

Corridor/Entryway Master Plan



Entryway to Campustown at Green Street and Neil Street



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
Operations Division
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Entryways and corridors can generally be defined as the points of entry into Champaign and the roadways that move traffic from those entryways to various locations within the City. Corridors and entryways can usually be expected to carry the largest numbers of vehicles that enter and leave the City of Champaign on a daily basis. These points of entry and routes of travel are envisioned as prime opportunities for the City to give individuals a positive first impression as they enter our City and to provide a pleasant reminder of the community as they depart.

2.0 PURPOSE

The Corridor/Entryway (C/E) Master Plan is intended to provide a comprehensive means of defining and improving the overall appearance of Champaign's "corridors", "entryways" and "focal points". The plan will help make decisions that will improve selected locations in a manner that most effectively utilizes any funding made available for this effort and also ensure that the improved site has the necessary resources to maintain its appearance.

The C/E Master Plan is not intended to provide a definitive plan regarding future beautification efforts. Many future beautification opportunities will arise due to unexpected opportunities and unanticipated partnerships that may come together quickly. Therefore, this plan is intended to target the majority of the City's effort toward previously identified areas of priority and to provide policy-related guidance that will assist in the determination of which opportunities to undertake and which to decline.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 Corridors, Entryways, and Focal Points Defined.

Entryways and corridors can generally be defined as the primary points of access into Champaign and the major roadways that carry traffic from those entryways to and from the various focal points of activity within Champaign. Focal points are the areas of Champaign that regularly attract large numbers of the general public.

3.2 Current Entryway Inventory.

The current entryway inventory consists of three major entryways, two future major entryways, eight current minor entryways, and one future minor entryway as shown in Appendix A. All of the current and future major entryways are located where interstate highways provide access to Champaign's street system. The eight current minor entryways are located where other federal and state highways enter Champaign's City limits (four), where large numbers of vehicles pass between Champaign and Urbana (three), and at the Illinois Terminal. The future minor entryway is anticipated to be at the intersection of Olympian Drive and Market Street.

3.3 Current Corridor Inventory.

The current corridor inventory is composed of six major corridors, two future major corridors, six minor corridors, and one future minor corridor as also shown in Appendix A. The major corridors include I-57, I-72/University, I-74, Hwy 45/Neil, and portions of Green Street and Prospect Avenue. The two future major corridors are expected to be Curtis Road and Olympian Drive. The six minor corridors consist of Hwy 10, Hwy 150/Bloomington Road, Church Street, and portions of Bradley Avenue, Kirby Avenue, and Mattis Avenue. Market Street, from Olympian Drive to Bradley Avenue, is the prospective minor corridor.

3.4 Focal Points Inventory.

Locations in Champaign identified as focal points include: Campustown and the U of I Campus, Downtown Champaign, Marketplace Mall, North Prospect, and Parkland College. These sites are also identified in Appendix A.

3.5 Current Viaduct Inventory.

In 1998, Council requested that several viaducts be added as potential sites for future beautification. The viaducts are located at University Avenue, Chester Street, Springfield Avenue, and Green Street. At a later date, the viaduct on Washington Street was also added to the viaduct beautification list.

3.6 When Changes Are Needed.

There are several factors that may cause a beautification project to be undertaken. One reason would be to remove identified eyesores from the previously identified locations since the elimination of unfavorable sites can be as important as the creation of enhanced landscapes. Other potential reasons include better-defined entrances to the City, creating a visual continuity for our community, and responding to possible partnerships with other government and private organizations.

3.7 Non-City Corridors and Entryways Located Within the City.

The most obvious non-City maintained corridors and entryways within the City include the interstate system, other State-maintained roadways, and the railroad right-of-ways (ROW).

3.7.1 Interstate Corridors and Entryways.

City of Champaign interstate corridors and entryways are comprised of I-57, I-72, and I-74 and the access points into Champaign from these highways. The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) is responsible for maintaining these locations. Due to State funding shortfalls, IDOT has reduced its level of maintenance such as mowing and sweeping. State mowing standards call for mowing twice per year along interstate highways with the possibility of a third mowing if it is considered needed. Additionally, IDOT is not disposed to contracting with the City to provide services along the interstates due to the high traffic speeds and high traffic volumes in these areas. Currently, the State has allowed the City to perform tree care along the I-74 ROW, from Mattis to Urbana, and to mow back the corners at I-74 and Prospect and I-74 and Neil.

3.7.2 Federal and State Highways.

It is less well known to the general public that the State maintains other road systems passing through Champaign, including all of Springfield Avenue as well as parts of Bloomington Road, Mattis Avenue, Market Street, Neil Street, Prospect Avenue, and Wright Street. Although the roadway in these locations is always maintained by IDOT, the care of other infrastructure items (sidewalks, trees, ROW mowing, etc.) varies depending upon jointly attained intergovernmental agreements.

3.7.3 Railroad Right-of-Ways.

Two railroad systems pass through the City of Champaign. These include Illinois Central Railroad and Conrail. Although some efforts have been made to improve the appearance of railroad and private properties along these railroad corridors, this is currently considered outside of the scope of this plan.

4.0 PARTICIPANTS AND ROLES

The C/E Master Plan could not have been developed in a way that represents the interest of the area without the participation of a wide variety of individuals. Following are some of the groups that were essential to the development of the Plan.

4.1 Private Companies, Organizations and Citizens (Canadian National Railroad, Chamber of Commerce, Champaign County Design and Conservation, Grand Prairie Friends, Illinois Power, and Peter Fox and Associates).

These groups provided individuals with landscaping expertise to act as regular members of the C/E Beautification Goal Team, contributed some of the funding needed to complete beautification projects, assisted with ongoing maintenance and enhancement of the improved sites, and provided limited access to privately held property.

4.2 Other Governmental Entities (Champaign Park District, Mass Transit District, University of Illinois).

These groups provided individuals with landscaping expertise to act as regular members of the C/E Beautification Goal Team, contributed some of the funding needed to complete beautification projects, became involved in implementing various projects, and assisted with the ongoing maintenance of the improved sites.

4.3 City Staff.

This group coordinated the planning process, provided individuals with landscaping expertise, provided resources to perform initial site preparations, and assisted with ongoing maintenance of the improved sites.

4.4 Corridor/Entryway Beautification Goal Team.

This group initially defined and selected which sites belonged in the various categories, identified issues and goals for the various areas, coordinated two pilot programs at Neil Street and Windsor Road and at Green Street and Chestnut Street, inventoried and rated the various sites, determined an initial order of priority for the various locations, presented Council with a variety of possible actions and alternatives.

4.5 Public Works Advisory Board.

This group reviewed the final draft of the C/E Master Plan. This allowed them to make suggestions and facilitate revisions to the plan prior to the final draft being presented to Council.

4.6 City Council.

The Council reviewed major planning steps, provided needed feedback and direction to Staff, directly participated in some of the beautification efforts, and provided funding for the C/E Entryway Beautification Program.

5.0 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR CORRIDOR/ENTRYWAY BEAUTIFICATION

Until the establishment of the C/E Goal Team in 1998, no coordinated effort had been taken toward improving the appearance of Champaign's high visibility locations. Eyesores developed and thrived in various locations, such as at Neil and Windsor and the Green Street Viaduct, because there was no group specifically charged with addressing such problems. The Goal Team was assembled to resolve these types of problems. The Team was comprised of individuals from an assortment of interested organizations who possessed a broad array of planning, landscaping, forestry, and maintenance expertise. All the Team members have been volunteers who perform these duties as "additional responsibilities" outside of their normally assigned duties. This Team determined that a list of short-term and long-term goals was necessary in order to address the blight problems that tarnish Champaign's image.

5.1 Potential Goals.

This issue recognizes that some improvement efforts are more viable than others because they are within the City's control and can therefore be accomplished more quickly. Examples would include the "Adopt-a-Highway" program intended to improve the appearance of adopted corridors; the litter collection program implemented to maintain the appearance of the Boneyard Park; the small neighborhood grant program intended to allow neighborhoods to identify and prioritize local problems they feel most need to be targeted; and City infrastructure maintenance and improvement programs intended to improve the appearance and effectiveness of City-provided infrastructure. Since these items are within the scope of Champaign's authority, improvement efforts can be undertaken more quickly if action is desired. Long-term issues usually involve coordination of improvement efforts with other public and private entities. Examples of long-term efforts would include relocation or burying of unsightly power lines; replacement and improvement of State - maintained infrastructures along State routes within the City limits such as Springfield and Mattis Avenues; the regulation or reduction of billboards within the City; and the regulation of business signage within Champaign's boundaries. These are topics that would require much thought and discussion and would require additional study regarding associated costs, the public's opinion on the issues, and the possible means of implementation.

Short-Term:

- Define what constitutes a corridor, entryway, or focal point
- Determine areas in need of aesthetic improvement
- Complete a pilot project to demonstrate that the Team could obtain results
- Keep a short list of potential projects rather than an unrealistically long list of projects
- Begin the process of developing partnerships with the private community
- Perform a condition inventory of the corridor/entryway system
- Seek financial and vocal support from the City Council
- Urge IDOT to improve its current standard of maintenance
- Recognize the limited supply of resources by not starting any new project until the current project is completed
- Remain ready to respond to beautification opportunities that may occur quickly

Long-Term:

- Develop maintenance standards for the community and determine which entity is responsible for overseeing and enforcing them
- Seek grants and other long-term funding to support on-going maintenance of completed beautification projects
- Develop a sign design for certain entryways in the City
- Develop a “vision” for the community – a general theme or standard that will create a sense of uniformity within the City
- Attempt to limit the abundance and high-visibility of utility poles and lines
- Advance reasonable restrictions regarding the number, size, design and location of billboards within Champaign
- Consider developing uniform business signage ordinances
- Push for IDOT to provide higher levels of infrastructure maintenance within Champaign’s city limits
- Contact property owners to seek their participation in improving corridors and entryways adjacent to their properties
- Determine linkages and integrate ideas into other plans, projects and programs
- Educate the community about the purpose and goals of C/E Beautification

6.0 CONDITION ASSESSMENT OF THE CORRIDOR/ENTRYWAY SYSTEM

The C/E Beautification Team performed a condition assessment of the various major and minor entryways and corridors late in 1999. The C/E Goal Team created an inventory sheet that allowed for each C/E locations to be scored in six categories. The items scored fell into two general categories: too many ... business signs, utility poles and wires, and street width; and not enough... landscaping, welcome signs, and pedestrian/bike amenities. Each location received a score between 1 and 5, with 1 considered very bad and 5 considered very good. Overall condition ratings assigned to each location are included in Appendix B.

7.0 ISSUES DISCUSSED AND COUNCIL DIRECTION.

7.1 Potential Partners/Financing.

7.1.1 Background.

The beautification improvements that have occurred since 1998 have resulted largely from the Goal Team's ability to react to opportunities and financing as they became available. The beautification projects have thus far been completed in large part due to the City's ability to partner with other public and private organizations. The Neil and Windsor Project received funding from the City of Champaign, CCDC, and Peter Fox, while the Champaign Park District, the U of I, CCDC, Peter Fox, and the City of Champaign donated an array of professional expertise. The Green and Chestnut Project received funding assistance from the U of I, Devonshire Realty, Illinois Power, Campustown 2000, and the City of Champaign, while the Champaign Park District, U of I, and City of Champaign donated professional services and materials. These partnerships have supplied invaluable community support as well as additional funding to the beautification efforts.

7.1.2 Considerations.

The issue involved maintaining City funding at current levels which would continue completing about one project each year, or increasing the City's financing in order to perform more beautification projects each year.

7.1.3 Council Direction.

While acknowledging the importance of the City's beautification efforts, Council recognized that it was currently facing many funding needs. Council suggested that C/E Goal Team members continue to seek public and private partnerships in order to lessen the City's expense of such beautification projects. The Council also authorized that \$25,000 be allocated for this purpose annually in the CIP in order to compliment funding provided by other sources. It was also suggested that other allocated City resources (personnel, equipment, etc.) continue to be utilized as a portion of the City's contribution to such efforts.

7.2 Prioritization of Corridor/Entryway Beautification Efforts.

7.2.1 Background.

One of the Goal Team's initial tasks was to identify Champaign's major corridors and entryways. Following that task, the Goal Team was directed by Council to devote its efforts toward the completion of a "pilot project" at the Neil and Windsor intersection. Recently, the Goal Team has attempted to focus its efforts on developing an overall, long-term plan for the beautification of Champaign's corridors and entryways. What must be developed now is a set of criteria that can be applied to the City's corridors and entryways in order to prioritize their order of completion. Many possible criteria could be used to determine the priority level of each location, so it is necessary to select which criteria should be used and to list each of those criteria in order of importance.

7.2.2 Considerations.

This issue involved selecting which criteria should be utilized to prioritize future improvements. Some of the possible criteria presented included daily traffic counts, site visibility, jurisdictional control, availability of additional funding sources, developed or undeveloped, rural areas, downtown/campus areas, neighborhood areas.

7.2.3 Council Direction.

Council directed staff to concentrate on the more easily accomplished improvement projects-- those that are at highly visible sites and ones that are located on sites under the City's jurisdictional control. The Council also agreed that the inclusion of beautification efforts should be a standard procedure in the construction or reconstruction of transportation infrastructure within Champaign's City limits. Based on Council direction, the following criteria will be used to establish and schedule new sites:

- Ease of implementation
- Visible impact of the site
- City control of the site
- Opportunity for outside financing through grants or donations
- Further direction from Council

7.3 Maintenance Standards for Corridor/Entryway Locations.

7.3.1 Background.

Currently, there are no maintenance standards for Champaign's corridors and entryways. Since no entity, group, or individual has had oversight responsibility for the overall appearance of the City's corridor/entryway locations, no effort has been made to develop a set of uniform maintenance standards. The fact that the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) has responsibility for many of Champaign's main corridors and entryways makes it difficult for the City to impose maintenance standards on IDOT's areas of responsibility. Additionally, the railroads that pass through Champaign are operated by corporations that are extremely independent, lack local contacts, have limited maintenance budgets and personnel, and have little concern for the appearance of railroad ROW.

7.3.2 Considerations.

The issue to be considered was to decide whether the City would continue to maintain City-owned areas according to current vegetation standards as defined in the City of Champaign Municipal Code, Section 22-1 (7) (Appendix C) while attempting to obtain voluntary compliance from IDOT and the railroads, or if more aggressive efforts should be taken to raise the level of IDOT and railroad maintenance.

7.3.3 Council Direction.

The City will continue to maintain City-regulated areas according to the current vegetation ordinance and will continue its efforts to obtain voluntary compliance from IDOT and the railroads. If efforts to obtain voluntary compliance are successful, it will result in an improved and consistent appearance for all of Champaign's corridors and

entryways. If voluntary compliance is unsuccessful, it may become necessary to consider other options.

APPENDICES

- A.** Corridor, Entryway, and Focal Points Map
- B.** Corridor/Entryway Condition Inventory
- C.** City of Champaign Municipal Code Section 35-16(1-25)
(Vegetation Ordinance)
- D.** Corridor/Entryway C.I.P. Project Worksheet