

# Planning Commission



## Agenda for the Thursday, August 19, 2021, Study Session

*Members of the Planning Commission*

Dr. Christine Crawford

*Chair*

Bob Bigger

Bob Clark

JoAnn McKie, Vice Chair

Leonard Carter, Jr.

Timothy V. Key

Larry Watts

*CITIZEN ASSISTANCE: Individuals requiring special assistance or a sign interpreter to participate in the meeting are asked to please notify the Department of Planning and Development 48 hours prior to the meeting at 803-441-4221.*

1. **Call to Order** – 6:00 p.m.
2. **Comprehensive Plan Update** – Community Facilities, Economics, and Transportation
3. **Comprehensive Plan Update**
  - a. Updates/Discussion for the Downtown and Riverfront

Mr. Eric Carrier, Planner for the Lower Savannah Council of government, reviewed the 5-year update for the North Augusta's comprehensive plan. He is reviewing the four elements. They are Economic Development, Community services/facilities, Transportation, and Downtown and Riverfront section.

**Economic Development:** The major aspect of that is employment and job in the City of NA. The map that was to the left shows the job density in North Augusta. The darker purple areas are where there's a higher concentration of employers. They are spread out so the highest density is the northern tip of the city limits over by the Edgefield border and throughout downtown close to the Riverfront. This data is from the Census 2018. The map on the right, shows how jobs are distributed for citizens working in the city limits and residents working outside the city limits. The report states that 6265 non-resident North Augusta citizens are coming from outside to work. It also states that 8715 work outside of the City of North Augusta. Only 948 people who live in NA actually work in NA. So this chart shows they are working and there is a significant increase in agriculture

forestry, transportation, warehousing, utilities, information technology, finance insurance and real estate. There were decreases in construction as well as wholesale trade (American Community Survey, 2019). This is a list of the various types of industries located in the city limits of North Augusta and how employment has changed from 2010-2018. There is a significant decrease in agriculture and forestry related jobs, a large decrease in information jobs as well as other services. The increases were primarily in construction and manufacturing. Retail and real estate jumped up significantly. Finance and insurance and public administration jobs also doubled over the past 8 years. In terms of North Augusta distribution of jobs, they are pretty much similar to other places in this area. They are also similar to the rest of the surrounding area in job distribution against the MSA and the state as a whole.

Community services/facilities – This is a chapter that outlines the city services and different departments and their roles for the City of North Augusta.

Transportation – The city has just outside the city limits a lot going on in regards of transportation. ARTS (Augusta Regional Transportation Study) is the MPO that works on behalf of the City to do their transportation planning by a regional transportation study of Columbia, Augusta-Richmond County, Aiken, Edgefield, and Burke counties. You can see on the map all the transportation projects that are outlined on the 2021 TIP (Transportation Improvement Plan) and the FHWA (Federal Highway Administration) which provides funding which goes to the state. South Carolina DOT distributes money to the MPOS and COGS throughout the State of South Carolina and they have to come up with a TIP. This is a direct product from their long-range transportation plan so the MPS and COGS will develop a long-range transportation plan. This plan identifies what transportation projects are needed in their areas and they rank those projects. Based on those rankings, they come up with projects that are going to receive the funding. Therefore, the TIP is the list of projects that are actually receiving funding. So the projects that you can see on the map are the projects that are going to be funded and should at least begin between 2021 and 2027. The different colors represent the different types of transportation improvement projects. There has been provided a list of all of the funded projects and how much they cost. The project title along with the project description is the total project costs. As you can see, these projects are very expensive. The 13<sup>th</sup> Street bridge is the most expensive project on the list and is actually being funded by the Georgia side. They have their own separate funding that they are using and that'll be a bridge. They're redoing the bridge making some aesthetic improvements, structural improvements as well as creating an opportunity for individuals who are walking and riding bikes to have connectivity to and from North Augusta from Augusta and vice-versa. This will be a nice addition for the City of North Augusta to help those people who maybe don't have a car and improves multi-modal transportation for the region. There's also going to be a bike path that's going to be running from Aiken to North Augusta to help improve with connectivity between those two areas for individuals who might not be able to drive a car. There's also some sidewalk improvements going on at Knobcone Avenue. That's coming from an extension on the Greenway is coming from tap projects. TAP projects are Transportation Alternative Programs. That money specifically is to be used for multi-modal transportation such as pedestrian and bicycle infrastructures. The money is strictly to improve connectivity and one of the main

reasons they're doing that is because there are a lot of deaths from pedestrians being hit by cars. Fifteen percent (15%) of all fatalities in the state of South Carolina come from pedestrian collisions and another three (3%) come from a bicyclist being hit by cars. A big effort right now by South Carolina DOT is to improve the infrastructure and to put it in place. Right now, South Carolina has the highest number of traffic fatalities in the entire United States.

Dr. Crawford asked if places within Hilton Head communities have implemented bike lanes and if so, are the rates lower.

Mr. Carrier responded that it is complicated because you have to take into consideration traffic counts, how many cars are coming through the area, the type of pedestrian infrastructure in place. One of the things that you have to have that SCDOT doesn't have currently is about pedestrian counts. So it's hard to get a really good understanding of how effective the sidewalks, etc. work because you don't know how many people actually come through. For example, you might have an area where there's a sidewalk and you've got more people that might have actually been hit there than another area that doesn't have sidewalks. It could be because there's more traffic in the area where there's sidewalks and it could be because there's just way more people walking and they're crossing the street in areas where they're not supposed to be, which might create the illusion that more people are getting hit even though there are sidewalks. So there's honestly not really any good way to tell how effective specific infrastructure compare. This is one of the things Mr. Carrier has been trying to look into and getting some of that data from SC DOT to figure out but hasn't been able to get it yet.

Dr. Crawford said she was asking because then there may also be learnings for us as we implement something.

The next map shows not only NA's transportation projects but the projects throughout the arch region. You can see the majority of the projects are actually clustered right around North Augusta. There's a lot of projects that North Augusta is going to benefit from as well as Aiken as they connect in Aiken to North Augusta. The long green line indicates the charity's bike path which is going to be putting in as a project.

4) Downtown and Riverfront: The biggest update from the 2017 Comprehensive plan was the completion of Riverside Village with includes: SRP park, the hotel, the Ironwood Apartments and the Amphitheater. They are included to show completed construction, suggestions for improvements to the downtown region, and the connectivity between the Riverside Village and Downtown. Since the 2017 plan, there has been a proposed project to connect Riverside or to Downtown along Bluff Avenue. It would be a good way for individuals who can't travel by vehicle and have to walk or bicycling to get to downtown. It could also be individuals who want to exercise and to utilize that as a way to get from one place to another.

Mrs. Joanne McKie said she thought this was interesting after reading about the continuation of the walking Greenway through Woodstone. The land was given to the City of North Augusta and purchased from a group in town and an investor from town

paid for some of the property. There is assistance with that and then another thing Downtown on the Bluff Avenue was also some assistance from a private organization. So we do have people that are really much interested in improving Downtown. Downtown and Riverfront she had just put on her sheet a money with big question marks for the Downtown improvement. She stated we've been working on that for a long time and just wondering if we're making any headway with money.

Mr. Carrier responded that the City of North Augusta, from Libby's notes that she gave them before she left, was working on a Downtown master plan.

Mr. Tommy Paradise replied that we are looking at doing a traffic study Downtown as far as traffic calming, pedestrian movement, what we do to make it more pedestrian friendly and transportation friendly, safer, and how to bring more people Downtown.

Mr. Carrier stated that he looked at the traffic counts for Georgia Avenue through there and they're pretty high especially comparing that to other downtown areas. They're twice as high as what Aiken's downtown area. Aiken's is about 10,000 and it's the 2019 traffic counts for Georgia Avenue through that section were 18,300 and it's been and always consistently high.

Mrs. McKie commented that tonight as North Augusta police now have got cars parked at each end of Georgia Avenue and it seems to slow it down a little bit and she thinks they are working on having a crosswalk.

Mr. Carrier stated that he has seen and reviewed a lot of the literature on different ways to try to slow down traffic and a lot of the literature is on work zone areas. The same thing would probably work in a work zone as it would anywhere else but having signs that show that there's cameras, etc.. Those have shown to significantly reduce individuals from speeding especially in an area where you've got a lot of people walking downtown and how much traffic there is in the area. It makes it extremely dangerous. They're also well over a hundred collisions on that road and they were primarily due to poor driving behavior not necessarily anything with the infrastructure but just people failing to yield right of way and being distracted. I want to say because that data is available from the South Carolina Department of Public Safety. So you can look at each individual data point they've got that show each individual point where there was a collision and you can click on that and pull it up and see what they type of vehicle that was involved whether or not a pedestrian was involved, the nature of the accident and why it was why the accident occurred. A lot of it's just due to people not paying attention.

Mrs. McKie said we had someone who came for the last time we did a comprehensive plan in downtown and they sat down with us and talked with us and one thing they suggested is the median in front of this building if it had a tree in it that it gives you an automatic slowdown in your brain.

Mr. Carrier stated he was not sure a tree would be adequate. In between 2016 and 2020, there was 154 collisions downtown part of Georgia Avenue not the whole section and 50% were due to drivers failing to yield right of way and following too closely. He

said he can look into the literature more on that because it gets pretty complicated. It gets really hard to know in different areas why people are getting into wrecks unless you're studying specifically that area. There's been a lot of research to show what types of things can influence driver behavior to get them to slow down and so it wouldn't surprise me something maybe a tree or a special sign. I don't know why specifically there's so many different things that people have used to try to get people to slow down. I would look at the literature and try to figure out maybe what's most effective to see if there were any comparison studies with stuff like maybe a tree versus having a special sign. Traffic signs that display your speed when you drive by seem to be more effective than just an actual speed limit sign. However, they're not as effective as potentially be caught on camera if you're speeding through there. Even with those types of things trying to mitigate speed and people still drive fast through there but it might only reduce the speed. In the particular study that I'm referencing, the speed limit was 35 and people were still driving 50 miles per hour through there and it would only reduce their speed by about five miles per hour. He does not know if there's any perfect solution.

Mrs. McKie asked at Pink Dipper crossing over they did a little strip that they drew it and now I think they're working on making it a speed.

Mr. Tommy Paradise said as far as he knows we have \$50,000 in the budget this year to do a study on downtown traffic common and pedestrian safety. They want to contract it out and have somebody come in to survey it and give us their recommendations and then move forward to implement those recommendations. It's \$50,000 the ARTS where is paying where it pays back 80% of that. That's funding is already locked up through the state using state transportation funds. So he just sent off the last thing that DOT wants before they'll give us the go ahead to start issuing the RFP and moving forward with that project. There's basically three projects that are on the TO DO list between now and the end of the year. 1) Development code rewrite; 2) Comprehensive Plan update; and 3) Traffic calming study downtown so it's on the high priority side of things.

Mrs. McKie asked if we still have the \$5000 that goes to a company if they do something to the side of their building downtown.

Mr. Tommy Paradise responded that we still had the façade grant and there has been some people reach out to me since I've been here but that is still active, ongoing and funded.

Dr. Crawford said she had not thought about that would be as to developers.

Mr. Carrier stated that the development in downtown was originally residential and then was converted to have more commercial properties. He thinks a lot of the parcels down there still are smaller and might be more suitable for a house rather than somebody building a commercial facility

Dr. Crawford said she heard that the conversations around developing the Riverfront and why we develop other areas. I think that piece of it in the parks as being smaller and to think about it and challenging to combine them and making larger parcels is a really

important part of conversation and something that most of us don't think about is even potentially a barrier to the development.

Dr. Crawford asked why the screen kept going in and out.

Mr. Tommy Paradise explained that they have a request for proposals going out to upgrade the system and to fix both the audio and the visual so hopefully it will be fixed within a few months. He explained that we are aware and not only does the Planning Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeals have this issue and the council does as well. It is a system problem which will be worked on and updated soon.

- b. Review date updates with Implementation Strategies
4. **Questions about agenda items-** There were no additional questions about agenda items.
  5. **Adjourn –**The meeting was adjourned at 6:35pm.