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TOWN OF CARRBORO
NORTH CAROLINA

TRANSMITTAL PLANNING DEPARTMENT

DELIVERED VIA: HAND MAIL FAX EMAIL

To: Patrice Toney, Town Manager
Mayor and Town Council

From: Tina Moon, Planning & Transportation Administrator

Date: January 3, 2025

Subject: Reimagining Weaver Street

Summary

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Town Council with additional information relating to possible conversions of the East Weaver Street corridor to a pedestrian-focused facility. This includes high-level conceptual designs showing possible alternatives focusing on different types of uses, possible impacts to adjacent and surrounding businesses, considerations relating to safety, transportation, climate, race and equity and public services. Case studies, previous analysis of East Weaver Street, and other relevant data is provided at the end of the document.

Background

As the Town continues to implement the *Carrboro Connects* Comprehensive Plan, to advance racial equity and address climate action, the subject of reimagining the block of E Weaver St as a dedicated pedestrian area has come up, particularly during engagement for the Downtown Area Plan. Goals hoped to achieve include reduction in single occupancy vehicle trips to downtown, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, improved air quality, increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists traveling through downtown, and the creation of dedicated public space in the historic downtown commercial core. A brief history of relevant Council and Advisory Board discussions is provided at the end of this memo.

Reimagining East Weaver Street – High Level Concepts



E Weaver St is a single block, approximately 650 feet long, between Greensboro St and E Main St. Infrastructure includes approximately 30-feet of paved travel way, from back of curb to back of curb, within a 50-foot public right-of-way. Weaver Street Market and the Carr Mill parking lot are located along the north side of the street. The Century Center and the police station are located along the south side of the street, as well as four local businesses: Tesoro, The Beehive, Spotted Dog Café, and rear access to Napoli.

The following concepts are illustrative rather than exhaustive and are provided as a starting point for discussion.



Pedestrian Plaza

- Pedestrian-only walkway/plaza - cyclists would dismount and walk with their bikes while traveling through the facility
- Attractive barrier needed to prevent vehicles from entering space at either end (such as planters, public art, or bollards)
- Businesses could potentially expand dining area into plaza space



Meandering Path

- Varied pavement treatments could create more interactive, playful space – this could also be used as a designated bike space
- If used for bikes, path is designed to reduce cyclist speed and mitigate safety concerns
- Attractive barrier needed to prevent vehicles from entering space at either end (such as planters, public art, or bollards) – but may need to allow space for bikes
- Businesses could potentially expand dining area into some of plaza space



Bike/Service Lane

- 10ft-wide lane on south side of street could be a designated bike lane that provides service access at certain times of day and provides emergency access
- 10ft bike lane slows cyclists down and creates safe re-entry points into vehicular traffic (i.e. bike boxes)
- Attractive barrier needed to prevent vehicles from entering space most of the time (such as planters, public art, or bollards)
- Businesses, particularly, Weaver Street Market, could potentially expand dining area into some of plaza space

Common Elements:

- Variety of new pavement treatments, including colored pavers or permeable pavement
- Opportunities to replace existing stormwater capture basins with other mitigation devices
- Space for installing permanent or movable plaza-like amenities (i.e. seating, fountains, etc.)
- Could allow for a wider sidewalk
- Include opportunities for variety of spaces for native trees and plants
- Changes to traffic signals needed on both ends of the block

Common Terms:

- *Pedestrian Street* – A street that is closed off to vehicle traffic creating a dedicated walking zone or linear walking area or corridor.
- *Plaza or Pedestrian Plaza* – Stretch of pavement, often a variety of treatments (color, permeability, etc.) that exclusively serves pedestrians.
- *Play Street* – A street that is closed to traffic with features designed for children’s play. This often involves colored pavement or design/patterns in the pavement to encourage play.

- *Complete Street* – streets designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users. Those include people of all ages and abilities, regardless of whether they are travelling as drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, or public transportation riders.
- *Woonerf* – A Dutch-based specific type of complete street design that uses traffic calming devices like meandering streets, plantings, and in some cases allows pedestrians full-use of the pavement.

Considerations

There are several aspects to be considered throughout this process. They stem from a combination of case study research, feedback collected from the public and the business community, and analytical tools such as the REAL and Race & Equity Pocket Questions. Not all the points below need to be resolved before determining how to proceed, but anticipating benefits and burdens may inform the types of changes the Town wants to make. The more the Town considers the various interrelated impacts of closing E Weaver Street, the more opportunities there are to identify potential unintended consequences and implement monitoring and mitigation strategies.

Climate & Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing some/all of existing paving with permeable pavement and/or bioretention devices may provide more direct mitigation of stormwater • Native plantings, fountains, and other plaza like elements can increase shade and provide cooling benefits to users • Design can incorporate and promote various small-scale strategies for addressing climate change • Air quality improvements may result from the removal of idling vehicles • If motor vehicle trips are replaced by alternative modes (rather than rerouted), greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced
Race & Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides opportunities/space for more public art and cultural storytelling • Lloyd-Broad and Tin Top neighborhoods stand to be most impacted by varying traffic circulation and stacking – only access to those neighborhoods is from E Main St/Rosemary St • Low-mobility and physically disabled visitors/residents may experience reduced access to the space and surrounding businesses. (loss of on street parking, fewer places to stop and let low-mobility visitors out in front of businesses and the Century Center) • Emergency service impacts and increased response time could also impact Lloyd-Broad and Tin Top residents more • See pocket questions for additional information
Activating the Space & Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could become the new Carrboro “place to be” – creates a publicly-owned gathering space • Increase opportunities for more local events and pop-ups • Sizeable improvements like fountains and planters may limit use of the block for existing events like races and parades • Unprogrammed public spaces without adjacent late-night businesses may be perceived as less safe • New policy/regulations may be needed to define area, such as designating a social district to allow open containers within the public plaza

Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without dedicated bike facilities, cyclists could increase risk of injury or collision with pedestrians • Pedestrians and cyclists will need to reenter intersections at either end – will need re-signaling and resurfacing • Type of barrier at each end could limit emergency services access through Town and increase response time (removeable or in-ground bollards versus planters i.e.) • Removes an exit point from police station, and response time could be impacted by stacking on E Main St.
Transportation & Downtown Circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of transit stop at the Century Center and Weaver Street Market – buses will need to be rerouted on Main and Greensboro • If vehicle trips are not replaced with bike and pedestrian trips, increased stacking on Main and Greensboro could occur (redistribution of ~7,000 average annual daily trips-see data at end) • Increased stacking can diminish the pedestrian and bike experience on Main, Greensboro, and Roberson streets • Increased stacking also increases the exposure of users to collisions as drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians may make riskier decisions – whether exiting the facility, or trying to bypass congestion • Without a designated parking space for visitors seeking to enjoy the new space, towing on private Carr Mill lot may become an issue • Shifting a current complete street to a pedestrian and bike-focused street also removes existing transit service • We don't yet know the impacts to traffic and trip generation from new performance art space in the Drakeford Library Complex • Town Code currently prevents bikes from using sidewalk on Main between Greensboro and Weaver
Economic Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May encourage residents/visitors to linger in the Downtown • May entice other businesses, and generate foot traffic in downtown for existing and new businesses beyond those on E Weaver • Could also lead to customer loss for local businesses if it is perceived too hard to find parking, travel through, or access places in the downtown

Public Input and Outreach

As part of the engagement for the Downtown Area Plan, comments were received about possible treatment changes to Weaver. These included community events, the visioning survey (~300 responses), and small meetings in historically Black and African American neighborhoods. Staff also reached out to the local business community to get a high-level sense of business owners' interest or concerns.

- Roughly one third of the comments received during the first phase of Downtown Area Plan outreach pertained to the closure of Weaver Street and downtown access and circulation.
- Approximately half of these comments were in favor of closing E Weaver Street and expanding the private dining area of Weaver Street Market.

- The other half of the comments mention concerns that downtown is currently difficult or unsafe to access via bus, bike, or car, depending on changes this area may become inaccessible, or perceived to be inaccessible.
- Business owners felt the closure would contribute to the community values of the Town, but there were concerns about how the closure would be implemented, how accommodations would be made for them, and how the space would be used after such a closure. Some business had questions about deliveries.

Scope, Logistics, and Costs

Permanently closing E Weaver St to vehicular use would require changes to the existing traffic signals at the intersection with E Main and Roberson streets and the intersection at Greensboro, and the preparation of a vehicle capacity analysis for NCDOT review/approval. It may make sense to extend the study area to capture the projected traffic generation relating to the Drakeford Library Complex to understand, in particular, the anticipated traffic from the use of the black box theater. Staff has reached out to NCDOT for additional information relating to the possibility of advancing an interim measure such as a pilot project where the street would be closed for a six-month period or weekend days during the summer. Additional engagement from downtown businesses and residents would also be necessary, and advisory board input may be desired. The budget on such a project will vary greatly due to the level of changes made to the roadway and sidewalk (i.e. painting the current surface vs replacing with permeable pavers), the items used to keep automobile traffic off the street (planters vs bollards), and structures/furniture that could be added to the space (benches, fountain, bioretention structures, etc.). Coordination with Chapel Hill Transit and potentially GoTriangle will also be required to reroute existing transit service.

Conclusion & Recommendation

The future of East Weaver Street has been a topic of discussion in Carrboro for decades: whether it should remain a complete street with infrastructure for all modes including automobile and transit or should there be a partial or total pedestrianization. Proponents envision a pedestrianized E Weaver St as a new focal point for Carrboro, a new home for major events, and a means to encourage nonmotorized transportation within the downtown area. But such a transformation would be a major undertaking. Traffic patterns and transit lines would change.

Staff recommend that the Council discuss and provide direction for next steps, if desired. Should the Council wish to move forward with a capacity analysis and/or consideration of a pilot closure, staff would bring back a follow up agenda item to discuss the specific scope of work and timeline, and to identify a source of funding.

MEMORANDUM SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Case Studies

Of 150 pedestrian malls open in 2000 in the U.S., 15 remain. These malls, plazas, and promenades were constructed throughout the second half of the 20th century (1960s and beyond) as part of a planning trend of pedestrianization, downtown revitalization, and economic competition with indoor malls.

Research has found that successful pedestrian zones in towns and cities share a few key elements of success:

- Existing foot traffic
- Accessibility - how users get to the space, and how accessible is the space itself
- Use - presence of activities (entertainment, retail, dining, gathering)
- Design - amenities (trees, landscaping, seating, pavement), visual interest & historic character
- Comfort - feeling safe, welcoming, reduced noise, affordability, maintenance

Staff reviewed several case studies and pulled four examples for reference in this memo:

Pedestrian Only – Pearl Street (1977-current) | Boulder, CO

- 4 blocks, 80' ROW
- Pedestrian only 24/7, brick path with landscaping
- Downtown Circulator Bus loops around the mall
- Populated with some chains and numerous local ground retail – top “foodie” area and hub for live music events and art galleries
- Boulder is a college-oriented community, and has approx. 100k residents
- An effort to revitalize original commercial core, led to historic structure restoration
- Currently in discussion to extend pedestrian malls to areas that were blocked off during the pandemic



Temporary Closure – George Street (2002-present) | St Johns, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

- 2 blocks, ~40' ROW
- Pedestrian only 12pm-8am – open two-lane in morning for business traffic & delivery
- Populated with many pubs and bars so stays active through the night, as well as businesses, residences, and a church
- Features historic 1 and 2 story buildings, historic buildings and colorful row houses
- Sports numerous festivals and an annual George Street Festival and a live music scene

Reopened to Two-Lane Street – Fayetteville Street (1977-2006) | Raleigh, NC

- 6 blocks, ~99' ROW
- Was originally pedestrian only, reopened to two-way traffic at all times in 2006
- Considered Raleigh's "ceremonial main street" – some of the tallest buildings in the city have frontage on Fayetteville, and the street is a popular place for restaurants, clubs, and bars
- Tourism plays a big part in drawing people to the mall as the seat of state government and cultural amenities; Fayetteville St is also centrally located in significant employment center.
- Local businesses lost on-street parking access to Fayetteville St, leading to a decline in overall business activity on the street in the 1970s-90s.
- An increase in business activity has occurred since cars returned to Fayetteville Street, but Downtown Raleigh as a whole has experienced increased commercial activity and an increasing number of residents in the area.



Reopened to One-lane Woonerf – Baltimore Street (1978-2024) | Cumberland, MD

- 3 blocks, ~50' ROW
- Was converted into brick surface pedestrian mall to stay competitive with indoor malls
- With surge in online retail, mall fell into decline, and in 2017 major planned updates to sewer and electric line allowed city to reimagine the area
- Street reopened November 2014, with reintroduced bike traffic and one way vehicle traffic, no curb, wider sidewalks, added greenspace, lighting, and street furniture
- Serves several small specialty shops and mixture of business and retail uses, and has two street crossings, 3-5 story buildings on either side
- Bus stops and parking on both ends

Timeline & Relevant Data

Closing E Weaver St has been reviewed periodically, for special events, as part of downtown vehicular traffic and transit circulation, during construction, and in adopting long-term plans. Closing E Weaver St traces as far back to the late 1980s for the Annual 10K road race, and its use as a hub for signature town events and festivals like Open Street continues today. See the table below

1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early examples of closing the street for events like the Annual 10K
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town conducted public hearings for closing street for various special events.
2000s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Downtown Vision and the Downtown Circulation Study imagine potential changes to the street, one-way woonerfs, a pedestrian plaza, signal changes, etc.
2010s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E Weaver closes for three months for water main work (2011) • Open Streets begins (2013) • E Weaver closes 3rd Sunday June-Aug for Summer Streets (2015-2017) – pilot program recommended to end – see Agenda Item 17-505 (4/24/2018)
2020s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stantec presents report on impacts associated with reducing E Main from four to three lanes for bike lanes. Incorporated into 2022 NCDOT restriping of E Main.

2023 NCDOT Annual Average Daily Traffic Counts:

Street	Annual Avg Daily Traffic
E Weaver Street	6,800 vehicles
E Main Street	11,500 vehicles
N Greensboro Street	11,000 vehicles
W Weaver Street	5,400 vehicles

2023 DCHC MPO Transit, Bike & Pedestrian Counts:

Street	6-hr Walking Count (pedestrians)	13-hr Bike Count (cyclists)
E Weaver Street	270	193
E Main Street	141	66
N Greensboro Street	182	49

2023 Chapel Hill Transit Boarding and Alighting

Bus Stop	Route(s)	Annual Boarding (passengers)	Annual Alighting (passengers)
WB – Century Center	F, CW	19,920	25,647
EB – Weaver St Market	F, CW	19,173	10,458
WB – Main Street	J	7,470	33,117
EB – Main Street	J	21,165	4,731

During the 2011 closure of the street for water main work, the Planning Department monitored and reported the following impacts to traffic volume on surrounding streets:

- 21% increase in peak 2-hour period traffic volumes on Greensboro St.
- Daily traffic volume doubled on E. Main St.
- Daily traffic volume increased by 35% on W. Main St.