



Community Event #1 Summary of Public Input

“A Taste of West Main”

December 7, 2013

Meeting Overview

The first public meeting for the Charlottesville West Main project was intended to give the community an overview of the project and the areas that are being explored, and give them a chance to give input in general and in response to specific questions and themes. The format was an open house with a short presentation on the project, along with several walking tours offered. Several West Main Street restaurants and bakeries provided food.

Participants viewed information and completed exercises (including sticky note input, dot voting, and streetscape design) at five stations:

Station 1: History

- Timeline of events, from Charlottesville's settlement to the current project
- Map of designated buildings
- Question board: "What's your favorite memory of West Main Street and its neighborhoods?"

Station 2: Transportation

- Maps: Cross sections, Parking lots, Street network, Intersections, Transit ridership, Alternate routes, Transportation overall (Bus Stops, Lanes, lane widths, bike lanes, parking spaces)
- Exercise: Using Streetmix, design your ideal streetscape using the actual ROW (60') of West Main Street
- Question board: "How easy is it to move along and across West Main Street? By car? By bike? On foot? By public transit? Are there problem areas? Missing crosswalks, curb ramps, bus stop seating, or other issues?"

Station 3: Character

- Existing Character Images: Street, buildings, neighborhoods
- General Existing Conditions Map
- Question boards: "Which elements of West Main Street and its neighborhoods do you like? Which don't you like?", "What is the overall character of West Main Street today? Are you happy with this or would you like to see it changed?", "Do you see West Main Street as one street or as a series of zones or districts of varying character?"

Station 4: Green Streets

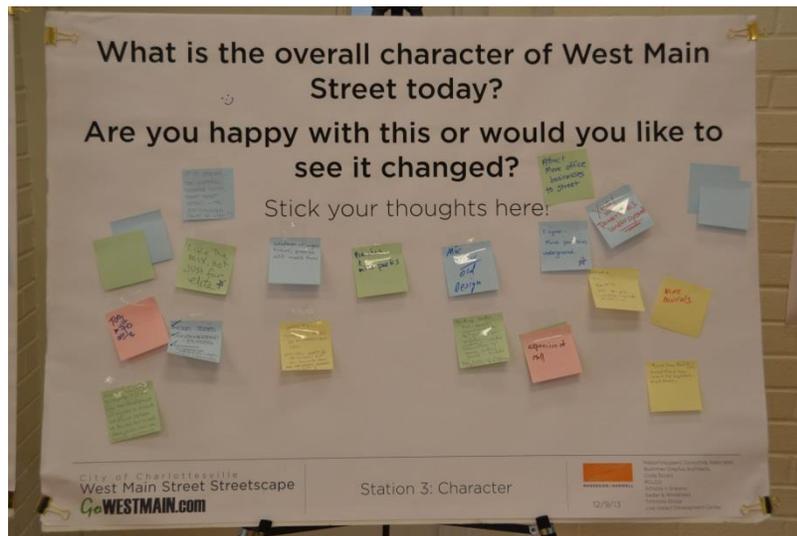
- Description of green streets with examples of different strategies
- Topography map

- Question board: “Are there any storm water issues in the study area that we should know about? For example, are there any areas of localized flooding? Have you seen good examples of green streets elsewhere?”

Station 5: Vision

- Building/district and streetscape precedents
- Question board: “What precedent imagery do you like? What precedent imagery do you not like?”
- Question board: “20 years from now, what does West Main Street look like?”

This document contains a high-level summary of all input provided at the meeting, followed by a detailed account of input that is easily translated into text. Where input is easier to show spatially and/or graphically, it is provided on separate documents, including a synthesis map and precedent photo boards showing dot voting results.



Summary of input

History

History (both personal history and community/city history) is important to the way that people experience the corridor and it influences the character of West Main Street. It is a historic street that has experienced both gradual and abrupt, disruptive change.

Many people expressed concern that the desired, historic character of the corridor is disappearing (or already has disappeared), especially in the west side of the corridor. It was suggested that a historical walk (with signage, similar to the existing historic signage) could be a way to keep that history at the forefront of corridor visitor's minds.

People have memories of West Main street that span from their personal experiences (such as getting married) to shared experiences (e.g., street fairs, watching the Olympic torch, attending school). They also remember certain stores.

Transportation

Pedestrian and bicycle improvements

There was mostly agreement that pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure needs improvement. There was a lot of support (in precedent images) for wider sidewalks and pedestrian areas that contain places to linger.

Right-of-Way (ROW) design

Participants created their ideal ROW design using the online program Streetmix, and there were a variety of designs. The idea of utilizing Streetmix was to have participants think about tradeoffs required when working in a limited ROW. Unlike typical real-world design, the participants who utilized taller buildings tended away from transit, while most of the streetscapes with shorter (≤ 3 stories) height limits incorporated a streetcar or other permanent transit. Notably, every design incorporated street trees – many with 2 or more rows on each side of the street, and some in a median.

Parking

Parking seems to be an issue in the corridor. Some expressed concern that many small lots near Main Street are filled by local employees, rather than customers. There may be a possibility for lot sharing.

Character

Most participants like the old/recent character (“interesting mess”, “small town feel”, “mix”), but some fear that it has become (or will soon become) ruined by new development. There seems to be a particular fear around larger buildings, either in terms of horizontal size (e.g., the

length of a block), or vertical size (e.g., anything 5+ stories, or non-pedestrian-scale buildings). There is a fear of losing the view of the mountains. There were several complaints about dirty streets or places (e.g., Greyhound station).

Design

The large scale of recent/new development is one area of major concern, as people feel it takes away from the historical character. Regardless of the type of building being shown to them – old, new, etc. – people tended to have more positive opinions about buildings that have a unique design, a generous setback, and a relatively low height. People also expressed support for designs that encouraged a good mix of uses.

Community

There is concern about the character in terms of the people who live on/near West Main Street. Some of the new buildings being developed (especially toward the west end) are student housing, and people expressed concern that having students as the majority of the people living in the community will change the neighborhood character. There was an emphasis on wanting a diverse (economically, racially, etc.) community.

Perceptions of West Main

When asked whether they see West Main as one street or a series of zones, there were different opinions. A couple of people mentioned that West Main was (or should be) treated as one street, with different opinions on how the character should or should not change along the corridor. Most thought that there were zones/districts, with many saying that there were two zones/districts, divided by the railroad: the funky, older east side and the larger, newer west side.

Green Streets

There was support throughout the stations for green infrastructure. The major takeaway is that people want to see more trees, especially trees that are cared for. In general, people want to see more green along West Main. Infrastructure such as parklets and bioswales had a lot of support through precedent imagery and the Streetmix exercise.

Vision

There were many different ideas for how West Main should look/function in 20 years. Though there are conflicts in the details, it is clear that residents would like to see West Main change over the next 20 years in ways that incorporate its history but also improve on pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and increase the public green space and the tree canopy.

Some participants imagined more density and services, while some feared that more density would bring more people and a loss of character. One idea that got a lot of approval from other participants was that the rebirth of the black business community (which was greatly affected

by urban renewal) would be ideal. Several ideas supported a mix of people in the neighborhood – a racially, economically diverse community, not just UVA students



All public input

Sticky notes and dot voting summary

The following are all responses (with summaries) of sticky notes provided in response to board questions at each station. An asterisk () indicates that another participant indicated that they agreed with a written comment.*

Station 1: History

QUESTION: What's your favorite memory of West Main Street and its neighborhoods?

- "The music store/record shop, Studio Art, and the music venue below Studio Art"
- "Attending Jefferson School"
- "Taking the train between home and Charlottesville when Amtrak has the whole building"
- "Midtown street fairs!"
- "We got married at 315 West Main in 2010. The building is now torn down."
- "The Olympic torch – 1996!"
- "The old train station and Woolworth on Downtown Mall"
- "Shopping at Sears and Safeway"
- Irrelevant:
 - "Please conduct development that honors and respects the character of the surrounding neighborhoods!"

Station 2: Transportation

QUESTION: How easy is it to move along and across West Main Street? Are there problem areas?

- "Where Plaza and Standard construction is: Lane lines are confusing, need remarking!"
 - Response: "As a cyclist, I actually like the construction area near the Flats at West Village...de facto road diet! No parked cars and easier to merge to make left turns in narrow lanes with slower traffic!"
- "Crosswalk needs better signage/markings at the top of the stairs at the train bridge!"
- "Sidewalks and crosswalks are incongruent, patchworked, antiquated, and poorly maintained. "
- "Bike lanes are dangerous at best"
- "By car – serious backups and delays now – will only get worse with new apartments coming"
- Suggestions
 - "Make W. Main a thoroughfare for peds, bikes, and accessible for cross (NS) vehicular traffic, local, and delivery."
 - "1 lane of vehicular traffic, parallel parking, cycle tracks, trees, and enhanced sidewalks"

- “1 lane 1 way in different directions for different segments, alternating (signal controlled) between 10th and JPA”
- “Add parking garage next to Amtrak Station (204 spaces)”
- “Move directional signage for pedestrians”
- “Move signs to direct people to parking”
- “Make it pedestrian and bike only on Sundays (allow cars to cross)”
- “Dedicated bus lane!!”
- “Please build to move vehicular traffic away from Main to Preston and expand bike/ped safety”
- “Remain two lanes (*)”
- “1 lane”
- “Keep existing and add more handicapped parking in front of businesses
- “2 lanes with parking is a must”
- Irrelevant:
 - “Taxes are going higher. It is a hardship for people on fixed incomes.”

Station 3: Character

QUESTION: What is the overall character of West Main Street today? Are you happy with this or would you like to see it changed?

- Thoughts on the character
 - “It is hideous...the lighting, sidewalk width, street details – all substandard. (Except for Gabes!!)”
 - “Like the mix, not just for elite (*)”
 - “Too much auto”
 - “Love the character of the street how it is and fear new development will only cater to students and affluent population. We don’t need what the mall already provides, need more services for neighborhoods.”
 - “Today it is a mess, but an interesting mess. Bad news is the uniform, brick box buildings that have been recently approved and built!”
 - “Mix new/old design”
 - “Getting better, but more improvements to pedestrian safety – wider sidewalks with some sitting zones – shade. “
 - “I like the small town feel but understand the need for high rise and high density.”
- Suggestions
 - “Bike lanes with clear sight lines and (illegible – no parking?)”
 - “Attract more office businesses to street”
 - “Yes! Power lines underground (***)”
 - “Expansion of mall from Omni to Baptist church all the way to the stain station neat Belmont Bridge.”
 - “Expansion of mall”

- “Put a park there”
- “More murals”
- “More trees (*), underground utilities (*), remove surface parking lots (*), more density”
- “Whatever changes occur, please add more trees”
- “Benches and mini parks”
- “Please no more tall buildings built. We are going to lose that small town feeling that is so C’ville – also more people and congestion!”

QUESTION: Which elements of West Main Street and its neighborhoods do you like? Which don’t you like?

LIKE

- “Save some of the fronts of buildings when building new larger buildings”
- “Views of SW mountains. Monticello.”
- “Trees. Plenty of trees. Cannot be emphasized too much.”
- “The view of the Blue Ridge (**)”
- “Diversity of styles, both people and buildings (*)”
- “Trees – need more (*)”
- “Narrow streets”
- “The ABC store is convenient for me. I like it there.”
- “View of the mountains”
- “Cool old gas stations – the height and scale are perfect.”

DON’T LIKE

- “If we keep building big boxes, no one will know we have mountains.”
- “Tall buildings causing us to lose our precious views!!”
- “Dirty streets and sidewalks (**)”
- “Greyhound bus stop all dirty”
- “Narrow sidewalks”
- “Get rid of ABC store (*)”
- “Needs more parking”
- “Density is highly overrated!”
- “Get rid of auto junkyard behind Mel’s”
- “4th Street intersection is dangerous! Was almost hit.”
- “Obstructions on sidewalks”

QUESTION: Do you see West Main Street as one street or as a series of zones or districts of varying character?

- “2 zones divided by the railroad tracks”
- “1-Destination, 2-Origin, 3-Corridor”

- “Series. East – funky old buildings, West – bad big new buildings”
- “One street with carrying character, height, and density”
- “Canyon?!”
- “Uneasy on large development”
- “W. Main is becoming two zones: historic east end and giant building/institutional west end.”
- “W. Main is one street. Should have consistent character.”
- “Yes”
- “Not different zones but zoning that limits density and heights and promotes character and rewards presentation.”
- “Variety of building facades”
- “Small for scale!”
- Irrelevant
 - “Add another pedestrian mall somewhere. The one we have is getting crowded”
 - “Wider sidewalks!!”
 - “Not many bike users”
 - “Love the idea of a pedestrian mall (even limit road to trolley and/or bikes)”
 - “Would like to see more murals that could tie in to historical markers (*)”
 - “Development good...but consider transportation. Pedestrians and transit.”
 - “Paint a mural on the street if it’s closed to traffic”
 - “No plain-faced buildings!”
 - “Keep the old character and make new buildings blend in”
 - “More people to benefit local businesses – no preference about building size.”

Participants were also asked to review three boards with images of the current streetscape, built environment, and neighborhoods around West Main Street. Participants left comments on sticky notes, either responding to questions or giving other thoughts on what they liked or did not like about the current character of West Main Street.

PICTURE BOARD: *Streetscape*

- Restaurants
 - “Mel’s is a PLACE. So glad it is now considered a contributing asset.”
 - “Yes, in newer, redone restaurants.”
 - “Need affordable restaurants”
- “Like murals, like wider, Richmond-like sidewalks. Close off partial traffic.”
- Sidewalks
 - “Sidewalk is too narrow for pedestrians.”
 - “Tree boxes don’t work.”
- “More trees and outdoor social settings.”
- [Do you use the bike lanes?] “Yes, every day. Watch out for car doors!”
- “Need better bus stops.”
- “Add some basic playground equipment (e.g., carousel) on a closed-to-traffic portion.”

- “I like good murals.”
- Power lines
 - “I like power lines”
 - “Underground them, please.”
 - [Would you like to see power lines put underground?] “Yes!” “NO.”
- Historically-themed lights
 - “More”
 - “Get rid of faux historic lighting.”

PICTURE BOARD: *Structures (old and new)*

- Positive comments
 - [Hotel Gleason/Albemarle Hotel] “Should be saved.”
 - “Main Street Market is terrific!”
 - “Eloise, Pho, and One Meatball are perfect renovations! Great model.”
 - Positive comments about adaptive reuse and outdoor dining space
- Several disparaging comments related to both existing and proposed buildings
 - “No character. Ugly.”
 - “Really bad! A wall on the street. Why no setback?”
 - The Standards and Flats buildings were the subject to much criticism related to design and size.

PICTURE BOARD: *Neighborhoods*

Comments on the neighborhoods board revolved around the Pedestrian Mall and the single-family neighborhoods near West Main

- [How important is the Downtown Mall to Charlottesville’s identity?]
 - “Overly important: If we cleaned, planted, and maintained West Main Street with the same tax allotment and man power, West Main would improve immediately.”
 - “The Mall has great character. Afraid West Main is a lost cause.”
 - “Don’t recreate the Mall on West Main.”
- Neighborhoods
 - [Do you like the character of Fifeville, Tonsler, Starr Hill, and other neighborhoods near West Main Street?] “Yes! Mix of neighbors is good.”
 - “Love old + modern.”
 - (With regards to house undergoing a paint job) “Very horrible.”

Station 4: Green Streets

QUESTION: Are there any storm water issues in the study area that we should know about? Have you seen good examples of green streets elsewhere?

- Tree comments
 - “Jacob Riis noticed that people needed water, air, and light. Trees need the same. Above and below ground infrastructure needs to be provided.”
 - “Urban trees are like babies, you can’t just have one. Need to make a place for the tree. Prepare a place. Adequate room for roots. Plant them right and receive benefits from the plant for decades.”
 - “New Orleans – Big trees (100 y.o. + Q virginiana) provide shade and protection for pedestrians, particulate removal, and heat island mitigation. They make oxygen, absorb greenhouse gas, provide ecosystem services, feed birds, provide habitat for critters. People and trees are symbiotic. People need trees, particularly with increasing population density.”
 - “Tree caution: Look nice, but pipe recently ruptured from root system; possible leaf maintenance hassles.”
 - [In response to the above] “Trees are the solution, not the problem! [In response to next comment]”
 - “Need diversity of appropriate trees that are planted so as to not disrupt pipes.”
- “More landscaping in addition to trees!”
- “Lynchburg Riverfront Park’s bioswales – they are a beautiful, experiential, rich example of green infrastructure and public space. Could be a model for Starr Hill Park or RR ROW near Amtrak”
- “Storm drains getting clogged often; Antiquated; Businesses and residents have been maintaining – need city maintenance help”
- “You can never be too green”
- “More plants are always good.”
- “Native plants and native trees! (*)”
- “Water problems drawing – stormwater issue on Starr Hill”

Station 5: Vision

QUESTION: 20 years from now, what does West Main Street look like?

- “Integration of public space with commercial space supporting it”
- “More density! West Main should be urban, full, and lively. It’s not a country road. Our city must grow up to save the countryside.”
- “Rebirth of black business community (**)”
- “Move City Market to West Main Street (***)”
- “A real neighborhood. Not an enclave of UVA students (**)”
- “More locals, racially mixed”
- “A pedestrian plaza with local vehicular traffic in the European mode. Woonerf.”

- “Mix of services (i.e., dry cleaner, florist, post office, affordable grocery) to stop at on my way to/from work”
- “I fear it will be a wall of buildings with constant traffic jams. I hope the C’ville character remains, with underground utilities and small, efficient transportation vehicles.”
- “Buildings are currently too close to the street. Wider sidewalks.”

Participants were also asked to review two boards containing precedent images for what Main Street could look like in the future. The images were centered on two themes. Participants used green and red dots to vote whether they supported (green) or disliked (red) each strategy for West Main. Some participants also gave comments by writing on sticky notes or directly on the phone boards. Votes were tallied and takeaways were gathered based on overall score and comments.

PICTURE BOARD: Streetscape Precedents

Full dot voting results can be viewed on the precedent pictures boards.

- General support:
 - Fuller tree canopy
 - Larger sidewalks
 - Better crossings
 - Better bicycle infrastructure, including protected lanes and bicycle corrals.
 - “West Main bicycles lanes are ‘suicidal’!! Please redesign before another cyclist gets knocked out by car doors.”
 - “Not dual direction bike lanes”
 - Signage
 - Lots of positive votes for a shared street (no curb) that is empty.
 - Parklets with lots of seating
 - Green streets
 - In response to “Could you see interesting stormwater management techniques on West Main?”: “On side streets and alleys - Ridge to Valley”
 - Street art
 - “...both permanent and programmatic. There should be an arts org along W. Main.”
 - “Close off traffic or open up pedestrian/play/outdoor green space.”
 - Places to sit and linger
 - “Benches create vagrancy...sad but true. Until streetscape is realized...bad idea!”
 - [In response] “All people need to sit!”
- Mixed opinions:
 - Shared streets
 - Painted streets
 - Type of bicycle infrastructure
- Negative response:

- Sharrows
- Lots of negative votes for a shared street currently being used by bikes, peds, and cars.

PICTURE BOARD: Buildings and Districts Precedents

Full dot voting results can be viewed on the precedent pictures boards.

- General support:
 - Adaptive reuse of historic buildings
 - Main Street Market-type development
 - New buildings that work within the older context
 - Open space along the public ROW
 - Mixed use developments
 - Setbacks and keeping development abutting the sidewalk at a pedestrian scale
 - Retail that has the look of historical housing
- Mixed opinions:
 - Some types of open space were less desired than others
 - With contemporary buildings, there was more support for some designs than others. An adaptive reuse example from Asheville, NC got many positive votes, as did a contemporary building that currently existing within an older context in Charlottesville.
 - “Re-use and reimagine. Most of this is cheap, boring architecture and design.”
 - Five story building had mixed reviews
- Negative response:
 - In response to “How do you feel about this [6 story] height?”
 - “Too late - city already approved all those tall buildings.”
 - “Only approve taller buildings if setbacks are much greater.”
 - “Limit heights to three stories on any new projects that come up.”

Streetmix

There were 24 right-of-way (ROW) designs completed and printed. Though there were many changes made to the existing 60' ROW, all designs contained an enhanced tree canopy. A large majority also contained bicycle lanes (about half unprotected and half protected by small barriers or parklets) and space for vehicles, and most streetscapes were given a road diet from the current design.

Though there are many ways to categorize the designs, there were some general themes that popped out: (1) Remove all parking and enhance the bike/ped/green space environment, (2) Remove some parking and enhance transit, (3) Remove some parking and enhance the bike/ped. Environment, and (4) Remove all cars and add transit along with other enhancements, and (4) Enhance the environment for cars.



All designs can be viewed on the Streetmix Exercise Results poster.

Element	% of 24 streetscapes featuring element
Enhanced tree canopy	100%
Bicycle lane - any	96%
Cars	92%
Wide sidewalk - full (>10', incl. parklets, benches, etc.)	88%
Less density (buildings <4 stories)	67%
More density (buildings 4+ stories)	54%
Streetlights	54%
Bicycle lane - enhanced	46%
Wide sidewalks - strictly pedestrian space (>8')	38%
Transit	33%
Parklet	21%
Parking	17%
One way	8%

Other comments, sent post-meeting

- West Main should be a dense, urban corridor. Along with Preston, Cherry, Rt 29, and a few other places in town, this street is ideal for large, tall buildings with retail, office and multi-unit residential buildings. There should be lots of foot traffic and mass transit. Charlottesville is a city and needs to grow up in order to preserve the surrounding countryside. Building a vibrant, beautiful urban landscape where people want to be and want to walk is key.
- Wide Sidewalks.
- One or two small plazas or mini-parks for people to meet, gather, rest.
- Murals, sculpture and fountains are always good. But there is no need to go overboard on gimmicks. This road is not ideal for playgrounds or large parks.
- Usually the more plants the better. Native trees and plantings! Important for wildlife.
- Attractive lighting. It should only focus light downward to protect our night skies. The light posts on the bridge over the railroad are too close together. Space light posts farther apart.
- Safe bike lanes
- Two lanes of traffic. It would be good to have a 3rd lane dedicated to a rapid bus system, trolley or other mass transit system to allow fast, regular service. This may require taking out a lane of parking. As the area becomes more dense, and new buildings contain internal parking structures, on-street parking will need to be removed.
- Preserve the nice 19th and early 20th century houses and buildings, most of which are already in use.
- Develop empty lots, like the Amtrak parking lot, and redevelop unattractive buildings such as car service stations and the current Habitat for Humanity building into larger, nicer structures. Proposals for new buildings need to be well designed and aesthetically pleasing. Classical architecture and modern designs are both welcome. If well designed, differing styles can go well together.
- Street should be 8' wide if one way or 10' if two way separated multi-use paths are preferred; however, if bike lanes are chosen they need to be a minimum of 5' wide
- Lesson learned from another project (MLK Street in Indianapolis): Survey the property owners for their parking needs. It may be that one side or the other of a major artery doesn't need parking based on the survey, and this could be the opportunity for [better] bike lanes or a separated multi-use path or paths.
- Neighborhoods off Main Street – entrances to side streets should be open to fire trucks, police vehicles, and residents. WE seldom have a space at this point to park near our front entrances. Amtrak commuters are known to park in front of your home for the week!
- Redevelopment increases taxes. Residents on fixed incomes feel the impact of increased value – taxes on homes in Starr Hill have really increased.