City carves more space for walking

Expanded downtown to feature added parking, less room for cars

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An ambitious, long-term plan to expand downtown's epicenter into five distinct districts around Main Street begins with a new effort to remake the streets that serve as the links.

A recent walking tour kicked off a streetscape project that could ultimately do more of the narrowing, planting and restriping already implemented in areas such as Main and Broad streets, and that is designed to spark development off Main, officials say.

Consultant say a network of downtown streets need to be more usable for pedestrians if the city wants to branch outward, tying an emerging museum district at Heritage Green, for example, more closely to downtown.

The result is less room for driving cars, much as Main Street was narrowed from four lanes to two.

Ultimately, 10 miles of downtown corridors will go into the master plan for streets, including the two "concrete collars" of Academy and Church streets, North Main between Academy and Stone Avenue and Washington Street, McBee Avenue, Spring and Falls streets and others, said Andrew Meeker, the city's project manager.

Mayor Knox White said the goal is to encourage people to walk more places and ultimately into districts such as an enhanced Bi-Lo Center "gateway" district, the County Square area and the warehouse district around the West End.

Those are three of the distinct areas sketched by a city consultant in 2007. Now the firm, Glatting Jackson Kercher Anglin, is steering a five-month effort to set the priority for street makeovers that White said will be gradually funded with money from downtown's special "tax increment" district.

The easiest work could begin within months, while the city will also seek to work with developers to improve streets in conjunction with projects such as Main at Broad, Meeker said. The capital budget will fund more work, and streets already scheduled for repaving could also get the new striping.

On Broad, Spring and Falls, the changes have already narrowed driving space, added bike lanes, eliminated turn lanes and added more than 70 total on-street parking spaces.

Meeker said the point is to use the street space more efficiently, and his office has received only one complaint about the reduced space for cars.

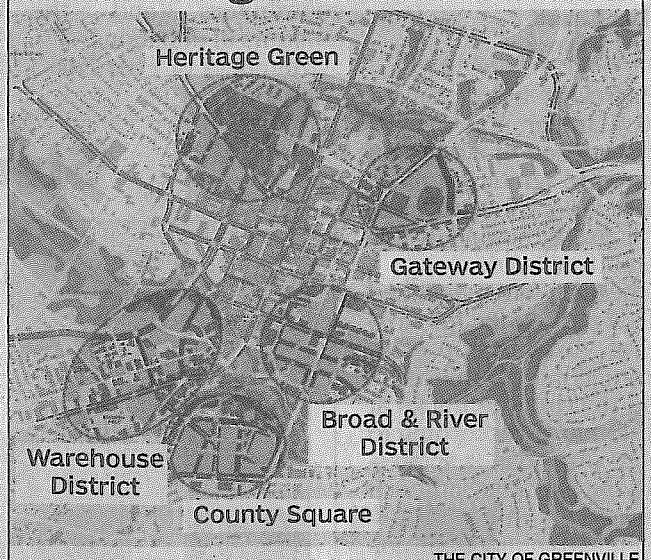
"There's definitely a learning curve when someone drives a street every day and makes some assumptions," Meeker said.

White said he hasn't heard any complaints and that added parking is always popular.

The pace of the work, he said, will ultimately be driven by the city budget.

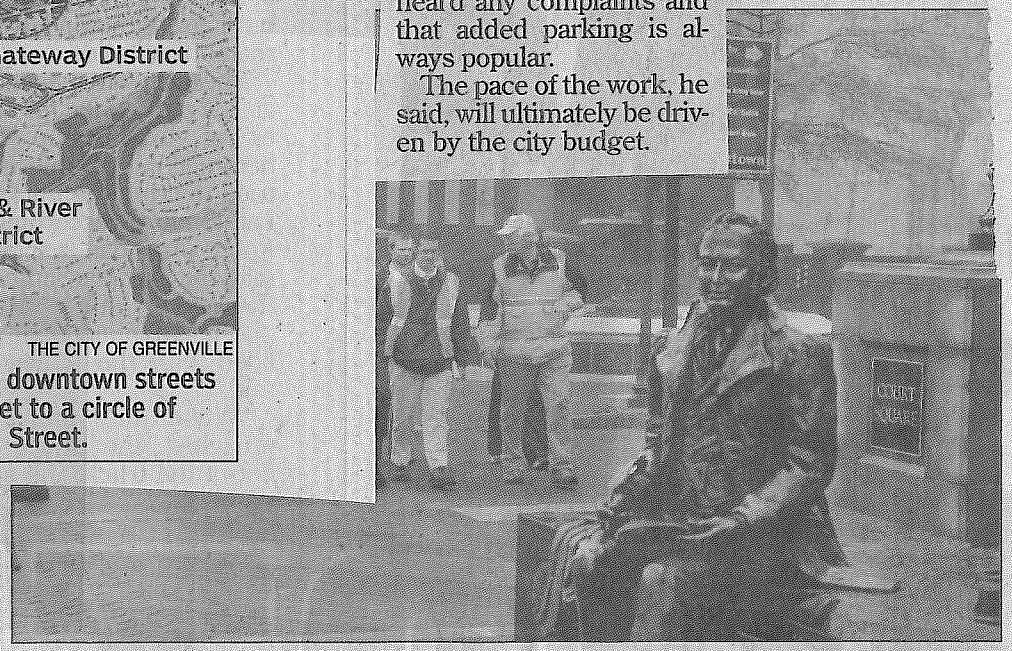
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Connecting downtown



THE CITY OF GREENVILLE

A city plan to remake 10 miles of downtown streets is designed to connect Main Street to a circle of future districts surrounding Main Street.



GEORGE GARDNER / Staff

Dan Burden of Glatting-Jackson leads a group of Greenville officials, planners and residents on a walking tour to look at downtown changes.

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