

## Summary of Comments from Main Street Streetscape Public Workshop

2006-06-07

Thirty four residents and members of the Main Street business community, as well as representatives of municipal and provincial governments attended the workshop held at the Air Force Club at 7. p.m., June 7th, 2006. The workshop began with a brief slide presentation by the consultants, outlining the objectives of the Main Street Streetscape Study, the basic tools commonly used in streetscape redesign and some principles of urban design for commercial streetscapes. The importance of attractive, safe and pedestrian friendly streetscapes to the local economy and for local residents was also highlighted. Residents were asked to consider some of the following points:

- The importance of local public spaces and green spaces to a streetscape.
- The importance of wayfinding and signage on a streetscape.
- Crosswalks, trails and bike lanes and how they function or intersect with the streetscape.
- The built form and aesthetics of street front facades.
- Entrance, egress, parking and vehicular traffic patterns and their impact on the street.
- The function of the street in terms of residential and commercial uses.

Workshop participants then broke into five work groups to discuss and respond to three questions posed by the workshop leader:

- What currently works on Main Street (i.e. what are the positive attributes)?
- What currently does not work on Main Street (i.e what are the negative attributes)?
- Taking a “big picture, perfect world” approach, how did the work groups envision Main Street in 30 years?

Five groups discussed the topics for approximately one hour, and then reported their conclusions to the entire gathering. Groups were also provided with a large colour map of the Main Street Study area, on which they identified notable sites that might merit attention in the planning study. The discussion below relates the major themes which emerged from the workshop presentations.

### **What currently works on Main Street?**

Many of the groups had very similar comments concerning the positive attributes of Main Street and its surrounding neighbourhoods. One comment identified by nearly all work shop participants was the good selection of shops available along Main Street and Tacoma Drive. There are a great number and variety of shops in a compact, small area that is easily walkable with some infrastructure to support pedestrian traffic. Many workshop participants believed the volume of traffic was a significant asset for this commercial area and the roadway design, with many shared turn lanes and traffic lights, was well designed and efficient. Perhaps the biggest asset to Main

Street to be identified in the workshop was the strength of the peripheral neighbourhoods surrounding the commercial areas. These established residential neighbourhoods have an excellent demographic mix of young and old, as well as varying residential densities of different scales. Furthermore, there are many neighbourhood green spaces, such as ball fields and parks, within a short walk from Main Street that see frequent use by residents.

### **What currently does not work on Main Street?**

The five work groups had very similar comments concerning the negative attributes of Main Street. One of the gravest concerns pertained to issues surrounding the movement of non-vehicular traffic through the study area and across Main Street itself. The existing pedestrian crossings were seen as inefficient (there are not enough), inconvenient (they are not at locations where people want to cross), and unsafe (they do not allow enough time to cross Main Street). The issue of crossing Main Street also pertained to non-existent or underdeveloped walking and biking trails to link the Main Street area to the regional trail system.

A secondary problem that pertains to pedestrian traffic was the lack of formal links from both Tacoma Drive and Lakecrest Avenue to Main Street. Although the streetscape appears porous and there are many informal connections, they exist on private property and are often unlit, intimidating and even dangerous. Also, many groups felt that pedestrian amenities along the existing streetscape were lacking such items as trash receptacles, attractive lighting and benches to make walking along Main Street safe and enjoyable.

Another almost universal concern was the lack of green spaces and landscaping. Using the aerial map provided, many groups effectively contrasted the many areas of green in the neighbourhood periphery compared to immense expanse of grey concrete and asphalt along Main Street and the Tacoma Drive shopping area. Groups felt there was a serious need to improve upon the number of trees and formal landscaped areas.

The workshop also identified some major concerns with the quality and aesthetics of the built form along Main Street. The major concern was the inconsistency of facades along Main Street. Many groups felt the existing built form is a collection of unrelated architectural styles from a variety of eras. Overall, many groups pointed out Main Street lacks a common architectural theme and the development pattern appears to have been created piecemeal, rather than comprehensively. Furthermore, a number of inconsistent and inappropriate uses for a commercial/retail area such as Main Street have been permitted. These include a range of uses from a self storage facility to an exotic dancing establishment. Also contributing to the aesthetic problems on Main Street was the visual clutter created by billboards and pylon signs. Many groups felt this form of signage was a very significant factor in making Main Street aesthetically unappealing.

As many groups contained local business people, parking and traffic flow were seen as areas of concern. Many people felt the existing parking system on Main Street was simply ineffective or inadequate. Due to the expansion of Main Street, many businesses had lost parking spaces. As a result, many people are forced to park behind stores on Lakecrest Avenue (seen as an unsafe area

due to crime) or Tacoma Drive (difficult for people to cross Main Street safely). Due to the large volume and high speed of traffic, another significant concern is creating safe entrance and egress to businesses on Main Street.

The last common concern among the work groups was the increased level of crime along Main Street. Many groups called for a larger police presence and even police foot/bike patrols through area. Many groups felt the increased level of crime was due to many easily accessible, unlit parking areas and the prevalence of “age inappropriate businesses” on Main Street.

### **A Vision for Main Street in 30 Years**

One of the unanimous points agreed upon concerning the vision for the Main Street area was the addition of new green spaces. This includes the addition of large new parks, pocket parks, and landscaping improvements, specifically tree planting, for the entire area. One vision included a treed median along a wide boulevard similar to Connaught Street in Halifax. Other suggestions included landscaped strips between properties and a park on Main Street between Macdonald’s and Ralph’s. This greener vision for Main Street included better active transportation links to neighbourhood parks and Main Street, as well as new connections to walking trails and bike lanes that connect to the regional trail system. Many groups suggested that Lakecrest Avenue should become a walking and a covered bikeway connection for the entire community, including an open and friendly walkway that linked Lakecrest Avenue, neighbourhood schools and NSCC. Many groups’ vision also included improved connections across Main Street between Lakecrest and Tacoma to improve these underdeveloped and currently unsafe pedestrian connections.

In terms of development, the vision for Main Street reinforced the success of the area as a neighbourhood commercial/retail node. Suggestions included building Main Street into a boutique destination with specialty retail and professional services combined with the existing entertainment and restaurant mix. In this vision, the architectural style of the facades would have a common theme, continuity of form and be constructed with high quality materials that are visually appealing and well landscaped. It was suggested that new construction along Main Street should be compact and possibly higher than many of the current buildings to create a more pleasurable and walkable streetscape. Improvements to the streetscape included pedestrian scale “downtown” street lights, landscaping and flower beds, hanging flower baskets, and safe, efficient pedestrian crosswalks. Also, a new signage strategy would replace the existing pylon signs and billboards with attractive, uncluttered signs.