



Downtown's Next Step Focus Group
August 1, 2024

The following discussion was held by the Downtown's Next Step Focus Group. The 9 members of the focus group were selected based on their ability to represent the following: downtown business owners, County residents, bicycle commuters, people living with a disability, racial and ethnic minority groups, people both in favor and against the project, and a wide age range. City staff comments and responses are *italicized*.

GENERAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- **Question:** Does the design dedicate a designated space to drop-off people who need more time?
Answer: *Loading zones can be used for that purpose, although that creates complications if the loading zone is already in use.*
- **Question:** How many curbside loading zones are there currently per block?
Answer: *There are currently 2-3 loading zones on every block.*
- **Question:** How much of the overall plan is being driven by parking?
Answer: *It's a balance. Some of the main goals of the project are to improve pedestrian safety, and create space and economic vitality for downtown businesses. Impact to parking is a significant concern for people. The City is trying to achieve a balance.*
- **Question:** I don't understand how much is up for discussion. In the survey response, outdoor patios were the number one priority for design, and I don't see outdoor patios represented in the design proposal.
Answer: *The patio details are dependent on all the other elements and how those are prioritized (such as curb extensions and widened sidewalks).*
Discussion: The reason we are having this discussion is because a lot of us disagree with losing parking.
Discussion: That is not the reason why everyone is participating in this discussion.
Discussion: It is impossible to make everyone happy with a project of this magnitude.

LOCATION OF ADA SPACES

- **Question:** Are 2 ADA-spaces sufficient for this zone (6th Street to 8th Street)?
Answer: *2 ADA spaces are the minimum requirement.*

- Question:** Are any of the existing ADA spaces PROWAG compliant?
Answer: *We haven't analyzed the compliance of the spaces on the cross streets. In working with the Southwest Center for Independence, we know that existing spaces aren't ideal for loading and unloading mobility devices.*
- Question:** The ADA is a requirement, so why are we spending time on that?
Answer: *We have some flexibility about whether the ADA spaces are on Main or in the block perimeter.*
- Question:** Is there an advantage or disadvantage to moving the ADA spaces to side streets?
Answer: *The disadvantage is that it may not meet the accessibility needs of the community, but the advantage is that opens more parking spaces on Main.*
- The proposal for location and number of ADA spaces sounds fine. We need to be mindful and work towards compliance with ADA. I like the idea of providing good accessible parking and would prefer to eliminate amenities that take away parking spaces.
- Retailers want more parking and fewer loading zones would be a way to give more parking spaces
- Not all retailers think there is a parking problem.
- I agree with the support for ADA spaces on Main. It's in the best interest of the community.
- We spend a lot of time on the exceptions (people who need ADA facilities and the small number of pedestrians hit by a car), and we're going to change all of Main Avenue for these small number of outliers. It's all overkill.
- I agree with the pedestrian accident issue. We shouldn't let that drive the decision for Main Avenue.
- But what would be the right number of pedestrian accidents? We should be aiming for zero pedestrian accidents.
- Even one accident and one hospitalization is a lot of economic impact. Cars are bigger, speeds are high. I fully support traffic calming and reducing pedestrian and vehicle injuries to as close to zero as possible.

LOADING ZONE SIZE AND NUMBER

- As a business owner, I've fought with the City on being able to unload in the alley. My delivery semis are big. If we eliminate loading zones in front to 1-2 per block, will we be allowed to use the alley without a hassle from the City? We can't unload our trucks at the ends of the blocks and we are located in the center of the block. It's our preference to unload inventory in the back. Eliminating one loading zone on each block won't hurt anyone. I'm advocating for two per block, one on each side.
- There does need to be some solution for businesses that don't have alley access. Deliveries can get backed up. I'm worried the 10-foot wide center turn lane as proposed isn't wide enough.
- I have a picture of a delivery driver parked in the center turn lane who advocated to keep the center turn lane at 12 feet. Two feet less will leave delivery drivers standing in the traffic

lane. We need to provide safety for people. Drivers don't pay attention while they're driving. Alley delivery should be allowed and is a mild inconvenience.

- I agree that the safety conversation has to include delivery drivers and they should be accommodated. Delivery trucks make it work in every town in the country. Designing with them in mind is important, but also one or two per block is plenty.
- I'm in favor of keeping a loading zone center turn lane 12 feet wide.
- I like the idea of having a curbside loading zone turned to parallel parking. Loading zones could have other uses and be flexible to add four parking spaces in the summer.
- My business has more deliveries in the summer than winter. I don't think you can take the loading zones out in the summer because you need them as much in the summer as the winter.
- If they tried flexible loading zones and it doesn't work, it would be an easy treatment to go grind up paint and return.
- Loading zones are a safe haven for bicyclists. I've seen cyclists wait for the light to change in the loading zone.
- The loading zones could be turned to parking every day at 6 pm.

WIDTH OF SIDEWALK AND TRAVEL LANE

- **Question:** How wide are the sidewalks now and how wide will they be?
Answer: *Sidewalks are 12 feet now, and would go to a total of 17 feet wide.*
- **Question:** Is it against the law to use the sidewalk to serve bump outs in the current arrangement?
Answer: *No. You just have to maintain the appropriate amount of right-of-way and not impede the flow of pedestrian traffic.*
- **Question:** How much more sidewalk space do you need to do utilities upgrades and still keep the historic look of downtown, keep additional restaurant spacing, and not disrupt merchants? Is utilities improvements the reason for widening of sidewalk?
Answer: *Utilities improvements are not the reason for widening the sidewalk and the width of the sidewalk is not a determining factor in making utility improvements.*
- **Question:** have really strong opinions on the safety of Main Avenue and think it's safer now than the proposal will make it. The biggest thing that happened when we went from 4 to 3 lanes is to create a safe zone between parking and the travel lane. Why would we screw up a safe situation?
Answer: *Just because there is space does not mean it's safer. The painted white line between the travel lane and a parked car's door does not prohibit cars from hitting people, and it is the high speed we want to control because it leads to more serious crashes.*
- My main reason for being here and my most deeply held opinion is that we need to prioritize more outdoor seating. I hold that perspective because after pandemic, my business was able to add 4 outdoor tables through the bump out program, and my business doubled. Because there's such a paucity of people downtown, people wouldn't stop in if there was no

place to sit. This design proposes an additional 5 feet, but removes the 10 feet of bump out space I currently have. If you give me half of the proposed 5 feet for bistro seating and the rest goes to sidewalk, I get a loss of space to use for outside seating. Widening the sidewalks takes out the flexibility we have with the bump out program. The widened sidewalks locks us in to something that's not ideal for my business. Amenity space location may be convenient for design, but it's not necessarily where people want to be.

- From the restaurant owner perspective, only 10% of our seating is in an outdoor bump out, but it accounts for 20% of sales. It was essential during Covid, and has remained twice as popular as our indoor seating. With the widened sidewalks, our bistro space area will shrink a bit. Outdoor dining is very popular. There's something that people really love about sitting on Main.
- I'm concerned about people's safety. 30% of our business is visitors that are renting bikes and navigating through downtown for the first time, trying to access the Animas River Trail.
- The point of the proposal is to put outside dining against building, and not in the street.
- I have seen the City make dumb moves historically. I subscribe to the Durango Herald and there are a lot of comments about the need for a Parking Garage.
- I didn't know about available parking supply (example it's \$5 per day or \$30 per month to park at the Transit Center). In addition to this project, I recommend a supplemental move to market existing parking supply and make people aware of what's available.
- The Transit Center lot would be best used to park employees. 50% of my customers are 65 and older and need to be able to park closer. I don't let my employees park on Main. A lot of this could be solved by better marketing. The City needs to offer some kind of compromise to provide parking for employees and improve signage.
- It is the City's responsibility to provide safe roads and parking. Parking on the avenues shouldn't be included in available downtown parking counts.
- Regarding wider sidewalks and bistro spaces, what is most charming is that you want to be able to walk downtown and enjoy amenities.
- On a micro level for my business, widened sidewalks will eliminate the bump out program and will hurt my business.
- The bump out program is temporary and permitted and you only use it seasonally. It could be a flexible space so that when you need it, you can use it. We could continue bump out program in certain locations in addition to widening sidewalks.
- Certain businesses would lose out on space with widened sidewalks when compared to the bump out program.
- As a merchant, I've asked the City to remove benches because I didn't like bums. There are areas that could be open spaces and controlled areas for seating downtown. We used to have those spaces until the bums got to be too much.
- I don't see speeding as an issue.
- During Covid, people were racing; we are three years past and we don't see fast traffic as much anymore.
- I respectfully disagree that there are no fast cars. I recently witnessed bike loud trucks and speeding cars while sitting outside at Magpie's. Speeding definitely exists.

- Regarding sidewalk width. Our business has installed a public green space with no commerce associated, and there are people in it from dawn to dusk all day. Right now, the pedestrian experience is very poor downtown and the downtown experience is great despite the current width of our sidewalks. I'm disappointed that only 5 feet is proposed, but even that amount would help tourists and locals have a place to hang out downtown and improve the experience of being downtown. You could have an experience where being downtown is so pleasant you just want to stay down there. I saw a benefit to my business when people could stop and "Eddy out" of sidewalk traffic into the bump out. Currently the sidewalk is fast moving and tight and you have to walk among other people. Sitting down and catching your breath means you'll spend more money. I'm entirely in favor of widest sidewalks that we can fit.

NUMBER OF TREES AND LOCATION

- **Question:** Would this design place trees in the middle of the sidewalk?
Answer: *New trees will be closer to the curb or in curb extensions. Existing trees will be in the middle of the sidewalk.*
- I'm always in favor of more trees, especially in the concrete island of downtown. Maintenance of the trees is critical. I've seen a lot of neglected trees that die if they aren't well maintained.
- The city has to maintain the trees.
- The city currently doesn't maintain flowers or empty tree wells. City can't maintain what they already have. Add rounded bench seating around the trees. Vagrants chop down the trees that the city plants. Put grates around them with seating so they can't do that.
- I'd suggest having the trees offset from the curb to help with shading the curb extension instead of casting shade into the street. Downtown is hot so the more the better!

CURB EXTENSIONS AND PARKING SPACE

- Curb extensions are the bulk of the project. Could turn red zones into curb extensions for a lot of benefits. The basic idea is great for downtown. The only major downside I see is business interruption during construction and there are ways to address that.
- I like the idea of curb extensions. It slows turning traffic and creates an opportunity for more trees.
- I understand the value of having a rounded curve. I would like to see us making those smaller for large truck turning movements. I would like to not have large amenity spaces because of impact to parking. Don't ignore the fact that county residents also use downtown. I would like to see the curb extensions minimized in the design.
- It seems like a 'we'll take this, but give you this' conversation. Curb extensions won't create an equivalent amount of outdoor seating.
- Loading zone space is important for safety. In the total scheme, it would be wonderful for everyone to have everything that makes their business thrive. The biggest reason I oppose the current plan is safety. Our safety has gotten so much better and people are so much safer. The 3.5 feet between travel lane and car door is really the most important thing to maintain.

WRAP UP CLOSING STATEMENTS:

- One of my main concerns that we haven't spoken about is impact to businesses during construction. I strongly encourage the city to have more concrete answers than you currently do regarding construction impacts. I'm in favor of the project. Having real answers about the construction phase will make you more successful.
- I don't have a business downtown. I've lived in the county 45 years and patronize a lot of downtown businesses. We've got a parking lot at work so I don't have an issue there but I do have parking issues downtown and I'm a person who has decided not to stop downtown because of parking. City needs to strike a balance. The City needs to get rid of bump outs because they're not safe and they are a hodge podge of things. They need to find what works best for most of people. There needs to be an emphasis on safety and maintaining the vitality of downtown. There has to be a balance and everyone's situation is different.
- I'm newer to the city (2 years) and one of the reasons we decided to move here was because of the wonderful downtown and businesses. Having small children and my mother who lives with me being visually impaired, the fewer cars the better. I'm a nervous driver and I avoid driving into town because there is a lot of pedestrian activity. The city is extremely progressive in its values and its concern for its citizens. I love the way the city treats its people and I think that safety and independent businesses is unique. I strongly believe eliminating cars in the downtown as much as possible is the best environment for a wide range of people and I will support achieving that however it looks.
- We've never talked about what it costs or done a cost benefit analysis. Why are we doing this? Could we do certain aspects, which are safety and enhancements that the businesses appreciate? Come on people, do we really need all of this? Please do not dismiss the parking issue. Some of this is solving problems that don't exist.
- I see why the city wants to do these things. I think there are other ways to find open spaces versus change downtown. I want to keep the historic value of downtown and add more benches. We don't want to look like Denver and Boulder. I see the point of more green spaces and bump out but I think there's a way to come to compromise without widening sidewalks and being a cookie cutter downtown.
- Recognizing all of our common ground, I think we all want to see everyone's businesses succeed and flourish. I think this project will do that. I'm in support of it. Making the downtown more enjoyable and adding more amenities and more trees is more important than maintaining 60 feet of asphalt and concrete. Sometimes doing things for sake of beauty and enjoyment is worth it.
- Put benches back on sidewalks before moving forward with this project to see what happens. I'd love to see more bicycle police downtown that could monitor people loitering. Downtown has already become safer by going to three lanes. Maintain the safe space between travel lane and parked cars. Our older and more obese population needs that space. The city keeps taking away our parking spaces and not adding them back anywhere. I'm also concerned about construction impacts.
- Overall I support the project. The design represents a compromise already. I read all 27 pages of the survey comments and I'm amazed at the variety of comments. A lot of comments request a pedestrian mall and a lot of comments mention leaving it alone. This

design as proposed fits the needs of a lot of people and is already a compromise. It's a more permanent solution to the bump outs, which do look a little hodge podge. Adding a nice coherent design throughout would tie in more trees and historical buildings and will make it feel more comfortable all around. It's a great opportunity to improve maintenance and utilities to avoid unexpected shut downs. Engineers designing this must have really good opinions, so trusting the people that make their living designing spaces is good idea.

- I appreciate you guys and I think we achieved our commitment of listening to each other. This has been a good experience. I can see everyone's perspective. I support the project. My recommendation would be to consider a flexible solution. I agree bump outs are hodge podge, but I have appreciated the fact that they allow us to have the space when we need it and it can go away when we don't. Where is the possibility for flexible solutions that we aren't locked into year round?