

**TMAPC Public Hearing Staff Report**

**October 17, 2018**

**CPA-75, Walkability Analysis / Amendment to the Downtown Area Master Plan**

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**Item:** Amendment to the Downtown Area Master Plan to include policy direction for providing appropriate pedestrian facilities in downtown Tulsa based on the Tulsa Oklahoma Downtown Walkability Analysis performed by Speck & Associates LLC with Nelson Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc.

**Background:** This item was presented and discussed at a TMAPC work session on September 5, 2018. The concepts within the Walkability Analysis are grounded in policy established in the Downtown Area Master Plan. The geographic boundary for this Analysis is the inner dispersal loop (IDL) which creates a ring of interstate highways around downtown Tulsa. Support for this analysis came from individuals, authorities, boards and commissions of the City, corporate and philanthropic partners, downtown property owners and institutions. Spurred by Jeff Scott, a former chairman of the DCC, many stakeholders and citizens were engaged through outreach and presentations during the time the Analysis was being developed.

Update for October 17, 2018 TMAPC Hearing: Following presentation and discussion of this item at the October 5, 2018 hearing, staff amended pages 208-210 of the Walkability Analysis (see attached). The changes consist of removal of specific references to two downtown development projects. While the graphics and text related to these projects was removed, the substance of this section is still valid and reflected in the remaining narrative. The recommendation presented by the author for a stronger regulatory structure to ensure better design solutions for Tulsa's downtown, arguably our most walkable neighborhood, is sufficiently supported by this section of the report.

**Downtown Area Master Plan:** The Downtown Area Master Plan is an action plan focused on revitalization. The stated mission of this policy document addresses three major targets:

- Revitalize the downtown
- Connect it to the Tulsa River Parks system
- Initiate rail transit extending outward from the downtown to the beginnings of future corridors serving the city and the region.

The plan identifies the goal of creating an active and vital 24-hour neighborhood as a key opportunity. The primary focus of the plan states:

*“The area’s most important to the revitalization of downtown are the initiatives to attract a population to activate it between the hours of 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m. as well as weekends. A 24/7 downtown will also address the amenities to increase convenience and quality of life. The principal foci include residences, entertainment, conventions and visitors. All area enhanced by connecting the downtown to its region by multiple modes of transportation.”*

With this as a guide, the Analysis offers a means of creating an environment that promotes walking by addressing the key causes:

- A safe walk
- A useful walk
- A comfortable and interesting walk

It addresses the way people use our street network – in vehicles, on foot or on bicycles or other alternative modes of transportation. Allowing the public realm to offer shared space to accomplish many of the daily activities of city life means more “eyes on the street,” more efficient use of public resources and a better way to experience downtown from the vantage of a pedestrian instead of a car driver or passenger. The Analysis encourages the extension of indoor activities and uses into the public realm of the sidewalk and right of way. It also encourages the City to experiment and pilot changes such as removing signals in favor of stop signs, increasing availability of on-street parking, proper crosswalks and alleys and improving the public realm with lighting, landscaping, sidewalk cafes and street furnishings.

The document includes a traffic analysis methodology and technical appendices consisting of the traffic studies and engineering reviews used to formulate recommendations for changes it recommends.

**Implementation:** The Analysis will be implemented through capital projects directed by the City and in conjunction with the Downtown Coordinating Council (DCC). While the Analysis provides a fairly detailed review of street segments within the IDL, recommendations will require additional engineering and design in order to best address existing conditions, regulatory constraints, and adopted standards.

**Staff recommendation:** Adopt the Walkability Analysis, with amended “One-Page Zoning Code Overlay” section, as an amendment to the Downtown Area Master Plan.

## The One-Page Zoning Code Overlay

It is discouraging, while completing a walkability study, to witness developments coming to a downtown that one can be certain to make it less walkable. In the case of Tulsa, there is mostly good news. The three largest mixed-use developments currently underway – The Annex, Santa Fe, and The View – are all by-and-large excellent in the way they treat their surrounding streets. It is clear that their developers and architects are fully up to date on what makes a good urban building.

The number one rule of good urban design—literally “Rule #1” in such classic books as *City Comforts*, published 1995—*Build to The Sidewalk*: never put a building behind its parking lot. Front parking lots result in streets that lack spatial definition, sidewalks crossed by driveways, and a general urban environment that communicates the message that cars come first. It is a mistake that few downtowns allow any more.

Parking structures directly lining sidewalks is an error that most cities have stopped making, but Tulsa lacks a mechanism to prevent it. With a slight change to downtown zoning codes, the City could have confidence that private construction would not undermine public success. There has been talk for some time of enacting a Downtown Zoning Code Overlay to solve this problem, but there is justly fear of the potentially lengthy and fraught political process that such an effort would entail. There is always opposition, and arcane zoning codes are hard to sell in the face of such opposition, since they can be hard to understand.

For that reason, we recommend short-circuiting this process by enacting an exceedingly simple code, one that will fit on a single page. The perfect is the enemy of the good, and a code that gets every detail right suffers the disadvantage of being difficult to communicate, promulgate, and promote. A one-page code can start as a leaflet, become a poster, and, through widespread exposure, generate enough support to overcome opposition by those who resist change.

Also important to the success of such a code is that it is not be required everywhere. While all of downtown would seem to deserve a more urban standard of architecture and site planning than the rest of the city, the fact remains that many parts of downtown will not attract significant pedestrian activity for many years. The Networks of Walkability already established acknowledge this circumstance and identify those streets in the downtown which can be expected to attract foot traffic if maintained or developed in the proper manner. Those Networks – both Primary and Secondary – comprise the appropriate area to which the Downtown Zoning Code Overlay should be applied.

Under such a regime, a national chain like Burger King wishing to locate in the downtown would be given a choice. If they want to build in an urban manner, with no front parking lot or drive-through, they can select a site along the Networks of Walkability. If they instead wish to build a suburban-style facility, they can do so in downtown’s less walkable areas.

Finally, it is worth repeating that being excluded from the Networks of Walkability is not a permanent condition, and streets can opt in by majority vote at any time. In that way, the reach of this proposed Overlay can expand without the need for a larger political process.

The proposed Overlay is presented here. One can imagine it laid out by a graphic designer to be reproduced as a leaflet, poster, and web page.

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