# 7: Guidelines for Streetscape Design

The map at right shows the streetscape hierarchy for the downtown. Ash Street, Elm Street, and the portion of Center Street north of Ash are entry corridors, shown in blue. Walnut Street, Center Street south of Ash and portions of other streets shown in red are retail streets, and in addition Center Street has a median. The treatment for streets shown in purple will vary with use. All others are considered residential.



This section gives conceptual guidelines for streetscape and public space improvements in the three districts as defined in this document. The illustration above shows the three principal types of streetscape improvements (retail, image/vehicular, and residential). The red lines represent pedestrian-priority streetscapes. A sub-category of retail streetscapes is Center Street, which has an added center median (shown in red with green edges). Blue dashed lines are image/vehicular streets. The purple lines shown represent a mixture of the other three



This sketch presents the concept for Center Street, including expanded sidewalks, a median with trees and walks, a new rotary at the intersection with Walnut Street, and improved pedestrian crosswalks.

types of streetscapes, with the treatment of each block dictated by the adjoining land uses and site designs. Those streets not marked are residential streets. On the following pages existing and proposed typical street cross sections are shown. Because public improvements will be accomplished over a long period of time, it is important to establish a framework for these improvements so that they work together to create a unified image for the downtown. It is essential that the City take the lead in making improvements to the downtown environment in order to encourage and reinforce private investment. In particular, one or several blocks of Center Street, and Ash Street from the railroad tracks to the rotary should be a high priority, since improvements in these locations are highly visible and will create excitement about the revitalization process. The quality of public improvements will also set the tone for the quality of private development. Ash Street is an NCDOT-maintained road, so any improvements to this street will require a sign-off by the state.

### 7.1 Pedestrian Priority/Retail Streets

These streets will present the highest image of the community to the visitor and resident. Pedestrian comfort and safety should have the highest priority. Because these streets are meant to be enjoyed on foot, they should have the highest level of "fin-



Pedestrian Priority Streets Proposed Improvements (Decorative pedestrian lights, trees in grates, and street furnishings as selected by the City) (Unit paver sidewalks wherever possible)

ish", including such elements as pedestrian lights, benches, trash receptacles, and more elaborate paving and landscaping. Streets with this designation include (see map on previous page) Center from Ash to Elm, Walnut from the Depot to the Courthouse, James and John Streets from Ash to Mulberry, Ash from James to John, Mulberry and Chestnut from James to William, and Ormond Street. The logic in designating these streets as pedestrian priority is that they are main streets, or streets to or from destinations, such as the Depot, the Courthouse, the Post office, and future planned parking lots and garages.

All pedestrian priority streets should have the highest level of finish. Treatment should include the following features, as shown in the "before and after" cross-sections:

- Unit pavers on the sidewalks on Walnut and Center at a minimum.
- Continuous paving with trees in grates throughout.
- Sidewalks as wide as ROW allows (10' minimum if possible).
- Well-marked crosswalks and crossing lights if needed.
- Poured concrete curb and gutter, with consideration given to the use of granite curbs on Center and least, and perhaps on Walnut.
- Pedestrian amenities such as pedestrian lights, benches, banners, more frequent placement of trash receptacles, planters, directories, and so on.
- Parallel parking rather than head in parking throughout the district (except Ormond Street).
- Street lighting at intersections and pedestrian lighting throughout.

Note in the cross-sections on page 46, which used Walnut Street as a model, that the main difference between the existing and proposed cross-sections is the addition of street trees. On Walnut Street from George Street east to the Courthouse the existing sidewalks are narrow and will probably only allow planting of a more upright form of tree, rather than a spreading form. It may be feasible in some cases to leave the current brick paving and simply add concrete collars and street trees, although eventually it would be preferable to use a version of the final design for Center Street on all downtown streets. Where there are overhead lines that must remain it will not be possible to plant street trees unless the lines can be buried or rerouted to the backs of buildings, or unless smaller trees are used.

On streets other than Center and Walnut, it would be desirable, but is not essential that the sidewalks consist of all unit pavers: the essential element is the continuous paving from ROW to curb. The only exception to this continuous paving treatment would be Walnut from George Street west to just past the intersection with Virginia, and on Center between Pine and Elm. On these blocks single-family residential already exists or is planned. Because of this, the treatment should probably change



The existing and proposed cross-sections for Center Street are shown above. Between Pine and Elm Streets, the cross-section for this road changes from continuous sidewalk paving to a 7-8'-wide tree strip and an 8'-wide (preferably brick) walk on each side. The treatment for the median would remain the same throughout.

The sketch on the right shows the intersection of Ash and Center Streets. Because Ash is proposed to be a major route into the downtown, and the rotary is the entry to the downtown, improvements here are critically important.



to 6-8' unit paver walks with a grass tree strip at the curb. The unit pavers will unify the entire length of the street, while the tree strip will signify a residential area.

Center Street, because of its greater width and its importance to the image of the entire community, includes in addition a 40'wide median from Elm north to Ash, and further north to Oak if possible (and if new development as shown in the plan is built). The cross section for Center Street is shown on the next page. The 40' median includes a 10'-wide center walkway of unit pavers and two 15' grass tree strips. This median will become an important new civic space for the community, and because of this, it can vary along it's length to include seating areas, monuments, memorials, artwork, and so on.

## 7.2 Image/Vehicular Streets

This type of street carries many vehicles to and from the downtown. It includes Ash Street from the railroad tracks to and past William Street, and Elm Street from the railroad tracks to and past the cemetery. Although we will only deal with these streets within the original downtown master plan study area, the model could apply elsewhere where there are collector roads with commercial and mixed uses along the edges. These is not the types of streets that will carry a great deal of pedestrian traffic, so whatever improvements are made should be aimed at moving traffic safely and efficiently, providing signage easily seen from vehicles, and creating an attractive landscaped edge. Typical cross-sections are shown on the following pages.





Even though these are not pedestrian streets, they should always have a minimum 5'-wide continuous sidewalk, preferably behind a minimum 5'-wide tree strip, and well-marked pedestrian crosswalks are recommended at all intersections. Improvements to Ash Street should be high priority, as this is the most attractive entry into the downtown, but it still needs cosmetic improvements to adequately welcome visitors.

Recommended public improvements for Image/Vehicular streets include:

- A minimum 5' grass strip with trees.
- A minimum 5' sidewalk. Although brick paving is not necessary, a continuous concrete sidewalk is recommended.
- Poured concrete curb and gutter.
- Reduction of driveway widths, screening of parking, and aggregation of driveways wherever possible.
- Clear wayfinding signage to direct people to their destinations and to parking areas.
- Parallel parking where it now exists (this may be instead of a second moving lane in each direction).
- Well-marked crosswalks at all intersections, including crossing lights at intersections that need them (to be determined).
- In locations where the street cross-section is wider than 60', consideration should be given to creating a center median with trees that would narrow to a left turn lane at intersections. This cross section is much safer for pedestrians crossing wide streets, and also allows the creation a an additional attractive green space and improved image at entry points. An example of one area where a median would work is the east end of Elm Street.
- Upgraded street lighting. In most cases, this would mean removal of serpent-head fixtures mounted on power poles and their replacement with sharp cut-off shoebox or round fixtures. A finish such as bronze is recommended, because this color tends to be less noticeable. In locations closer to the downtown, or where and when funds allow, pedestrian fixtures could be used in addition to, or in place of, street lights.
- In locations where overhead lines must remain, planting of smaller ornamental trees (e.g. Crepe Myrtles) is recommended; where overhead utility lines can be relocated or buries, full size street trees are recommended.
- Bike lanes are shown on both cross-sections.
- See site design guidelines for screening requirements on adjacent properties.

The exact dimensions and design of the street will require design development work and, in the case of Ash Street, approvals from the NCDOT.







These two photos show appropriate character for residential streetscapes. The top photo is the historic community of Southport, NC, and the bottom photo is the New Urbanist community of Woodsong in Shallotte, NC. Both show a narrow concrete walk and a tree strip next to the road. Sidewalk width should vary according to expected pedestrian traffic.

# 7.3 Residential Streetscapes

Nearly all of the residential streets in the downtown area have a 60' right of way, so typicals are based on that profile. If the streets are narrower, parking on one side should be removed rather than the tree strip and sidewalk being narrowed. There should not be as large a demand for parking on residential streets, in any case. Parking can also be removed from one or both sides of the street for about 80' back from the intersection if it is necessary to create left-turn lanes.

A typical existing and proposed cross-section for residential streetscapes is shown on the following page. Recommended improvements for residential streets include the following:

- Minimum 5' grassed tree strip with trees.
- Minimum 4-6' sidewalk (depending on width of ROW and anticipated foot traffic).
- Poured concrete curb and gutter.
- Pedestrian lights with street lights at intersections where needed (the pedestrian lights could be single-head lights rather than the doubles used in the downtown, but using the same poles).
- Curb cuts should be kept to a minimum. Wherever possible, access to parking should be from the rear of properties. If driveways enter from the front of properties, all turn-around and car storage areas and garages must be behind the back edge of the primary building on the site if possible. Driveways aprons will be a maximum of 14' wide, with 10-12' preferred. Walks should continue at grade across driveways.
- When streets are re-done, efforts should be made to save existing healthy trees, even if it requires an accommodation in the widths of proposed streetscape elements.
- Burial or re-routing of overhead power lines where they occur wherever possible.
- In locations where overhead lines must remain, planting of smaller ornamental trees (e.g. Crepe Myrtles) is recommended; where overhead utility lines can be relocated or buries, full size street trees are recommended.



Two styles of pedestrian lights on Center Street.



*These longer tree grates provide more root space for street trees.* 

Treatment for streets will vary where the uses change along their length within the downtown master plan area. There are many examples of this, such as William Street, which would be treated as residential for two or three blocks moving north from Elm, then transition to retail near the Courthouse, then transition to image/vehicular farther north. Adjacent uses should guide decisions about appropriate streetscape treatment.

The typical existing road width on residential streets with a 60' ROW appears to be either  $\sim$ 30' or  $\sim$ 35'. There appears to be no parking on the streets with 30' ROWs.

If it is too expensive to bury overhead wires and impractical to re-route them to the backs of buildings, consolidation of the overhead wires to one side of the street or the other is recommended. The preferred side for the wires would be the northfacing side on the east-west streets (this will allow shade on the south-facing front of buildings on the other side of the street), and/or the side with less existing healthy trees to be saved.

### 6.4 Streetscape Furniture and Lighting

Choices for streetscape furniture and lighting should be made as the first streetscapes are designed. The design process should include detailed design for all the various types of streetscapes, even if only one type will be implemented. Planning for all variations will provide guidance for the City over the many years that streetscapes will be planned and built.

The existing pedestrian lights are vary attractive and should probably be retained as the City standard for the downtown. Elements may be added such as banner arms, street name signs, or specialty items such as gateway arches which harmonize with the lights. The City will have to decide if black will be the color for all fixtures or if another color should be chosen.

Other elements, such as trash receptacles and benches, should probably be reconsidered as part of this process. Paving color and materials will also need to be considered. There is a brick color and pattern now used on Center Street, but since the sidewalks will be widened, this would be the appropriate time to make any changes. If the City wishes to stay with brick paving, great richness can be achieved by using more than one color of brick paving, so this is one possibility. One material that is NOT recommended for use as unit pavers is colored concrete pavers, as they tend to fade over time. Whatever the design for the sidewalks, the retail streetscapes should probably be some type of unit paving set in sand rather than a monolithic surface (e.g. concrete) or mortared paver. The reason for this is that downtown streets must fairly regularly be excavated for utility upgrades, new service, or for other reasons, and only unit pavers can be removed and put back in place with no visible "scars."







A wide variety of styles and sizes are available for street furniture. Quality and durability should be the primary considerations to ensure longevity.

The older tree grates will have to be replaced by grates with narrower openings to meet the requirements for handicap accessibility. New grates in front of City Hall are the new type with narrower openings.

Experience also suggests that cast iron benches with wood slats, or all-tropical wood benches are more durable and cooler than all metal benches, especially in eastern North Carolina.

In general, purchasing the best furniture and lighting the City can afford will save money over the long term since higher quality fittings will last much longer.





