



NEWS RELEASE

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SCDOT Commission hears, sees historic Beaufort planning for a new future

State Highway Commissioners meeting in Beaufort Thursday learned how City leaders are preparing for Beaufort's fourth century – including transportation options beyond roads and cars.

“We’re going back to the original city planners,” Beaufort Mayor Pro Tem Donnie Beer told the S.C. Department of Transportation Board of Commissioners, meeting in the Beaufort City Hall. “Our plans are to redevelop and infill our city ... rather than building out, we are going to build in.”

Beaufort City Council and the Beaufort Redevelopment Commission are working with residents, property owners, developers and businesses to turn the City's updated comprehensive plan into reality.

“The relationship between transportation and roads is key to the success of the residential and commercial realms,” Beaufort City Manager Scott Dadson said in his welcoming remarks to the Highway Commission.

Demetri Baches, who heads up the City's Office of Civic Investment, helped lead a recent three-month public review of downtown Beaufort's challenges and opportunities.

“Beaufort is already a walkable area, so we have a lot of opportunities with improved sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, bike routes and walking trails to encourage residents to walk as an alternative to driving,” Baches said.

With the Heritage golf tournament underway on Hilton Head Island, Baches pitched the idea of a water taxi between Beaufort and Hilton Head to reduce road congestion; provide faster transport

and unique, relaxing travel; and to create an economic opportunity for day trippers in both locations.

“We are not trying to become the next Charleston or Savannah – we have plenty of wonderful and unique aspects right here to make downtown Beaufort a destination for travelers, for residents and for commercial development,” he said after the meeting.

During the recent charrette for downtown Beaufort, ideas surfaced – and, in some cases, resurfaced – on ways to improve Beaufort. Ideas included:

- Developing the Downtown Marina parking lot as an extension of the Henry C. Chambers Waterfront Park
- Making Port Republic Street two-way to stimulate retail shopping
- Building a parking garage in the core commercial area near Bay Street
- Finding innovative ways to blend an expanding USC-Beaufort campus into the retail and residential life downtown
- And the possibility of creating on-street diagonal parking on Boundary Street between Charles Street and Ribaut Road by reducing Boundary to two lanes of traffic.

“All of these initiatives are micro matters in relation to the macro issues you deal with,” Baches told the Highway Commission. “Locally, we’re trying to make sure we are ready to receive all those people you are going to bring to us” with improvements to the state’s roads and highways.

With roughly 2,000 people living in the downtown area studied this spring, about 500 participated in the public meetings and presentations, Baches said.

Additional public meetings about planning and creating Beaufort’s future are scheduled throughout the year and 2012. The Redevelopment Commission is leading the charge, including working with developers and builders about possible infill, re-use and construction projects.

The S.C. DOT Commission usually meets in Columbia but occasionally takes its meetings to locations around the state. Craig Forrest, of Bluffton, represents the Congressional Second District which includes Beaufort County.

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