

**MINUTES
SPECIAL WORKSHOP
DESTIN CITY COUNCIL
JUNE 24, 2019
ANNEX COUNCIL CHAMBERS
5:30 PM**

The Council of the City of Destin met in special session with the following members and staff present:

Destin City Council

Mayor Gary Jarvis
Councilmember Chatham Morgan
Councilmember Cyron Marler
Councilmember Parker Destin

Councilmember Prebble Ramswell
Councilmember Steven Menchel
Councilmember Skip Overdier
Councilmember Rodney Braden

Destin City Staff

City Manager Lance Johnson
Public Information Manager Catherine Card
Public Services Director Michael Burgess
Community Development Director Louis Zunguze
Land Use Attorney Kimberly Kopp

City Clerk Rey Bailey
Deputy City Manager Webb Warren
Code Compliance Manager Joey Forgione
City Attorney Kyle Bauman

Visitors

Commissioner Nathan Boyles, Okaloosa County
Commissioner Kelly Windes, Okaloosa County
Jared Perdue, Director of Development, FDOT
Tim Smith, IST Administrator, District 3, FDOT
Mark Brock, Planning Manager, District 3, FDOT
Jill Lavender, Long Range Transportation Planner, Emerald Coast Regional Council
Mary Beth Washnock, Emerald Coast Regional Council
Cameron Smith, Emerald Coast Regional Council
Austin Mount, Chief Executive Officer, Emerald Coast Regional Council
John Fielding, Atkins Engineering
Jason Autry, Public Works Director, Okaloosa County
Scott Bitterman, Engineer, Okaloosa County
Jim Wood, Chairman, Citizens Advisory Committee, TPO

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Gary Jarvis called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM, on Monday, June 24, 2019, in the City Hall Annex Council Chambers.

WORKSHOP

1. Stahlman Avenue and U.S. Hwy 98 Intersection Improvements Project

Councilmember Destin expressed concern there is no real plan to link the crosstown connector traffic back on to Stahlman interchange; or to get motorists that want to use the

connector off US Hwy 98 without creating more traffic. He stated that the Stahlman Avenue/US Hwy 98 intersection is quite challenging due to lack of right-of-way and the value of the properties that exist on all four sides of that intersection.

Mr. Perdue discussed the 3R resurfacing project that is currently underway as well as other plans FDOT wishes to implement as part of that project. He explained that the primary purpose of the resurfacing project is to rehabilitate the existing pavement for safe and efficient traffic flow. They look for operational Improvements that are within allowable budget that fit within the existing right-of-way. They considered offsetting the left turn lanes on the Stahlman interchange; which is taking the eastbound and westbound left turn lanes and shifting them over to provide better sight distance and to better see oncoming traffic. It would also provide more width and more asphalt to install dual left turn lanes. However, receiving lanes are required for the dual left turn lanes. They also plan to install a right-turn lane on to the Emerald Grande; which would require additional right-of-way. They are currently in negotiations with property owners for the necessary right-of-way.

Councilmember Ramswell asked if there is enough traffic to warrant a dual left turn lanes to Stahlman Avenue.

Mr. Perdue stated that since they do not have the receiving lanes necessary for the dual left turn lanes, they have no way to determine the true demand for dual left turn lanes for that road.

Councilmember Ramswell asked how long the green arrow stays green for eastbound traffic heading north to Stahlman Avenue.

Mr. Perdue stated that he does not have the answer to that question; however, the corridor is being actively managed by FDOT, and that the timing is optimized on a recurring basis and it should already be fully optimized.

Councilmember Ramswell asked whether it should be part of the development order to mandate the property owner to give up the necessary right-of-way for the right turn lane to Emerald Grande since it will clearly impact traffic at that intersection.

According to Community Development Director Louis Zunguze, they would need to address this issue to the extent there are City requirements that need to be met.

Okaloosa County Public Works Director Jason Autry addressed the question regarding the demand for dual left turn lanes on to Stahlman Avenue. He stated there would be a change in dynamic if there is receiving capacity on Stahlman Avenue for the dual left turn lanes. He also noted there are all sorts of influences that affect the ability of that intersection to operate smoothly such as pedestrians and high side streets volume; adding that the improvements are intended to provide the ability to expand and improve the efficiency of that intersection in the future.

Councilmember Destin expressed concern they are going to continue to have problems acquiring the necessary right-of-way for the right turn lane to the Emerald Grande; adding they would still have traffic problems at that intersection even with the 3R improvements project. He

also stated that if they build the crosstown connector before they completely fix those problems, they would be inviting a tremendous amount of traffic at that intersection.

Mr. Perdue maintains there are no relations between the two projects. The Stahlman and US Hwy 98 intersection is one of many intersections on that road that operate at level of service "F." The entire corridor operates at level of service "F." He continued that the stated intent of the crosstown connector is to provide more multi-modal connectivity and networking to help with traffic flow at the City of Destin.

Councilmember Braden noted that the TPO has allocated approximately \$2.4 million for a major redesign of Stahlman Avenue/US Hwy 98 intersection by 2025. He asked what kind of major redesign is planned for that intersection.

According to County Commissioner Boyles, the TPO has planned to do a PD&E study of that segment of the road to include the Stahlman interchange by 2021; but prior to that, the crosstown connector would be fully funded. The TPO is working on finalizing their priorities for the next budget cycle and they expect to make a final decision by next month. They would ultimately need some directions from the City of Destin on the crosstown connector prior to their July meeting. They would need to make recommendations to FDOT whether funds need to stay earmarked for that project or use the funds for another project.

Mr. Perdue noted that there is a PD&E study funded in FY 2021 for the intersection. However, since the entire corridor is at a level of service "F" they could make any kind of improvements to that intersection and the entire corridor would still function at a level of service "F." He also stated if they are going to fund the first phase of what they called a capacity infrastructure project, they will need to consider the big picture and look at the entire corridor; adding they have no idea what the design will look like at this time. He explained that the PD&E will assess all the potential impacts and look at different alternatives based on the purpose and needs established in a collaborative effort with all residents and business owners. They will develop all the alternatives and try to select the one that best fit the purpose and needs of the project. He added that capacity projects usually take anywhere from 15 to 20 years from the PD&E study to construction.

Councilmember Braden noted that amendment 4 to Okaloosa-Walton TPO 2040 Cost Feasibility Plan shows a major intersection improvement planned for Stahlman Avenue and US Hwy 98 intersection worth \$1.2 million for 2031 to 2040. He inquired as to the nature of that project.

Mr. Austin Mount, Chief Executive Officer, Emerald Coast Regional Council, stated they have not seen that particular document.

According to Mr. Perdue, the Cost Feasible Plan is not a FDOT work program, but a long-range planning document that the TPO produces to plan for future projects. He added the only thing funded in FDOT's work program was the PD&E study for FY 2021.

Mr. Jim Wood, Chairman for the Citizens Advisory Committee that makes recommendations to the TPO, stated that the TPO does not design roadways. In consultation with FDOT, they conduct long range planning and produce documents that guide long range planning for both Okaloosa and Walton County. He pointed out that the document to which

Councilmember Braden was referring was the Annual Priorities List for FY 2021-2025. The PD&E study, with the \$1.5M projected amount set aside for 2021, would look at the Calhoun to Airport Road corridor. Once the study is finalized and the results are analyzed, it would provide several options; and then public workshops and other meetings will be scheduled in conjunction with FDOT to gather input on the preferred design. Only then will the long-range funding process begin and then ultimately the construction of the project.

Mr. Mount explained that the FY 2020 Cost Feasible Plan, even though it is a public document, is just a long-range plan and is not meant to be taken literally as it can change drastically. He continued that the PD&E study currently programmed for the Stahlman Avenue/US Hwy 98 interchange would determine the alternates and suggested improvements; and from there they proceed to the design of the project.

Mr. Wood mentioned that when he left the Council after 8 years of service, the crosstown connector was a two-lane road; but then the PD&E study that was conducted provided several options, including a 2-lane road and a 4-lane road.

Ms. Jill Lavender, Long Range Transportation Planner, Emerald Coast Regional Council, explained that FY 2020 Cost Feasible Plan contains long-range estimates which is done every 5 years. They are generalized estimates for different projects. They reach out to their partners to get these estimates as accurate as possible. Once projects move up to the priority list for funding, they take a second look at these estimates to make sure they are reasonably accurate.

Councilmember Marler noted that the Emerald Grande property owners are in negotiations with FDOT for the necessary right of way for the right turn lane to the property. It was also his understanding they are planning on re-designing the entrance/exit area and adding another lane to have two receiving lanes for the two left hand turn lanes to help alleviate traffic at that intersection.

Councilmember Morgan stated that he would like to discuss the idea of using part of the sales tax money to accelerate the PD&E process and to get the Stahlman project started sooner rather than later at their upcoming budget workshop. He also hopes to get the crosstown connector issues resolved soon in terms of the 2-lane road versus the 4-lane road, and for the Council to approve moving forward with that project.

Councilmember Destin asked Mr. Wood to clarify his earlier statement regarding the 2-laning versus the 4-laning of the crosstown connector.

Mr. Wood explained that the PD&E study provided several options; including a 2-lane and a 4-lane road design. It afforded the Council the opportunity to decide which design is best for the City and how much money to spend on it. He continued that Azalea Drive and Legion Drive both have two lanes. They have the right-of-way available to build 4 lanes on Azalea Drive, but he does not think they will ever 4-lane Legion Drive. For this reason, it would not make sense to 4-lane Azalea Drive if Legion Drive remains a 2-lane road.

Councilmember Destin noted that one of the questions being asked is why obtain the rights-of-way for 4 lanes when they only desire 2 lanes.

Mr. Wood opined that the additional rights-of-way could be used for other purpose such as widening their sidewalks or building a park.

Councilmember Menchel noted that Mr. Perdue confirmed at the last Council meeting that FDOT is installing a right turn lane into Emerald Grande from the Marler Bridge and made no mention of any right-of-way negotiation.

Mr. Perdue explained there is a right turn lane from the bridge to the first driveway to the Emerald Grande; but additional right-of-way will be necessary to build the right turn lane going up to Stahlman Avenue.

Councilmember Menchel noted that the right turn lane on Stahlman Avenue backs up, sometimes all the way to the cemetery, because of the pedestrian crosswalk located on the west side of the road. He suggests removing that crosswalk and have the pedestrians use the crosswalk on the east side of the street in front of Whataburger at least as a temporary measure to help facilitate traffic at that intersection.

Mr. Jason Autry, Public Works Director, Okaloosa County, noted it would still create a conflict because people coming up on the west side of Stahlman Avenue would have to cross the road to the other side of Stahlman Avenue.

Councilmember Destin pointed out there is a crosswalk directly in-front of the Destin Community Center and the Whataburger which would provide access across Stahlman Avenue.

Commissioner Kelly Windes discussed the benefit of the crosstown connector to the City of Destin; stating he was a member of the Destin City Council from 2006 to 2010, and that the crosstown connector was a big vision of the Council during those years. He also noted that \$4.8 million has already been allocated and ready to be used for the project.

Councilmember Ramswell stated that many people talk about the crosstown connector as being a 2-lane road, and it is what she has always believed since she sat on the Council. It was not until a few months ago when she started finding different documents that referred to the 4 lane road. The 2016 PD&E study provided an alternative for 4 lanes. It will be done in phases. The first phase is 2 lanes; and then the second phase expands both Azalea Drive and Legion Drive to 4 lanes.

Councilmember Ramswell also noted the underground passageway underneath the road at the old Scenic Hwy 98 near Destiny East and Destiny by the Sea. She suggests they consider building a similar passageway at the Stahlman interchange. She also pointed out there is another piece of right-of-way on the east side of the Emerald Grande properties. She suggests making that an exit road and re-designate Stahlman as strictly an entrance road to the property.

Mr. Autrey stated they have looked at several different ideas; and that the PD&E study provides different options to include all requirements in terms of land, right-of-way and so forth. He also agreed an underground passageway at the Stahlman interchange is worth considering.

Councilmember Ramswell discussed the importance of having a master plan for the crosstown connector for Council to use as a starting point for moving towards the next step for the process.

Mr. Perdue noted that the PD&E study that was done by the City might have one of the components that looked at the overall connectivity in a master plan.

The Mayor pointed out the PD&E study reviews and evaluates all the options, but the Council ultimately decides which option is best suited for the City. He also noted there is a plan to finish the last 2100 feet of the crosstown connector that was approved by the current Council. It was one of three options that were presented at the time. He added that the PD&E study gave 3 or 4 options long-term.

Councilmember Ramswell pointed out the 3 or 4 long term options the Mayor alluded to were all about 4-laning of the connector.

According to Councilmember Morgan, the TPO's priority list shows that any kind of expansion of the crosstown connector would take place in 2041; which would give them ample time to get with their community partners, FDOT and TPO to amend the PD&E study. He also noted that he previously made a motion to direct staff to do whatever it takes to memorialize the last .4 miles of the connector as a 2 lane road to appease the public's concern and hopefully get the Council's support to move forward with the project.

Commissioner Boyles stated this is the Destin Crosstown Connector, the City owns the property; and it is ultimately the City's decision to make it either a 2-lane road or a 4-lane road.

Councilmember Overdier noted that the idea is to make sure FDOT would still provide funding even after the Council decides on a two-lane road.

Councilmember Menchel stated that he was a former member of the Public Works and Safety Committee, and that the committee worked very hard to get the signalized pedestrian crossings installed on US Hwy 98 and would not support any suggestions to get rid of these pedestrian crossings. He also pointed out that the pedestrian crossing closest to the Emerald Grande affects the Stahlman interchange and is being blamed for some of the traffic jams at that intersection. He recommends changing the lighting system at this one crosswalk to the Hawk Beacon System or the Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon.

According to Mr. Perdue, FDOT did not actually fully warrant a pedestrian signal, which is currently the system they see on the road. They only warranted the Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon, which is what Councilmember Menchel is recommending. He continued that Destin has a lot of residential, commute and tourist traffic; and so one of the most important things they could do for traffic when they have a lot of different mode of transportation mixing and a lot of different out of town and in town commuters is to provide for the most consistent expectations possible. They considered the fact that US Hwy 98 is a coordinated signal system in upgrading to a full pedestrian signal. He added that the way the corridor is entirely coordinated is that the pedestrian signals are actually subjected to the corridor at large in moving traffic through Destin.

Councilmember Menchel asked if there was something they could do short term that would not cost much but would alleviate the traffic issues at that corridor.

Mr. Perdue stated that their options are limited, but they are considering every possible solution to alleviate traffic congestion at the Stahlman interchange. This intersection is not

configured in such a way that they see optimum efficiency because the Stahlman leg of that intersection is not wide enough. To see noticeable operational improvements to the queuing problem at that intersection, it would require additional turn lanes. Though the intersection would still remain at level of service "F", adding an additional turn lane at Stahlman Avenue would quite possibly help alleviate the traffic congestion in that area.

Mr. Autry noted that the intersection has a split phase signal and the angle is bad, which creates sight issues. He continued that there is no quick and easy solution. There are so much traffic going through this intersection that a quick and easy fix is not going to translate into safety. He also mentioned that they have set up a synchronized model of the intersection, and that they will run some of the ideas in terms of solutions, such as taking away pedestrians, to see if they make a difference or how they might impact the operation of that intersection.

Mr. Perdue stated that Stahlman Avenue is a local side street and they would entertain any proposal from the City as part of this process.

The Mayor suggests having two right turn only lanes, from Stahlman Avenue to US Hwy 98.

Mr. Autry pointed out there is a sign on Calhoun Avenue, which is a right turn only road to US Hwy 98, directing east bound traffic on US Hwy 98 to the Stahlman intersection. He also stated they would be limiting the far west end of anything north of US Hwy 98 the ability to go east of US Hwy 98.

Mr. Perdue noted that Stahlman Avenue is a City road, and it is certainly an idea the City could consider; however, he would recommend conducting a traffic analysis to determine its effect on the road.

Commissioner Windes stated that if the City could get the design done and have some estimates on this possibility, he would be glad to take it to the TDC and the Surtax Advisory Committee for funding.

Councilmember Morgan asked whether the Stahlman Avenue/US Hwy 98 improvements project is included in the surtax funding list, and whether a specific amount is earmarked for that project.

Mr. Autry replied that the Stahlman Avenue/US Hwy 98 improvements is an identified project; adding that once a project has been identified, it is taken to the Surtax Advisory Committee for recommendation.

Councilmember Ramswell recommends timing the pedestrian crossing on the west side of the intersection in such a way that it does not conflict with vehicles turning right from Stahlman Avenue. She also suggests looking at Zerbe Road and how it is impacting the intersection when motorists are attempting to make a left turn from that road on to Stahlman Avenue.

Mr. Perdue noted that the problem with the right turn lane and pedestrian crosswalks is not unique to this intersection. It is a classic problem which occurs at almost every intersection in the entire country, especially in urban areas. The right turns always conflict with the pedestrian movement. It really becomes an issue when the pedestrian demand reaches saturation

just like vehicular demand. The solution is not to remove pedestrians from the intersection; but to prohibit right turns. Local governments do projects such as the crosstown connector that provide more network connectivity so that trips could distribute throughout the network. He added that pedestrians would continue to cross the road even without the pedestrian crosswalks.

According to Councilmember Menchel, the only way to prevent jaywalking all along US Hwy 98 is to have some kind of barrier; be it plants or shrubberies. He stated that when the 3R project first came up, the City's Public Works and Safety Committee tried very hard to get the median hardened to put the plants in and prevent people from crossing the medians. He added this is still a viable option.

Mr. Perdue agreed that anytime there are median openings and they reduce those median openings, the corridor immediately becomes safer. However, FDOT as a standalone agency, have not been very successful with it because it is a huge public involvement campaign. They are also required by law to have a public hearing anytime they modify access to State highway system. It takes the local government having an adopted plan for what they want the corridor to look like for a project like that to be successful.

Councilmember Menchel asked if it was too late to add this option to the 3R project.

Mr. Perdue stated that it is too late because they are required to have a public hearing at least 180 days before the final design.

Councilmember Ramswell asked if making Palmetto Street one way north and Stahlman Avenue one way southwest has been suggested.

Mr. Autrey reiterated that both streets are City streets and the City has that option.

Councilmember Marler asked if the City needs to go to the process to put some plants on the medians.

According to Mr. Perdue, US Hwy 98 in Destin has very closely spaced median openings, which are opportunities for bicycles, pedestrians and cars to cross. The City can permit landscaping on the State highway system. If they install landscaping on an already constructed median, they are not modifying anybody's access. He added that if they prevent pedestrians from crossing the median locations, they are going to use the median openings.

Mr. Wood suggests they consider very carefully how much greenery to place on medians because it could create more problems than they are trying to solve. He continued that people jaywalk all the time, and their safety is at risk if they jaywalk into a median opening where there is too much greenery that motorists cannot see them.

Councilmember Menchel noted that Mr. Wood's comments brought up another problem, which is inconsistent lighting on US Hwy 98.

Councilmember Destin inquired as to a realistic timeline for completion of the 3R project.

Mr. Perdue replied the project should be completed by the end of the year.

Councilmember Destin asked if the rest of the 3R project can continue moving forward even though the proposed right-turn lane into Emerald Grande is still under negotiation.

Mr. Perdue replied affirmatively, stating that the 3R project is going to move forward as scheduled.

Councilmember Menchel wants to make sure they will have some items they could vote on at the next City Council meeting.

The City Manager noted they would obtain the answer to the funding question and bring it back. The question is if they build to a designated 2-lane on the crosstown connector, if it could impact current funding for right-of-way acquisition, and if it could impact funding previously received.

Councilmember Menchel suggests they place all of the things they discussed tonight such as, two right-hand turn lanes and no left turn lanes from Stahlman Avenue, on the next Council meeting agenda for discussion and possibly a vote.

Councilmember Destin stated he would also be willing to support an RFP to find somebody who can assist the Public Works Department in providing the Council some proposals for different options that they could pursue.

The Mayor suggests FDOT sends a representative to the next Council meeting to listen and possibly weigh in as the City Council and staff discuss some of their ideas.

Mr. Perdue addressed the funding issue by stating that the funds they have on the crosstown connector are TRIP funds. They are State funds based on the PD&E study that was done by the City and its consultant. As long as going from 4 lanes to 2 lanes is consistent with the alternative on the PD&E study, and it is consistent with the TPO's priority project, those funds would not be in jeopardy. He continued that the only thing that would jeopardize the TRIP fund is the City not having a unified voice in moving the project forward.

Councilmember Morgan asked Mr. Perdue to put his statement in writing for when the Council take a vote on whether to go forward with the crosstown connector.

Mr. Perdue noted that he had made his statement on the record at a Council meeting.

Councilmember Marler wants to make sure part of the 3R project is narrowing the travel lanes from 12 feet to 10 feet, adding bicycle lanes and widening the sidewalk.

Mr. Perdue replied affirmatively, stating that the travel lanes would be narrowed down to 10 feet wide, which should produce a traffic calming effect and slow vehicles down. There would be 4-foot wide bicycle lanes and the sidewalk would be widened whenever it is feasibly possible.

Mr. Ken Wampler spoke of the crosstown connector hoping that the Council would decide to move forward with the project. He recommends 5-laning Stahlman Avenue; with one right-turn lane, one lane going from the north to the south and a left turn lane. He also

recommends making Zerbe Street a dead end at the north end to the entrance to the Destin Community Center as well as the back part of McGuire's.

Mr. Jim Wood addressed other issues that require some attention. He stated that they need better lighting on US Hwy 98; replacement for the Marler Bridge which is nearing 50 years old; and for the Council to convey to FDOT if they want to do a flyover or something else with the Danny Wuerrful intersection.

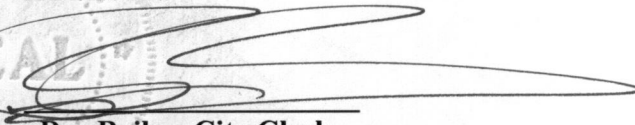
ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:35 PM.



Gary Jarvis, Mayor

ATTEST:



Rey Bailey, City Clerk