Theme 5

Greenways

Theme 5. Connect centers with greenways, open spaces, parks, and alternative transportation amenities.

This theme addresses the critical spaces between centers and neighborhoods. Centers cannot exist in isolation. Connections let people move easily between their jobs, homes and recreation activities and strengthen sense of place. They bring the individual parts of the community into a more coherent and workable whole.

People typically think of connections as building new roads or expanding roadway capacity. New growth requires an enhanced system of roadways. The Transporation Plan section of this document identifies the new links necessary to accommodate increased auto trips. This theme, however, explores opportunities to increase mobility through alternative means, such as trails, bike paths, pedestrian-oriented environments, human-scale design, and transit access.

Issue: Scattered, uncoordinated growth fragments greenway and open space systems.

Policy: Promote a coordinated system of linked open spaces, parks, trails and greenways throughout Southwest Jacksonville.

Implementation Options:

Option: Promote greenway connections

This strategy envisions a connection of green spaces. The district already has captured major swaths of preserved open space through the Preservation Project. Individual developments should take advantage of these amenities with links to collective open spaces.

Under this option, the City would actively promote the use of conservation planned communities adjacent to conservation and recreation lands and the design of pathways, trails and other physical connections from individual development sites to open space assets.

Issue: The spread of low-density growth and strip commercial activity strains existing roadways and detracts from the visual character of area streets.

Policy: Reduce the visual clutter of streets.

Implementation Options:

Many of the physical signs of strip commercial growth are readily evident along the Southwest's major corridors. Commercial streets, such as Blanding Boulevard, 103rd Street, and Roosevelt Boulevard, feature large surface parking lots, buildings set back far from the street, unconnected uses strung along the roadway, and limited landscaping. The physical layout of strip commercial fails on two dimensions. Streets lined with commercial uses often function poorly because of heavy, stop-and-go traffic. They are very unfriendly for people on bike or foot, posing many obstacles to their safe travel.

Strip commercial development also drains streets of their visual character, creating a clutter of parking lots, driveways, and signs.

Streets are a critical part of any community public space. Safe, attractive streets invite social interaction, stimulate business growth and define neighborhoods. These options would focus on reclaiming roads from generic strip commercial activity, auto-dominated design, physical decline and visual blight, turning them instead into active public spaces that people can embrace.

Strip commercial development

Sketch of 103rd corridor after improvements
Source: *103rd Street Corridor Improvement Strategy*

Option 1: Reduce strip growth over time in the Traditional Building and Suburban Areas

This option would recommend slowly redesigning district corridors through the use of access management practices. Access management controls the flow of traffic between the road and surrounding land uses.

Examples of measures to improve the function and safety of auto-based commercial streets include:

- driveway consolidation
- intersection bulb-outs
- medians
- shared driveways

Option 2: Create signature streets in the Traditional Building, Suburban, and Rural/Conservation Areas

The City has existing street design guidelines that identify minimum design standards for streets. This strategy recommends enhancing minimum standards with additional design elements that reflect and strengthen the unique character of particular areas in the Southwest. Based on public involvement, residents tend to favor streets with:

- medians
- bike lanes
- lighting
- landscaping
- street trees

Bike lanes, widened sidewalks, historic lighting, street trees and landscaping, relocation of existing overhead utilities, and paved cross-walks and signalized intersections to accommodate people on foot, help create a pedestrian friendly environment. Examples of possible "Main Street" corridors include San Juan Avenue near Blanding Boulevard and Wilson Boulevard near Blanding Boulevard.

Option 3: Transform unsightly corridors in the Traditional Building and Suburban Areas

This option would recommend developing additional improvement strategies for distressed corridors, such as Roosevelt Boulevard from Edgewood to Clay County, Blanding Boulevard, 103rd Street, and Normandy Boulevard east of Chaffee Road. Strategies may include:

- landscaping and street trees
- gateways and signs
- buffers for adjoining residential areas
- pedestrian access
- secondary street connections

This option would also incorporate the efforts of community stakeholders who studied the 103rd corridor from Old Middleburg Road North to the proposed intersection of Branan Field-Chaffee Road. The 103rd Street report embraces the vision of a more urban, multi-model corridor with connected open spaces, streetscape, street lighting, landscape medians, street trees, sidewalks, access management strategies, gateways features linked to the Cecil Commerce Center, and design guidelines for buildings. The intersection of 103rd/Old Middleburg/Shindler Drive provides the major activity center focus of the corridor.

Option 4: Create more activity at intersections

Streets with the same intensity of development along the roadway have few transitions between uses, giving a generic quality to the landscape. This option would recommend creating more visual interest by varying the intensity of development along corridors over time. The City can accomplish this by adding points of concentrated activity (increasing density) at major intersections, while reducing or maintaining the intensity of uses along the corridor between intersections. Increased density at intersections also allows for more pedestrian or transit access.

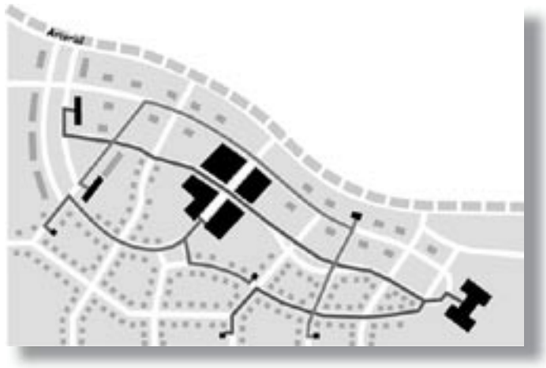
Option 5: Encourage multiple connections

This option would recommend developing guidelines to ensure that new developments physically connect to their surroundings. Connectivity requirements can include:

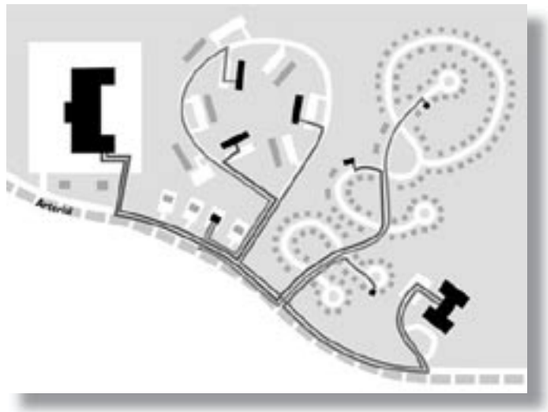
- making buildings orient to streets that are easily accessible from adjacent neighborhoods
- creating a new "shopping street" with sidewalks and pedestrian amenities (e.g., weather protection, seating, lights, etc.) inside commercial developments
- adding transit-friendly features, such as ground-floor retail, seating areas, and pedestrian walkways, in areas served by transit
- connecting to the existing street network to form a grid

The East/Southwest Rapid Transit Corridor Study focuses on a 35-mile corridor connecting downtown Jacksonville with northern Clay County, Argyle/NAS, Ortega, Avondale, Riverside, Arlington, Mayport and Jacksonville Beach communities. The corridor would link major employment centers, Naval installations and commercial destinations and many transit-dependent households. The East/Southwest Corridor study began in 2002 and has yet to identify preferred route concepts. The corridor should, however, include some of Southwest Jacksonville's major strategic spots, including the historic intown neighborhoods and Argyle area. To facilitate future transit use, Town Centers in these areas should stress easy pedestrian access, including sidewalks, shelters, and street furniture.

Traditional Street Grid



Conventional Street Layout



A traditional network of streets (top) allows for multiple connections, which means less driving and cars dispersed over a wider area.
Source: www.cnu.org

Option 6: Modify the box

One of the most visually limiting features of the commercial corridor is a generic big-box retail store set within a large surface parking lot. This option would urge retailers to tailor building designs and site layout to the surrounding context.

The City of Jacksonville has existing examples of big box retailers with modified building exteriors that reflect additional architectural character. Under this option, the City would continue to promote refined, human-scaled commercial architecture, but would also promote innovative site planning design. As an example, retail stores would maintain a required continuous street frontage with surface parking at the rear of the site. Within new multi-use town center sites, multiple retailers would line the edges of a street corner.

Option 7: Fill in shopping plazas

The Southwest Planning District has a number of underused, older shopping centers, which often leave empty parking lots and deteriorated building facades in their wake. This option would recommend turning an overlooked existing commercial space into vibrant new mixed use centers that can anchor community redevelopment.

Options for retrofitting conventional shopping plazas include:

- adding a public gathering space
- introducing a compatible residential use, such as lofts, apartments or townhomes
- increasing pedestrian connections within the site and between the site and surrounding areas
- "filling in" corners of large parking lots with new shops, restaurants, and other people-generating activity
- continuing the street grid through the site to create secondary commercial streets