

Memorandum



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To: Jim Olson, City of Ashland
From: Tom Litster, Otak
Copies: Project Management Team
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Subject: Will Dodge Way — White Paper
Project No.: 15702: City of Ashland Transportation System Plan Update

Direction to the Planning Commission and Transportation Commission

Five sets of white papers are being produced to present information on tools, opportunities, and potential strategies that could help Ashland become a nationwide leader as a green transportation community. Each white paper will present general information regarding a topic and then provide ideas on where and how that tool, strategy, and/or policy could be used within Ashland.

You will have the opportunity to review the content of each white paper and share your thoughts, concerns, questions, and ideas in a joint Planning Commission/Transportation Commission meeting. Based on discussions at the meeting, the material in the white paper will be: 1) Revised and incorporated into the alternatives analysis for the draft TSP; or 2) Eliminated from consideration and excluded from the alternatives analysis. The overall intent of the white paper series is to explore opportunities for Ashland and increase the opportunities to discuss the many possibilities for Ashland.

Introduction

Will Dodge Way, between Pioneer Street and 2nd Avenue, is an Ashland example of the urbanism of the downtown alleyway. The white paper on Shared Streets and Alleyways identified it as an opportunity to undertake a commercial alley retrofit. Will Dodge Way is also identified in the TSP scope of work as an area of interest for enhanced pedestrian and bicycle access to downtown. The purpose of this white paper is to present potential enhancements for Will Dodge Way. Input from the various project stakeholders will determine whether or not enhancing Will Dodge Way is pursued. The initial general consensus from the consultant project team, is Will Dodge Way has the potential to be a pedestrian boulevard; however, due to restricted sight distances on approach to many of the cross streets, it is not ideal as a bicycle-way or bicycle boulevard.

Will Dodge Way Today

Running parallel to E. Main Street and Lithia Way, Will Dodge Way is already considered the front door address for some retail businesses and housing. For other businesses, whose addresses are on E. Main Street and Lithia Way, breezeways and formal rear entrances link the pedestrian movements along Will Dodge Way to the sidewalks of the streets. The alley also provides for parking near building entrances, access to parking lots and many of the traditional service functions of an alley.

Will Dodge Way meets several of character criteria developed in the Shared Streets and Alleyways White Paper. It has proximity to commercial establishments, storefronts that face the alley, light- and low-speed traffic conditions, relatively good pavement conditions, few obstructions to pedestrian or bicycle through movements, and it seems reasonably clean and well-maintained. It is already a useful place in downtown and can provide some relief for any pedestrian congestion that may occur on the main shopping streets.

Intersections with the side streets of Pioneer Place, N. 1st Street and N. 2nd Street provide short sight distances when approaching from the alleyway. In other words, the corners are blind. That suggests the slower movement of pedestrians is the most amenable use of Will Dodge Way. However, that doesn't imply that bike or vehicle use should be precluded. The storefronts with display windows, entrances, short-term parking, and existing levels of pedestrian activity provide good natural surveillance for segments of the alley. An important consideration moving forward is the potential need for Will Dodge Way to continue to serve delivery vehicles; this particularly true given recent conversations regarding a potential road diet on E Main Street through downtown.

The Will Dodge Way Enhancements

A comprehensive strategy to enhance Will Dodge Way should focus on the "Ps" (listed below) that can be learned from other cities that have transformed their downtown alleys.

Pilot Your Project. Pull it out of normal street reconstruction projects and don't try to create city-wide standards and programs right away. This will allow you the greatest latitude in addressing specific concerns and capturing unique opportunities.

People Power. Don't make it just a city project. Try to make it a people project that engages the businesses and other key downtown stakeholders.

Promote, Promote, Promote. Set forth a clear statement of objectives and benefits. If it involves anything new and potentially complex, such as Green Alleys as part of an innovative stormwater

management program, use the community outreach process and City website to help demystify the topic.

Program it. Once the pilot project is complete and winning public confidence in its benefits, develop a program to identify and address similar opportunities throughout the city.

With those overall strategies in mind, the City might identify some specific physical improvements and develop preliminary plans and budgetary costs for each bundle of improvements. Based on plans and costs, funding sources can be sought through some of the potential funding programs suggested in the Funding Programs white paper or through state or federal grant programs focused on pedestrian facility and streetscape improvements.

Improved Security

Will Dodge Way will make its greatest contribution to downtown Ashland by being an attractive and useable place both night and day. Security may come up as one of the biggest concerns surrounding an intensification of use or investment of monies assuming more use. Make sure that lighting is even and continuous throughout the alleyway and work to eliminate potential hiding places created by service utilities, loading facilities, or architectural elements of buildings. Maintain a clean and litter free environment.

If citizen concerns are high, consider doing a full Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED) analysis. CPTED is an approach to crime prevention based on the theory that decisions about the design and use of the built environment can reduce the fear and incidence of crime. Applicable guidelines are:

Natural Surveillance. “See and be seen” is the overall goal of natural surveillance. Create plenty of opportunities to observe the space around them. Visibility will discourage potential illegitimate activities and offenders. Landscaping and lighting play important roles.

Territorial Reinforcement. Create clearly visible boundaries between public and private space. This creates a strong sense of ownership and extends the ‘sphere of influence’ in ways that discourage intrusions and keep activities within the intended spaces. Designated parking, paving treatments, landscaping, and signage are examples of design elements for territory.

Natural Access Control. Create attractive ‘gateways’ at each intersection with the side streets to announce and subtly control the movements and access into this uniquely public and private space. This helps distinguish between legitimate access and intrusion. Access control is most effective in conjunction with natural surveillance. Walkways, fencing, landscaping, lighting, and signage are examples of design measures for access control.

Improve the Pedestrian Environment

Pedestrian amenities might include special pavers, bollards, pedestrian-scale lighting as either stand-alone fixtures or exterior architectural lighting, hanging baskets and foundation planters, quality street furniture, and working with building owners to find effective screening of trash enclosures. Make sure that any drainage problems are corrected so that standing water does not discourage or impede walking.

A Green Alley

Will Dodge Way is part of Ashland's transportation infrastructure. Given the high interest in establishing a Green Streets program, consideration should be given to extending that to include Green Alleys. Will Dodge Way could be a good pilot project, assessing the feasibility and functional compatibility of introducing stormwater treatments such as permeable paving and a variety of bio-retention facilities. As with Green Streets, these facilities are not transportation facilities so much as they are stormwater facilities and should be coordinated with any updates of the stormwater management master plan.

Fill in the Gaps

Encourage new development to fill in some of the gaps between the existing buildings. As the redevelopment occurs, the uses and building design should meet at least the following objectives:

- Maintain a mix of uses with one or more entrances onto Will Dodge Way, including residential. Residences provide the best 24/7 natural surveillance and "eyes on the street" security.
- Encourage the use of breezeways to maintain the sense of inter-connection between the alleyway and the sidewalks and storefronts of E. Main Street and Lithia Way.
- Minimize the amount of blank walls along the alleyway.
- Develop a comprehensive exterior lighting style and provide incentives for outdoor planters and seating areas.

Bibliography and References

The white paper on Shared Streets and Alleyways provided a list of references along with specific examples of alley redesign projects from four cities. Those references and examples provide useful ideas and guidance for a potential remaking of Will Dodge Way.