WALNUT HILLS COMPLETE STREET TYPOLOGIES

Walnut Hills
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Goals

The goal of this urban design initiative is to design a system of complete streets for the community of Walnut Hills that promotes walkability within the neighborhood, creating a more pedestrian friendly environment while also providing increased multimodal access to the community. By creating different typologies for a complete streets network, this project will help to determine what is necessary to create a more pedestrian oriented street regardless of the size or type of street.

The project addresses the improved streetscape proposal outlined in my group’s framework plan. This proposal should also be put into place with the property acquisition and development plan along the central business district also proposed by our framework plan. While a complete streets project alone will not provide increased economic development in the community, if it is paired with property acquisition and development it will create a more lively and pedestrian friendly environment to attract businesses and shops to newly renovated properties in the central business district.

This complete streets proposal will also help in the area of neighborhood redevelopment by creating a unique streetscape system that will differentiate the community’s central business district from others and give it a new character. By creating a unique pedestrian oriented streetscape, the hope is that the negative image of Walnut Hills will begin to change, allowing residents and visitors to experience the historic character of the community. The project also hopes to address environmental improvements with the use of storm water management techniques and the use of energy efficient street lighting systems. The proposed complete streets project will also create more multimodal transportation options, with the creation of bicycle lanes, safer pedestrian sidewalks and crossings, and the addition of high-speed rail lanes along the interstate.

Overall, it addresses the economic aspect of sustainability by creating a street and pedestrian environment that will attract more businesses while utilizing TIF funding to offset some of the initial costs. It addresses the social aspect of sustainability by creating an environment that will bring people of various backgrounds and socioeconomic classes to shop and explore the community. And environmentally it will provide ways to utilize bio swales and more efficient pedestrian lighting throughout the community.
**Project Description**

The project proposes various streetscape strategies for various sizes and types of roads, focusing on residential, main streets, boulevards, and highways. In order to create a more pedestrian oriented street I focused on creating a better buffer zone between the pedestrian zone of the sidewalk and the automobile zone of the street. In many places of the community, and especially surrounding the focal point of the central business district at Peebles Corner, the sidewalks are already wide enough to create a streetscape that would create the necessary division between pedestrian and automobile zones. This interstitial zone provides an opportunity to create seating and other sidewalk amenities such as raised planters and more street trees. Because of the character of old brick buildings in the community, I have proposed that this “planting buffer zone” be differentiated with brick pavers and brick planters. Permeable brick pavers could also be used to help with storm water management on sidewalks to reduce water runoff into the city sewer system.

Another important aspect of complete streets is the implementation of traffic calming strategies to slow traffic in the community. I utilized various elements to meet this goal, including more street trees, planted medians, and reduction in traffic lanes. Increased street trees along sidewalks not only help to create a more enjoyable environment for pedestrians, it also narrows automobile drivers’ perceived space on the road. Sunken medians with planted trees are also proposed along boulevards such as Gilbert Avenue and Victory Parkway. These medians with trees also serve to narrow drivers’ perception of space while also providing opportunities for bio swales for storm water management and treatment from water runoff. Reducing the number of traffic lanes is also proposed along main streets of McMillan Avenue and Taft Avenue, with the addition of a permanent parking and bus stop lane and a bicycle lane. By reducing the lanes on these roads, drivers will be forced to slow down and street crossings will be safer for pedestrians with the addition of bulb outs and neckdowns at corner intersections to reduce crossing distances.

There is currently an ongoing project studying the on and off ramps for I-71 around Walnut Hills, which provides an opportunity to design for future multimodal options along the highway. One of the proposals calls for two service roads along the highway that would allow for access to both Martin Luther King Drive and Taft Avenue from I-71. In my project I am proposing for the addition of a bike and walking path to line these service roads, providing a green north-south corridor within the community. I have also proposed for the creation of lanes that could serve light rail lines in the future between the north and south bound lanes on I-71. These light rail lanes would be separated from automobile travel lanes with the addition of sunken bio swale medians, which would help with storm water management and reduce runoff into the Cincinnati sewer system.

**Rationale**

Include a narrative describing how your concept and proposal responds to the following:

The concept for a complete streets program is very much needed in Walnut Hills in order to regenerate a lively atmosphere in the community’s central business district.
Community representatives and stakeholders are adamant that Peebles Corner is the epicenter of activity for the neighborhood and should remain so in any proposal for the community. This complete streets proposal accounts for that and allows for an improved pedestrian environment to help lead the way in the revitalization of the Walnut Hills historic business district.

The GO Cincinnati report goes into detail about creating multimodal transportation options in the city’s communities along with reinforcing the need for more walkable neighborhoods in order to spur more multimodal options, including light rail and streetcars. They state that there is a “strong positive relationship between rail transit and the existence of walkable urban places: 65 percent of walkable urban places are served by rail transit” (GO Cincinnati 60). By redesigning the infrastructure for more complete streets with improved pedestrian and bike zones, this proposal will help to promote Walnut Hills as a walkable community and hopefully allow for greater investment in development and transportation options.

The Walnut Hills 45206 report also lists streetscaping and improved transportation options among its many goals for the community. Goal 3 of its economic development vision states that the community would like to “improve the safety, cleanliness, and visual identity of the ’06 business districts” (45206 8). Their goals for the image of the community also have an objective to “develop a streetscape plan that addresses issues of curb appeal, design of materials, increasing cleanliness, and eliminating litter and blight” (45206 17). This includes improving street lighting and a beautification and streetscape program. The report also states the need for various modes of transportation and improved pedestrian environments with safer street crossings. As the 45206 report shows, this complete streets proposal fits into the development plans the community has in mind in the near future.

**Implementation/Funding Strategies**

This complete streets proposal could be partially funded through tax increment financing (TIF), which Walnut Hills was accepted for in 2004. According to the City of Cincinnati reports, a TIF zone was established for streetscape improvements at Peebles Corner for a total of $400,000 with the Ohio Department of Transportation contributing $844,000 for improvements along Gilbert Avenue (City of Cincinnati 2). This money was allocated for improvements such as new bulb outs or neckdowns, sidewalk work, improved lighting, and benches among others.

**Precedent Studies**

The precedent study I used for my complete streets proposal was for the pedestrian zone redevelopment and streetscape improvements on “A” Avenue in Lake Oswego, Oregon. Lake Oswego is an old mining town near the suburbs of Portland, Oregon. The downtown central business district had become dilapidated and business activity had decreased before the redevelopment of the area. The goals of the streetscape and sidewalk improvements included curb extensions, special pavements to delineate
pedestrian zones, street trees, street furniture, pedestrian scaled lighting, and the implementation of bicycle lanes along roadways.

Although located in a more suburban area, Lake Oswego’s central business district has similar characteristics as Walnut Hills, with low to medium density commercial and mixed uses located within one block of low to medium density residential. The streetscape and pedestrian zone redevelopment project helped to revitalize the business district by bringing new investment and an improved pedestrian atmosphere.

**Bibliography**

City of Cincinnati, Walnut Hills NRSA 2004 Projects. City of Cincinnati. October 20, 2004

