar to on Locust near Lee school – the island that causes traffic to slow heading east on Locust, that is.*

**Review zoning downtown_ incorporate design standards for new construction_ require green space, setbacks, height restrictions, etc. etc., I would like in another meeting to discuss trash_ a terrible problem in East Campus and very inadequate city-wide_*

**Parking & Traffic: If permit parking is recommended for East Campus absolutely opposed to selling extra parking spaces to people. I think students would like to buy these and it would increase vehicle parking in Cliff Drive, etc. areas_ leave Locust as it is! one-way. Also Paquin, Waugh_!! Left-turn lane College and Walnut for traffic heading west on Walnut*

** Parking Downtown – employees of downtown business should get access to parking such as hang tags. New structures intended for residential should have parking or require residents to not have cars.*

**Opposed to concrete barriers on college. Consider possible options such as: grass or landscape median, Blvd., traffic calming devices, one lane on each side; or median like North Providence by Douglass.*

**One-way streets issue: neither Locust nor Paquin should be 2-way; Bringing Elm St through would be a great idea – protect Lee, make it pedestrian at certain times, etc. Protect permanent residents.*

**Re: College Avenue barrier: Please be aware of need to allow access to UM Child Development Lab from college. Would it be possible to add a light with crosswalk or a crosswalk w/flashing light (like on Broadway, just West of College) mid-way b/t University & Rollins w/barrier for rest.*

**I very strongly oppose making the one-way streets around Lee School two-way. It would be a huge safety issue & make it difficult for parents & community to access the school.*

**Locust simply cannot be two-way in front of Lee Elementary. The safety of the students is paramount. Even with the improvements (traffic calming) made by the city earlier this year, the increase in traffic from new developments (especially Brookside) continue to make it dangerous for kids getting into and out of cars in front of the school.*

**1: The concept of College as a ‘corridor’ as described in the Charrette Plan, with crossings and traffic calming is excellent. Aesthetics should be a higher priority, not an afterthought. We have a lot to be proud of as Columbians, but we don’t see it reflected as visitors drive down our main roads. Roundabouts at Rollins and University Ave? (& College). Is this feasible?*

**Parking 1) hang tag for downtown workers, 2) future garages mixed use similar to Short Street.*

**Lee School 1) Extend Elm to College, 2) Lee/Stephens cooperation, 3) Keep Locust and Waugh one way.*

** College 1) traffic flow/traffic calming, 2) one lane with turnouts, 3) facilitate cross traffic, 4) better – much better- landscaping, 5) public art, 6) well designed lighting, 7) extend Elm to College.*

**Problem at University Ave: The lanes southbound are poorly marked, poor design.*

** Big picture: create an interconnected grid of streets.*

**College Ave adjacent to MU has different problems than the rest of College Ave.*

One email comment was received from City's website:

**Regarding the proposed change in Locust St. from 1 way to 2 way traffic. As the parent of a Lee Elementary school student I feel that this would be a terrible decision that could affect the health and wellness of our students.*

Lee is a landlocked school with NO designated off-street parking lots, NO driveway to allow safe drop-off and or pick-up of students, and NO reserved street parking spaces. We currently only have a single block directly in front of the school for "safe" use at start and end times. The only way this goes smoothly is because there are 2 lanes flowing in the same direction, allowing for cars and buses to work at the same time. And that still backs up traffic to the surrounding streets. Compounding that this year is the school start/end times changing to coincide with the heaviest traffic flow towards MU's campus. So now we have other traffic (mainly students) trying to cut thru to their classes/jobs. The City has already done a disservice to school by allowing the neighborhood to become a heavily built area of student apartments which has brought its own additional problems mainly the decrease of available side street parking spaces and but not the least being the increased car traffic.

I have been witness to incidents where car traffic has ignored the existing stop signs; the Cross Walk guard giving directions; or not allowing pedestrians the right of way crossing the street directly in the area you now want to make a 2-way street. These were all close calls for fellow Lee students and parents.

When is the City going to realize that sometimes CHANGE IS NOT A GOOD THING and that they need to leave Locust Street alone! I invite the Committee to stand outside Lee Elementary in the morning to see these issues for themselves and how detrimental changing this street will be.