PROPOSAL FOR WHITAKER & DRAYTON STREETS

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About SDRA

Created in 1992 by the Georgia General Assembly, Savannah Development and Renewal Authority (SDRA) is an independent public development authority. SDRA works with the local government and private sector to plan, develop, and promote greater downtown Savannah. The Authority strives to develop this area as an economic hub in the region by building an attractive urban environment and a prosperous climate for businesses and institutions.

The geographic focus of SDRA is bounded by the state border to the north, Victory Drive to the south, the Truman Parkway to the east, and Stiles and Lathrop Avenues to the west. Since its founding, the Authority has focused on specific corridors in this area in order to advance economic-development activity therein. Its current initiatives primarily address the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and Montgomery Street corridor on the west side of downtown.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of safe, accessible streets for all means of travel offers considerable public-health, environmental, and economic benefits to a city and its community members. Streets that are designed to allow for and encourage not only vehicles but also pedestrians and cyclists promote physical activity and a lower ecological footprint. Multimodal infrastructure such as sidewalks and bicycle lanes also fosters increased connectivity and mobility, bringing more potential customers to local businesses and fostering greater civic engagement throughout a community.

Moreover, streets that accommodate all users are vital for public safety. Pedestrians that are struck by automobiles travelling 30 miles per hour (mph) have a 50 percent chance of survival. Of those hit by automobiles travelling 40 mph, nine out of ten will die.

By all of these measures, sound decisions in street design are of particular import and relevance in Savannah—a dense, urban area with a significant tourist population. The following analysis and recommendations responds to issues regarding the safety of the current configuration and infrastructure along Whitaker and Drayton Streets.

Multiple studies demonstrate the need for and benefits of safe street design for all users—regardless of age, disability, or mode of transportation.

1. Streets configured to accommodate all users have found reductions in crashes ranging from 19 to 47 percent for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers alike.

2. In 2014, automobile collisions were the leading cause of death among children ages 11 and 16–24; in 19 percent of these fatalities, the children involved were pedestrians.

3. In 2009, an analysis of available literature indicated that bicyclist injuries and collisions with automobiles could be reduced by up to 50 percent by the creation of marked, on-street bike lanes.

4. Streets that are designed for pedestrian safety often also provide drivers with increased safety. In Savannah in particular, a comparison of collision data from the four years immediately preceding and subsequent to the addition of the bicycle lane on Price Street, it was found that automobile collisions had declined 27 percent over the subsequent four years.
The need for safe streets for all users has already been recognized and established as policy by City of Savannah leadership. Unanimously approved and adopted by City Council on January 22, 2015, the Complete Streets Ordinance outlines the following purpose:

“To encourage healthy, active living; reduce traffic congestion and fossil-fuel use; and improve the safety and quality of life of residents of the City of Savannah by providing safe, convenient, and comfortable routes for walking, biking, and public transportation.”

To achieve this purpose, the ordinance indicates that to the extent feasible and appropriate, every street project should incorporate Complete Streets Infrastructure to enable reasonably safe travel along and across the right of way for all categories of users. Also, when economically viable, the City should attempt to incorporate Complete Streets Infrastructure into existing streets to improve the safety and convenience of users.

The Complete Streets Ordinance sets forth these overarching objectives for the City to pursue:

1. Encouraging City staff and affiliated agencies to consider and, to the extent practicable, implement the principles associated with Complete Streets

2. Creation of a comprehensive, integrated, and connected transportation network throughout the City that supports community-development and land-use goals

3. Promotion of safe and efficient travel for street and sidewalk users

4. Continued use of best practices in design standards, policies, and guidelines

5. Recognition of the need for flexibility to accommodate a variety of streets and users

What is Complete Streets Infrastructure?

Complete Streets Infrastructure means design features that contribute to a safe, convenient, and comfortable travel experience for all users. Such features include shared-use paths; bicycle, transit, and automobile lanes; sidewalks; paved shoulders; curbs and accessible curb ramps; bulb outs; crosswalks and refuge islands; pedestrian and traffic signals; transit priority signalization; signage; landscaping; street furniture; bicycle-parking facilities; public-transportation stops and facilities; traffic-calming devices; surface treatments; narrow vehicle lanes; and raised medians.
As a principal thoroughfare and destination for visitors and residents alike, Forsyth Park represents a prime example of the need for a coordinated implementation of the Complete Streets Ordinance, specifically on Whitaker and Drayton Streets. In response to safety concerns amid the increased use of the park by cyclists and pedestrians, the City of Savannah proposed a revision to its existing ordinance regarding the use of foot-propelled vehicles in Forsyth Park in January 2016. The existing ordinance prohibited the use of bicycles on the internal sidewalk of the park between the fountain and the southern limits of the old fort area. State law furthermore prohibits the use of bicycles on the sidewalks encircling the park.

The revision would prohibit individuals from operating all foot-propelled vehicles—including bicycles, mopeds, and skateboards—on all sidewalks and other pedestrian thoroughfares in and around Forsyth Park. Only children under the age of 12 with adult supervision would be exempt, provided that they yield to pedestrians.

The City of Savannah held a public meeting to gather community feedback on the proposed revision on January 14, 2016. Over 500 residents provided feedback at the meeting or through the City of Savannah website. At the time, former City Manager Stephanie Cutter noted that the new ordinance would limit the possibility of collisions and tension between cyclists and pedestrians in the park. However, a principal concern expressed by the majority of respondents was that the City had not offered any plans for providing safe alternative routes for the many users that would be displaced by the new ordinance. Community members overwhelmingly spoke against the notion of eliminating access to the park for a certain group, and instead advocated for the City to find reasonable solutions to improve safety in the park and nearby streets while preserving access for all users. Specifically, the community noted that prohibiting the use of Bull Street—a central north-south corridor utilized by thousands of cyclists—would force these individuals to take the more dangerous routes along Whitaker and Drayton Streets for transportation and recreation.
While City leadership ultimately decided not to pursue the ban in Forsyth Park at that time, the concerns regarding safety and access in the park, on Whitaker and Drayton Streets, and throughout the community remain relevant. Savannah has the highest bicycle-commuting rate in the state of Georgia and receives approximately 14 million visitors annually, many of whom also walk or bike in the city. However, improvements to Savannah’s bicycle infrastructure have not kept pace to accommodate this ever-increasing demand. Of the nearly 700 miles of streets within the City limits, fewer than twenty are equipped with bicycle lanes that meet current standards.

As streets that run through the heart of downtown Savannah, Whitaker and Drayton Streets represent important pathways for all users. However, their current two-lane, one-way configuration results in higher traffic speeds and reduced visibility, making it difficult and risky for pedestrians and cyclists to travel along the streets and to cross when entering and leaving Forsyth Park. The current design has also posed a safety hazard for automobile users; according to the UGA Traffic Safety Research and Evaluation Group (TSREG), the streets have witnessed an increased rate of reported collisions over the last five years.
EXISTING CONDITIONS

While the collision data for Whitaker and Drayton Streets indicate that these corridors stand to benefit from traffic-calming measures, some automobile users have expressed concern regarding the potential for congestion if such measures were implemented. However, in reviewing the most recent traffic-count data for downtown Savannah, it is clear that the traffic levels on these streets do not necessitate maintaining two travel lanes on either corridor. In fact, the highest traffic counts recorded along Whitaker and Drayton Streets from Bay Street to Victory Drive (#7–10) were equal to or significantly lower than the traffic counts recorded along Liberty Street and Oglethorpe Avenue (#1–6), both of which offer only one travel lane in each direction.

ON RIGHT & BELOW
Traffic Counts & Locations, 2015
Source: Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)

1. 9,800: Oglethorpe Avenue near Whitaker Street
2. 8,860: Oglethorpe Avenue near Abercorn Street
3. 7,390: Oglethorpe Avenue near East Broad Street
4. 14,800: Liberty Street near Whitaker Street
5. 10,800: Liberty Street near Abercorn Street
6. 12,000: Liberty Street near East Broad Street
7. 7,690: Whitaker Street near Gwinnett Street
8. 7,040: Whitaker Street near Henry Street
9. 7,400: Drayton Street near Jones Street
10. 7,260: Drayton Street near Gwinnett Street
Existing Conditions

CURRENT STREETSCAPE
PROPOSED CONDITIONS

The recommended modifications to Whitaker and Drayton Streets include the reduction of one automobile lane to accommodate on-street parking and a one-way protected bicycle lane. These changes would apply to both streets. In contrast with the bicycle lanes seen elsewhere in downtown Savannah, such as on Lincoln and Price Streets, the proposed bicycle lane for Whitaker and Drayton Streets would be protected. Most suitable for streets with the potential for higher automobile speeds and cyclist volumes (such as Whitaker and Drayton Streets), protected bicycle lanes are classified as such due to the security afforded by their buffer area, which separates the bicycle- and automobile-travel lanes. This buffer often provides not only additional space as a degree of protection, but also a physical barrier between cyclists and drivers. As shown in the top right image, a basic protected bike lane is demarcated with pavement lines and diagonal striping, while bollards may be added to reinforce the new configuration and prompt users to remain in their respective lanes. This option would be ideal for implementation as a short-term pilot project on Whitaker and Drayton Streets. A more permanent and effective measure to ensure protection is to install a raised median in the buffer area, as shown in the bottom right image. Landscaping features enhance the environmental quality, visual appeal, and user experience of the thoroughfare without reducing visibility. Street sections for these two options and the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) standards for protected bicycle lanes are shown on the following pages.

It is important to note that these proposed lane reductions—and the consequent reductions in automobile speed—will not only improve public safety but will also smooth current traffic conditions on Whitaker and Drayton Streets. Reducing automobile speeds from 40 mph (a common speed on Whitaker and Drayton Streets) to 30 mph (the current posted speed limit) tends to increase roadway capacity because lower speeds reduce the space required between automobiles.
Proposed Conditions

STREET SECTIONS

Option A: Pilot Project on Whitaker & Drayton Streets

Pavement Markings & Bollards
Proposed Conditions

STREET SECTIONS

Option B: Long-term Solution on Whitaker & Drayton Streets

Raised Median with Planters
Proposed Conditions

NACTO GUIDELINES

Design Standards for One-Way Protected Bike Lanes

**Required Features**
- A cycle track, like a bike lane, is a type of protected lane as defined by the MUTCD. It separates bike lanes, designated bike lanes, and bicycle routes.
- Bike lane width, symbol, and color combinations (MUTCD Figure 9C-3) shall be placed at the beginning of a cycle track and at periodic intervals along the facility based on engineering judgment.
- If pavement markings are used to designate motor vehicle parking lanes from the pedestrian/bicycle lane, solid white line (two markings shall be used) diagonal crosshatch markings may be placed in the neutral area for speed and emphasis. See MUTCD Section 303.24. Raised medians or other barriers can also provide physical separation to the cycle track.
- The minimum desired width for a cycle track should be 5 feet. In areas with high bicycle volumes or high sections, the minimum desired width should be 7 feet to allow for two or more passes passing each other.**
- These feet is the desired width for a parking buffer to allow for passenger loading and to prevent door collisions.**
- When using a parking-protected-pedestrian marking buffer, the pedestrian lane and buffer combined width is 5 feet to discourage motor vehicle encroachment into the cycle track.
- In the absence of a sidewalk buffer or curb, the minimum desired width of the painted buffer is 3.5 feet. The buffer space should be used to locate barriers, planters, and other forms of physical protection.**

**Recommended Features**
- Driveways and minor street crossings are a unique challenge to cycle track design. A review of existing facilities and design practice has shown that the following guidance may improve safety at crossings of driveways and minor intersections:
  - If the cycle track is protected, parking should be provided outside the intersection to improve visibility. The driveway no-parking area is 30 feet from each side of the crossing.**
  - Motor vehicles attempting to cross the cycle track from the side street or driveway street should stop and yield to the cycle track.
  - Cycle track width should be increased by 2 inches where the cycle track extends more than 12 inches from the curb.**

**Optional Features**
- Tactile markers may be used to protect the cycle track from the driveway’s track lane. The color of the tactile markers shall be the same color as the pavement marking they supplement.**

**Design Guidance**

**One-Way Protected Cycle Tracks**

**Source:** National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)
CONCLUSION

These proposed changes to Whitaker and Drayton Streets represent an important step toward improving safety and access in a key area in downtown Savannah. Moving forward, it is vital to consider and work toward a more holistic approach to accommodating all forms of transportation. Much good work has been completed in recent years, especially the Mobility and Parking Study completed last year. This particular issue points out the need to look at how best to balance the needs of people walking, cycling, driving and taking public transportation on all of greater downtown’s streets.

Savannah and its downtown have changed a great deal in the last three decades. As we look to the next two or three decades, it will be increasingly important to develop a coordinated strategy for all of our streets.

ON RIGHT
Greater Downtown Development Plans
Source: Savannah Development & Renewal Authority
The following pages comprise the letters of support that SDRA has received from local agencies and community groups regarding its proposed modifications to Whitaker and Drayton Streets. The Downtown Neighborhood Association of Savannah (DNA), Savannah Downtown Business Association (SDBA), and Lucky Savannah have also confirmed their support. In addition to promoting public awareness and involvement, many of these entities represent potential partners in the process of funding the short- and long-term streetscape designs.

Attached Community Letters of Support

1. Ardsley Park/Chatham Crescent Neighborhood Association
2. Georgia Bikes
3. Healthy Savannah
4. Savannah Bicycle Campaign
5. Victorian Neighborhoods Association