

**MINUTES
SPECIAL WORKSHOP
DESTIN CITY COUNCIL
MAY 10, 2021
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 (arrived: 5:50 PM)
Councilmember Johnny King
Councilmember Dewey Destin

Councilmember Terésa Hebert
Councilmember Prebble Ramswell

City of Destin Staff

City Manager Lance Johnson
City Clerk Rey Bailey
Code Compliance Manager Joey Forgione
Community Development Director Louis Zunguze
Engineering Assistant Joe Bodi
Land Use Attorney Kimberly Kopp (Virtual)

Deputy City Manager Webb Warren
Finance Director Krystal Strickland
City Engineer Donald Smith
IT Specialist James Lauria
City Planner Traci Goodhart
City Attorney Kyle Bauman

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Dewey Destin called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

WORKSHOP

A. Impacts of the Crosstown Connector at the Intersection of US Highway 98 and Stahlman Avenue

Mayor Pro Tem Dewey Destin asked for each Council member to give their preliminary views on the concept and actual design of the crosstown connector.

Councilmember King stated that he lives in the older portion of the city and often drives through the back roads, which he considers the current crosstown connector. He stated that keeping the roadway to two lanes would be quite advantageous to the city.

Councilmember Hebert noted seeing many out-of-town license plates as she drives or runs through Kelly and Main Streets and Airport Road; and more so between 4-6 PM. She stated she is in favor of keeping the crosstown connector at two lanes.

Councilmember Ramswell stated they have been presented with a much better design, but she still has some concern about the potential for a 4-lane expansion. However, there are different infrastructures in place beneath the curb and other areas of the road that could prevent that expansion from occurring. She recommends pursuing the idea of a linear park as she believes it would benefit the entire community. It would also add to the aesthetics of that particular section of the connector and the community as a whole.

Councilmember Destin stated that the crosstown connector would be a benefit to the city; and even though he is concern about the road turning into a raceway, it could easily be abated by putting in certain traffic control devices on that road such as 4-way stop signs and speed bumps and avoiding having safety issues right in the middle of town. He also recommends lowering the speed limit. He also stated that as they approach the campground they previously acquired, they need to seriously consider moving the right-of-way over to one side and using the rest of the long linear distance as the greenway for people to recreate. They also need to actually do a multi-modal pathway similar to what they have on 30A or in Sandestin, which they could easily incorporate into the right-of-way. He recommends bringing all these recommendations before the Council at a regular Council meeting for approval and giving directions to the designer.

Councilmember Ramswell noted that the plans show a 5-foot space on either side of the road for dedicated bike lanes, which could be used to incorporate into an entire multi-modal project.

The mayor arrived at the meeting at 5:50 PM.

At this time, Ms. Jessica Golema, Project Manager, Atkins North America, Inc., provided the following presentation to Council:

Crosstown Connector Redesign Update

- Major Design Elements Criteria
 - ❖ Facility Type – Minor Collector
 - ❖ Design Speed – 35 MPH
 - ❖ Posted Speed – 25 MPH
 - ❖ Typical Section
 - Lane Width – 11'
 - Bike Lane Width – 5'
 - Median Width – 12'
 - Sidewalk Width – 10' (6' when constrained by ROW)
 - Sidewalk Buffer – 6' (less when constrained by ROW)

Intersection Analysis – Benning Drive

- Traffic Operations Rank
 - ❖ Roundabout – LOS A
 - ❖ Signal – LOS B
 - ❖ All-way Stop – LOS C
 - ❖ Two-Way Stop – LOS E
- Safety Rank
 - ❖ Roundabout
 - ❖ All-Way Stop
 - ❖ Signal
 - ❖ Two-Way Stop
- Recommendation: All-Way Stop
 - ❖ Roundabout not recommended due to:
 - Previous Council direction
 - Additional right-of-way acquisitions
 - Additional utility relocations (overhead electric/sanitary sewer)
 - Driveway impacts

- ❖ All-way stop reduced impacts while providing for safety and still meeting an acceptable Level of Service

Note: Harbor CRA Advisory Committee recommends the city further evaluates this intersection to look at a roundabout

Intersection Analysis – Beach Drive

- Traffic Operations Rank
 - ❖ Roundabout – LOS A
 - ❖ Signal – LOS B
 - ❖ All-Way Stop – FAIL
 - ❖ Two-Way Stop – FAIL
- Safety Rank
 - ❖ Roundabout
 - ❖ All-Way Stop
 - ❖ Signal
 - ❖ Two-Way Stop
- Recommendation: Roundabout
 - ❖ Skewed geometry at this intersection is remedied by use of a roundabout rather than 4-leg configuration
 - ❖ There are right-of-way impacts associated with this option
- Current redesign cannot be easily altered to a 4-lane facility because:
 - ❖ Ponds sized to 2-lane facility – would need additional pond(s) or underdrain facilities
 - ❖ Drainage structures beneath curb would have to be moved
 - ❖ Potential new utility relocations
 - ❖ Additional right-of-way needs

Note: Any change would be expensive and requires Council approval



- ★ Project Update
- ★ Public Workshop

Ms. Marsha Hayes, Acquisition Consultant, provided the following information:

- Anticipated Right-of-Way Acquisition
 - ❖ Typically plan for 24 months on a ROW project to determine any changes along the way
 - This is on a typical FDOT project when it involves eminent domain

- ❖ This type of project where there is voluntary acquisition makes it a lot more difficult
 - There are certain factors that dictate how long a project takes
 - For voluntary acquisitions, they have spent 2-10 years acquiring properties
 - Lots of time spent negotiating or re-designing around the parcel due to property owner unwilling to sell

Councilmember Hebert asked how many more properties they are still awaiting to acquire.

Ms. Golema replied they are looking at 9 full property acquisition and a couple of temporary construction easement.

Councilmember Ramswell noted that this project has been in process for many years, whether it is for 2 lanes or 4 lanes roadway. She continued that they should have been further along in terms of looking into eminent domain and having reached out to some of the property owners.

Ms. Hayes stated they were actively in the process of acquiring the parcels until the project was put on hold for a redesign. They have been successful on acquiring and relocating 3 properties; one of which was not occupied; but there is one property owner that they have not been able to contact at all.

Councilmember Destin asked whether they would be able to incorporate the desired features to the design of the project, such as the multi-modal pathway, if successfully voted upon by the Council. Ms. Golema replied affirmatively stating that they have the necessary rights-of-way to do so.

The mayor asked what this Council could do to make sure property acquisition is done in a timely manner; adding that they received correspondence last year from willing sellers who were unsure where they stood since it was unclear to them as to what the city plans to do with the project.

According to Ms. Golema, property acquisition should restart as soon as possible; adding that they are at a point in the design that she would be able to provide Ms. Hayes a list of properties to pursue.

Councilmember Destin pointed out that the Beach Drive intersection is currently an all-way stop, and that the recommendation is to put a roundabout there because the configuration may improve or facilitate the flow of traffic. He stated they may need to reassess this portion of the design because too many roundabouts and too much facilitation of traffic may result in turning the road into a raceway which he alluded to earlier. He added that leaving it as an all-way stop would be a natural speed break and slow down the flow of traffic at this intersection.

At this time, Ms. Golema proceeded with the rest of her presentation.

Multimodal Features

➤ Multimodal Goals

- ❖ Provide a recreational amenity
- ❖ Beautify the area
- ❖ Provide a safer space for bicyclists and pedestrians

- ❖ Provide a more efficient transit route (in coordination with Okaloosa County Transit)
- Bridge the Gap
 - ❖ Circles designate ¼ radius around a park
 - Yellow Circles – Project location ¼ mile radius
 - Green Circles – Parks within ½ mile
 - Red Circle – Parks greater than ½ mile away



- Fitness Loop/Area
 - ❖ Loop around long pond approximately 1/3 mile
 - ❖ Equipment can be handicap accessible
- Art Walk
 - ❖ Display large-scale artwork
 - ❖ Rotating exhibits
 - ❖ Visiting artist program
 - ❖ Cooperation with Mattie Kelly Art Foundation
- Gathering Space
 - ❖ Picnic tables, benches
- Ensley Park (Escambia County – in the design phase) – Similar Sized Space (3.5 acres)



Councilmember Ramswell asked what type of buffering or fencing they are considering in order to separate the connector from residential areas since the entire connector at some point is very closed to residences, and whether it is something that have been discussed with those particular residences.

Ms. Golema does not believe it has been discussed with residences. She stated that most backyard already have fences; however, they are planning on vegetative buffering in these areas.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Mr. Jim Wood, a Destin resident, stated that he is a big supporter of the crosstown connector and that he likes the new plan. He is disappointed that it could take 25 years to build a road that is only a quarter of a mile long. He expressed concern that if they wait any longer, they could lose the money that was allocated for this project. He urged the Council to move forward with the project sooner rather than later.

Mr. John King, Sr., from Santa Rosa Beach, noted that he read a report several years ago that says 51 percent of the traffic on US Hwy 98 was thru traffic. He continued that the 4-laning of Hwy 331, resurfacing of Hwy 20 and 6-laning of US Hwy 98 make it easier and convenient for motorist to go thru Destin. The crosstown connector would make it easier for Destin residents to move around town.

Mr. Shane Moody, President and CEO of the Destin Chamber of Commerce, expressed that the Chambers has been supportive of the crosstown connector project for several years, and that he is glad to hear the positivity of tonight's comments from the Council members about this project. He continued that he likes the park ideas. He did not see parking areas for the park, and so it is a pedestrian park, which does not add more cars to the road. He also stated that the Destin High School will be on the same connector road. There will be about 300 children going to school, and at

least 200 more cars on that road. They need to be able to get them through this road easily. He urged the Council to move forward with this project sooner rather than later.

Mr. Cyron Marler, Destin resident and former Council member, stated that this project has been under discussion since he was first elected to Council in 2000, and that they need to move forward with it now. Technically, they already have a crosstown connector, and some considers it an "alternate US Hwy 98." With regards to the 4-laning of this road, his experience dictates that anything the present Council does now can be reversed by future Council. He urged the Council to move forward with this project now.

Councilmember Ramswell noted that a Stahlman Avenue Intersection Work Session presentation was included in the report. She asked if they should address that issue tonight.

Councilmember Destin stated they have discussed this issue in great detail during the past meeting. They really do not have solutions yet, and that they probably would not come up with a solution until the study is completed to determine how much money they have to spend.

Community Development Director Louis Zunguze explained they provided the information just to summarize all the studies that have taken place so far, and to get Council's thoughts on whether additional studies are necessary or if they just want staff to come up with suggested solutions.

According to the City Manager, staff would be bringing back this item at the next Council meeting to add acquisitions back on to this contract. Also, the City Engineer will be making a presentation to the Transportation Planning Organization to find out if there is future funding available for the Stahlman/US Hwy 98 intersection.

Mr. Moody noted that Okaloosa County previously went to the Chambers asking them to support the Half-Cent Sales Tax for infrastructure improvements and brought the Chambers a list of projects to be funded by it. The list showed that money from the Half-Cent Sales Tax from the County level was going to be used to pay for the Stahlman/US Hwy 98 intersection improvements. He continued that this item as well as improvements to Commons Drive are the things that drove the Chambers to provide their support for the Half-Cent Sales Tax.

ADJOURNMENT

Having no further business at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 6:35 PM.



Gary Jarvis, Mayor

ATTEST:



Rey Bailey, City Clerk