

TO: The Board of Mayor and Aldermen, February 10, 2004
RE: Major Thoroughfare Plan

At the BOMA workshop on January 27th, RPM, the consulting firm who authored the Major Thoroughfare Plan (MTP) Update, stated their agreement that no roadways inside the urban core delineated by either the existing or proposed extension of Mack Hatcher Parkway should be wider than three lanes. However, this stance is not what is published in the MTP. They also stated their agreement that all roadways should be considered within a context sensitive design criteria, and this was confirmed by the Director of our Engineering Department. While no specific definition of this concept was presented and none exists in the MTP, **context sensitive design should take into account not only the need to move cars, but also the impact of facilities on the surrounding and contiguous environment, community and established character.**

It is important to reference the language of the UGB Land Use Plan concerning context sensitive design, page 10, under the heading Design-Based Density.

“The city will strive to achieve an overall density that is sustainable, compatible, and **protective of community character**. However, density will be viewed within the context of other important community planning needs, such as design, infrastructure, and the **recognition that land must be used wisely and efficiently.**”

And on page 15 of this Land Use Plan, under the heading Gateways and Corridors we find this reference:

“Franklin Road from the north, Murfreesboro Road from the east, Columbia Avenue from the south, New Highway 96 West to the west and Mack Hatcher Parkway are some of the major corridors that help shape the image of the community. Unfortunately, their visual image often leaves much to be desired, both because of the quality of development on private land and **because of the lack of aesthetic consideration of public facilities within the public right-of-way.**”

Recommended MTP projects R3, R19, R36, R37, R38 and R39, which outline both improvements to New Highway 96 West, Del Rio Pike and Carlisle Lane, and new roadway extensions, should have specific **context sensitive** design guidelines that address the rural character of the West Harpeth area. These projects, while properly anticipating the potential growth in this area, should not be considered independently of necessary improvements to Carlisle Lane from New Highway 96 to Del Rio Pike or the extension of Mack Hatcher Parkway. The opportunity to proactively design the road facilities of the entire West Harpeth area should not be missed, and the character of the West Harpeth area as defined in the UGB Land Use Plan must be preserved. It is significant to report that most of the open land in the entire West Harpeth character area comprises a rural district deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Due to the impact that roadway facilities will have on the environmental and historic resources in this area, proper and thoughtful design and placement of roadway facilities must be of paramount consideration.

The Roadway Enhancement Master Plan, adopted in September 2001, primarily makes recommendations for suburban roadways in the Interstate 65 / Cool Springs corridor. Very little reverence to urban streets is included in this report, but what is included is important. In section 3-1, Urban/Historic Roadway Design Guidelines, the following are the findings of the consultant:

“Urban roadways have their own unique character and style. The urban core is roughly three-quarters of a mile in all directions from the center of town. This distance may vary depending on the roadway and land use transitions along that roadway. Roadways considered urban are Fifth Avenue, Murfreesboro Road, Columbia Avenue, West Main Street, and New Highway 96.”

Concerning this list of urban streets, only Fifth Avenue is discussed in any detail in the Roadway Enhancement Master Plan. Under the subtitle Issues is this quote: “Form a connection with the historic character of downtown, transitioning from the broader historical design references at the outer gateways to the more specific historic design vocabulary of the downtown area.” And under the subtitle Conceptual Design, this statement: “Bring larger-scale design concepts down to a more detailed and pedestrian scale.” I assume that this same transitional language applies to all urban core roadways, not just Fifth Avenue.

A comprehensive Central Franklin land use planning process has been ongoing for some time. A draft of the Central Franklin Land Use Plan has been received by the Planning Department and will be discussed by the plan steering committee and consulting firm on February 12th. Sub-committee reports have included the following policy guidelines:

1. The city should pursue an extensive multi-organizational effort to address the collective problems and opportunities along the Columbia Avenue and West Main Street corridors, along with the neighborhoods in between. There are planning issues that coincide in these areas.
2. The scenic quality and rural character of the Franklin Road gateway is exemplary and should be protected.
3. Deep residential parcels along Murfreesboro Road contribute heavily to the rural character of that corridor, and tools should be explored to insure the continuation of this character.

I appreciate the reasoning and the methodology used to create the Major Thoroughfare Plan and I understand the intent of this document is to identify and recommend facility improvements. At the BOMA workshop on January 27th, we were informed that the MTP should be used as a “guideline” to address and prioritize projects. However, once adopted, I believe this will become more than a guideline — it will become our policy. Our City Attorney stated, “While this is a very influential planning tool, it is not deviated from lightly.” The MTP contains language and design criteria that are currently in conflict with other planning efforts, both completed and underway. I would therefore like to make the following three recommendations to the BOMA.

First, I recommend the development of a comprehensive toolbox of guiding principles and policies be adopted by the BOMA and the FMPC to direct any roadway project identified in the MTP. This toolbox should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. A Context Sensitive Design (CSD) process with definitive language and guiding principles that details the oversight of all facility planning efforts, and includes narrower cross-section options for slower speed roadways.
2. A Traffic Calming policy that “combines self-enforcing physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alters driver behavior and improves conditions for non-motorized street users.” This definition is borrowed from Traffic Calming State of the Practice prepared by the Institute of Transportation Engineers, published in 1999.
3. The adoption of a Travel Reduction Ordinance (TRO) that establishes mandates to limit and reduce automobile trips and follows Traffic Demand Management (TDM) strategies.

Second, because most road projects west of Interstate 65 at the Highway 96 corridor as identified in the MTP will be influenced by the completion of the entire loop of Mack Hatcher Parkway, I believe it is time for the city to officially and publicly set this project as our most pressing priority. I recommend we commit our creative, financial and political resources to the design and construction of Mack Hatcher Parkway from Hillsboro Road to Columbia Pike as a singular effort, instead of expending our energy and resources on piecemeal road widening projects that cannot fully address the issue of through traffic in the historic urban core of Central Franklin.

Third, due to the fact that we consider Central Franklin, which contains our urban core, important enough to require a land use plan of more detail than any other part of the city, and since this plan has not been finalized or adopted, I recommend the removal of the following three projects, as currently designated, from the MTP:

1. R2 - Widen Franklin Road to three lanes from Mack Hatcher Parkway to the Harpeth River Bridge, to include bike lanes.
2. R4 – Widen New Highway 96 West to three lanes from Seventh Avenue to the new Mack Hatcher Parkway extension, to include bike lanes.
3. R20 – Widen Highway 96 to a four-lane, median divided roadway from Mack Hatcher Parkway to Eddy Lane.

Upon completion of the comprehensive toolbox and adoption of the Central Franklin Land Use Plan, any or all of these projects may be revised and reinstated into the MTP. This action should occur only after appropriate consideration of the guidelines established by these newly developed and adopted policies and procedures.

Respectfully submitted,

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Alderman, Fourth Ward