City of Ashland

Transportation & Growth Management Outreach Workshop

FINAL REPORT

October 19, 2007

CITY OF ASHLAND

COGAN OWENS COGAN

SERA

KITTELSON & ASSOCIATES, INC.
TRANSPORTATION ENGINEERING/PLANNING

City of Ashland TGM Outreach Workshop
Designing Great Arterial Streets

Conducted September 20, 2007

Project Team

TGM Program

Constance Beaumont

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Introduction

This report summarizes the Transportation and Growth Management-funded Outreach workshop in Ashland, Oregon on Thursday, September 20, 2007.

Background

The Transportation and Growth Management (TGM) Program is a partnership of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) that works to expand transportation choices for people. TGM supports community efforts to expand transportation choices for people. By linking land use and transportation planning, TGM works in partnership with local governments to create vibrant, livable places in which people can walk, bike, take transit or drive where they want to go.

Ashland Outreach Workshop

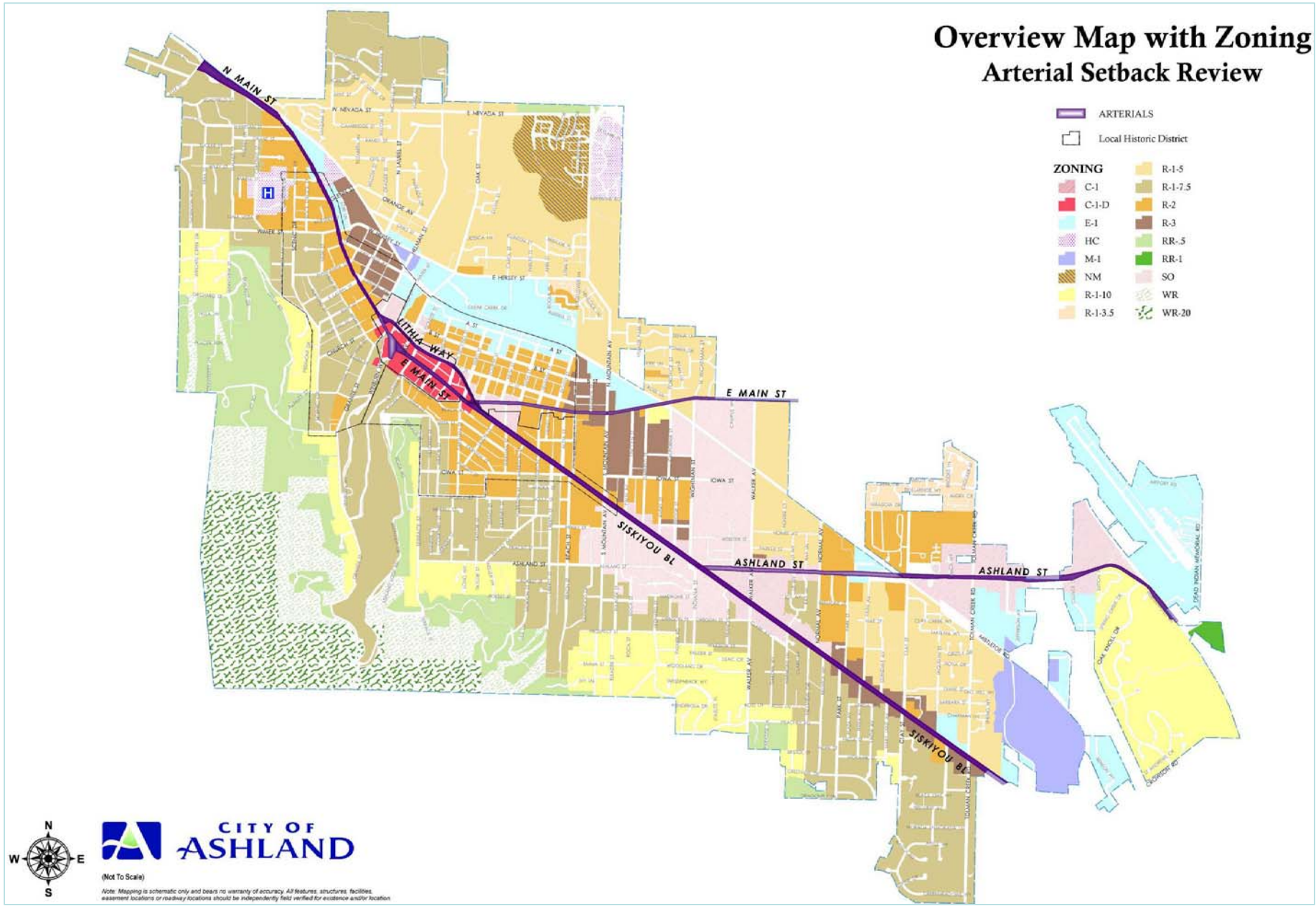
The City of Ashland currently enjoys an attractive downtown and effective transportation system. The City is blessed with a vibrant downtown, a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment opportunities. These include the Oregon Shakespearean Festival and an outstanding park system, including Lithia Park, which is directly adjacent to the downtown area.

City leaders and local residents want to continue to build on and strengthen the quality of streets in the downtown area and elsewhere, particularly along the City's five arterials (see map on page 2). Encouraging quality private development and public facilities near them also is important. In addition, City staff has noted a need for more information and education about good urban design and transportation planning principles that can help the City address more specific street design and land use planning issues related to development along these arterials.

The state's TGM Outreach assistance program retained Cogan Owens Cogan (COC), in partnership with SERA Architects and Kittelson Associates, Inc., to accomplish the following objectives:

- Provide an overview of urban design and land use planning principles.
- Identify key issues and approaches to designing arterial streets and planning for land uses adjacent to them.
- Facilitate a discussion among community members about these issues and approaches.

City of Ashland Outreach Workshop
September 20, 2007



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To address the above issues, the City, TGM and COC collaborated on an outreach workshop held in Ashland on Thursday, September 20, 2007. In advance of the workshop, team members reviewed a variety of background materials and interviewed City Planning staff and representatives of the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development.

This report summarizes the workshop discussion. The PowerPoint presentation is included in a separate document, while a brief description of the topics discussed at the workshop is included below.

Workshop Summary

Approximately 25 Planning Commissioners, City Councilors, local residents and others participated in the workshop on September 20.

Ashland Senior Planner Maria Harris welcomed participants. She thanked participants for attending and encouraged them to take this opportunity to discuss important urban design and transportation planning issues. She noted that the workshop was an opportunity to take a step back from some of the more specific planning issues the community has recently wrestled with and learn and talk about some general urban and street design issues. These concepts can help improve the quality of the downtown, foster economic development and continue to create great streets and places for Ashland residents and visitors.

Next, Constance Beaumont gave an overview from the State's perspective. Constance manages TGM's Education and Outreach Program, the source of funding for the workshop. She emphasized the program's interest in giving Oregonians more transportation choices while strengthening the economic health of downtowns and livability of surrounding neighborhoods. Matt Hastie, principal with Cogan Owens Cogan, then introduced members of the team – Tim Smith, Director of Urban Design and Planning at SERA architects, and Beth Wemple, Associate Engineer at Kittelson and Associates, Inc. Matt then turned the presentation over to Tim and Beth, who discussed the following topics:

- Functions of great streets
- Advantages of mixed use development
- Key urban and streetscape design elements, including building design, street furnishings, the importance of intersections, gathering places, street trees, landscaping and other topics

- Arterial street design and traffic operation and capacity issues
- Parking design and management
- Possible redevelopment opportunity sites

Group Discussion

Participants then participated in a discussion with members of the consulting team about urban design, land use and transportation planning issues discussed during the presentation. Following is a summary of comments and questions from participants, as well as responses from members of the consulting team (shown in *italics*).

- **There seems to be a tension between mobility for cars and access for pedestrian on the types of streets you are talking about. And this conflict creates stress. How can "great pedestrian streets" also accommodate the need to carry a certain number of cars efficiently?**

While we are calling these streets "great pedestrian streets," they actually serve multiple functions. For example, Main Street through downtown needs to accommodate a certain amount of auto traffic that is passing through, whether it is originating or traveling to locations just outside the downtown or to or from farther away. The street needs to balance these different needs but the community may want to emphasize one or another in different locations along the same street. For example, in the heart of the downtown, pedestrian connectivity and safety may be more important than traffic capacity and speed and drivers or the community as a whole may be willing to put up with more traffic delay. Farther outside the downtown, the emphasis may be reversed on the same street. Not all Arterials are created equal and they don't all function the same way throughout their length. It is up to the community to decide which functions are most important in which locations and act accordingly.

- **Would it make more sense to decide what the function of the road should be and then design buildings to fit that, rather than designing the buildings first and then forcing the road to match that?**

  Not necessarily. The best approach is to look at function of road and the intent of adjacent land uses at the same time. They are directly linked

and a coordinated approach to land use and transportation is very important.

- **What is the current way of defining or designing a pedestrian friendly street? Where should sidewalks be located and how wide should they be? I find many sidewalks along streets in Ashland to be right next to the curb, too narrow and sometimes they do not feel safe when they are right next to traffic.**

  The primary objective should be to separate or buffer pedestrians from traffic with parking or landscaping, particularly on roads where traffic speeds are higher. In areas where traffic moves more slowly, this may be less of an issue but is still important. Some situations may be tough to retrofit because there is not enough room to add parking or landscaping and maintain enough street capacity. The community may decide to live with less than ideal conditions in some locations while looking for ways to improve them as land is developed or redeveloped in the future (e.g., on some sections of North Main Street).

- **Improvements to North Main to incorporate some of the urban design elements discussed tonight could have negative impacts on traffic capacity and/or congestion in that area. We should be careful about implementing some of these urban design and streetscape approaches in areas like that.**

- **Has anyone developed a way to measure level-of-service (LOS) for sidewalks or other pedestrian facilities? Do you have any information about that?**

  There has been some research into that issue but is has focused primarily on very large areas or communities such as New York City. There also has been research done on how to define the quality of pedestrian facilities.

- **I constantly walk downtown. During a recent power outage recently when the traffic lights were out, I noted that traffic actually worked very well downtown. There were no traffic jams. People behaved in a courteous manner and cars and pedestrians coexisted well. I've read about a "shared space" approach in some cities in Europe where they don't use typical traffic signals, lane markings or other things like that. Is this something that would be appropriate to consider in Ashland.**

  Some people looking at these types of systems in certain areas or cities in the United States. They appear to work well in European cities where they have been implemented, either in pedestrian-oriented commercial areas or on local, residential streets. It could be something to consider.

However, it also should be noted that implementation of such treatments should be considered very carefully and tested at locations with relatively low levels of activity prior to implementing such programs in busier areas.

- **Do you have opinions on one-way streets vs. couplets?**

  The couplet seems to work relatively well here based on our observations. Traffic moves through at an appropriate pace with good pedestrian connectivity. (Beth Wemple)

  I'm not a big fan of couplets. They often promote faster speeds and a less pedestrian-friendly environment. (Tim Smith)

  On the other hand, couplets can help with pedestrian safety because cars are only traveling in one direction and there are fewer turning movements and conflicts with pedestrians in that sense. (Matt Hastie)

  We all agree that they can work well if vehicle speed is controlled and careful attention is paid to street design (e.g., on-street parallel parking on both sides of the street, short crossing distances for pedestrians and other good pedestrian amenities).

- **East Main is unfriendly to pedestrians. Cars move faster on that leg of the couplet. One half of couplet works relatively well while the other doesn't. That makes the urban design tools you've been talking about even more important on that and other one-way streets.**

- **What are some criteria to use in deciding where to create public plazas, courtyards or other open spaces?**

  Three things to think about are building on existing areas of activity that seem to be natural gathering points, using them to strengthen sites with redevelopment potential and identifying those sites that seem to have the greatest potential for success in serving that function.

  Another approach is to go for the low-hanging fruit – someplace that could be designed and built relatively easily. Locate it as centrally as possible and provide multiple entry points. Design it to be relatively tightly occupied. Estimate how many people might use it at one time and design it to be half the size needed to accommodate that number. It's better for those spaces to be crowded.

- **Does Lithia Way present any opportunities? How would you design it from an outsider's perspective?**

  Create a good amenity. Have the doors open onto a plaza or open space if appropriate. Do all the other things we talked about in the presentation to create a good building and street design. Make it look like it belongs there.

- **What are some rules of thumb for sidewalk design and width?**

  Sidewalks in a mixed use area should be 12-15 feet wide and curb cuts should be minimized. Centrally located parking should be on the inside of buildings or developments. Sidewalks should be separated into three zones as discussed in the presentation (the "shy zone," "walk/talk" and "furnishing/buffer" areas). Curbside parking and other sidewalk design elements described in the presentation also can serve as rules-of-thumb.

- **For bulb-outs, what is the narrowest crossing distance you should try to achieve (curb-to-curb)?**

  Thirty-three (33) feet is a good distance to shoot for (two eleven-foot travel lanes and an eleven-foot turn lane (similar to what you have on East Main).

- **How about building enclosure? Is there a preferred height to width ratio for buildings vs. street widths?**

  Alan Jacobs developed a very complicated formula which I found too difficult to understand and apply. I like a one-to-one ratio but have seen them work anywhere from one to two and five to one. They can be much higher than that in very large cities. For a community the size of Ashland a ratio somewhere between 1:1 and 2:1 seems to be most appropriate.

- **North Main Street has four lanes of traffic, no sidewalks in some sections and there is a constant log jam there. If the total daily traffic on that road is about 19,000 vehicles, could it work better with three lanes (two travel lanes and a turn lane)?**

  It seems to be right on the edge. Operation of a three-lane road, typically starts to breakdown at about 19,000 vehicles per day. It might not work any worse now but probably would if traffic increased. It could be OK if traffic was allowed to be slower there.

Next Steps

The following next steps were discussed at and subsequent to the workshop.

Opportunity Areas. Identify potential future activity nodes; incorporate the principles discussed at the workshop in developing or redeveloping these areas. Three potential nodes were identified during the workshop. Each one represents an intersection of one or more arterials and/or collector streets. Each one also presents an opportunity for a mixture of uses that would add activity and energy to the intersection and surrounding area. Finally, each one includes a mix of redevelopable sites, commercial uses and community oriented facilities at or very near the intersection. They include the following:

- **Siskiyou Boulevard/Bridge Street**. This intersection is adjacent to Southern Oregon University and a variety of commercial uses. Redevelopment of some of these uses along with targeted streetscape improvements, such as street crossing improvements, wider sidewalks and other pedestrian amenities could enhance activity in this area and improve the pedestrian experience.

- **Ashland Street/Walker Avenue**. This intersection includes The Beanery, as well as two relatively large corner properties with potential for new development or redevelopment. More intensive commercial and/or mixed use development in these areas, coupled with streetscape improvements to enhance the pedestrian experience would strengthen this area.

- **East Main/Mountain Avenue**. This intersection is bordered by a school facility (playing fields), a vacant/potentially redevelopable propery and a community arts center. It also is near the City's civic center. Redevelopment of the underutilized sites into a mixed use node, coupled with potential streetscape improvements could result in a vibrant mixed use area that

would also help meet neighborhood commercial needs for nearby residents.

Arterial Streetscape Improvements. The City may want to consider some sections of existing arterials for future pedestrian and bicycle improvements. For example, workshop participants discussed the possibility of reducing a portion of North Main between the city limits and downtown from five to three lanes in order to add sidewalks and bicycle lanes. This could be an option, depending on the following factors:

- **Current and future projected traffic levels**. Staff report that this road currently sees about 19,000 cars per day. At this level, a three lane road with a turn lanes could potentially function adequately, although with higher levels of congestion. However, as traffic continues to increase, at some point, three lanes likely would not be adequate. For example, if traffic exceeds 25,000 to 30,000 vehicles per day, five lanes likely would be needed. Any proposed change should be considered within the context of future traffic levels.
- **Extent of turning movements**. The number of intersections with left turn lanes and the number of turning movements at these intersections will affect the ability to reduce the number of lanes without causing unacceptable levels of congestion. As turning movements onto and off the main street increase, the traffic volume threshold for a three lane facility decreases.
- **Traffic control and signalization**. The number of controlled intersections along North Main and type of control uses (e.g., signals), in tandem with the extent of turning movements also will affect traffic flow and mobility/congestion. For example, fewer turns coupled with a higher degree of intersection control will improve the efficiency of traffic movement and allow for a higher volume on fewer lanes.

Assuming city jurisdiction of this road also could affect the ability to make changes to its design.

Continued Public Education. Further discussion of these issues will be important as the City makes decisions about the character and location of future development, as well as supportive street design. City staff and Planning Commission members may want to continue to use the presentation developed for this workshop or portions of it to illustrate design and planning issues in the future.

Appendix A: Powerpoint Presentation

The presentation delivered at the design workshop has been provided in a separate document.

Appendix B: Questionnaire Responses

Participants were provided with an optional written comment form to complete and return at or after the meeting. Only two participants chose to complete the form. Responses are described below, with questions shown in ***bold italics***.

1. ***What are Ashland's most outstanding assets with regard to roadways (arterials) and walkability?***

   Most of the arterials are aesthetically pleasant and safe for both pedestrians and motorists. Bike lanes and crosswalks are generally well marked and way-finding signage is good.

2. ***How best can arterial traffic be balanced with pedestrian-friendliness? What improvements would you like to see to accomplish this?***

   Make sidewalks wide enough for two people to walk. No sign posts and trees in the middle of walking space.

   Match width and amenities on sidewalks to level of pedestrian traffic. Continue to enforce speed limits at pedestrian crossing & bicycling rules. Improve pedestrian aesthetics & traffic calming along Lithia Way.

3. ***What are the best ways you see to connect the arterials discussed in the workshop to downtown and/or surrounding neighborhoods?***

   Create nodes along Ashland Street and along Siskiyou beyond Walker so they aren't so fast and (like a) "strip mall"

   I think the connections are clean now. I think the idea of using bio-swales at nodes for aesthetics, runoff clean up and traffic calming is a good idea.

4. ***What are the major "nodes" or intersections along these arterials where you would like to see improvements made? Please be as specific as possible.***

   Block between Walker & Harmony Lane.

   I think the "Copeland" project design and the future/re-design of the Wells Fargo property are critical to the future vitality of downtown. The design could be coordinated and the design appropriate to Ashland in look & scale. Now is the time to work with the bowling alley owner & associated businesses around Walker & Siskiyou on a cohesive design for the node. Lithia @ 1st. Pioneer & Oak.

5. ***On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being high, to what extent to you agree with the urban design principles presented this evening (building out to the sidewalk, human-scale architecture, parking in the rear, good window coverage, street furniture, traffic calming, etc)?***

   10, 7-8

   'Building out on the sidewalk' is entirely site-dependant.

Which principles in particular do you like, or have concerns with?

Like: The idea of sidewalk bio-swales. Like: Menu-district design appropriate to traffic & business/residential context. Dislike: Over-urbanized design bias. Concerns: Lack of integrated project (area) design. Too much project by project permitting for same area.

6. ***What additional types of features would you like to see along the arterials such as Lithia Way, North and East Main, Siskiyou Blvd. and Ashland St.?***

   Lithia (Copeland) 3-story limit; encourage incorporating set back public plaza area. Wells Fargo—sunken parking: attractive public wide spaces at intersection midway between 1st & Pioneer. N. Main: bike safety issues: link existing businesses through attractive design from Mountain View to Breachboard.

7. ***Are there any other strategies that should be considered? Other suggestions, comments?***

   Some way to bring owners, target occupants, designers (architectural & engineering) and public together to discuss impacts and opportunities for more integrated design around target development areas (one to two block sizes). I don't know how but I do feel it is absolutely necessary.

EVALUATION

1. ***On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how valuable was this workshop for you?***

   6, 9

2. ***On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, please rate the presenters.***

   9, 8

Other comments:

Grateful for the opportunity to meet together to discuss these issues.