

**Staff Memorandum**

Council Work Session– 01/05/2022

**Provide Guidance on Franklin Street Options Downtown.**

**Staff:**

Colleen Willger, Director  
Bergen Watterson, Transportation Planning Manager  
Sarah Poulton, Downtown Special Projects Manager

**Department:**

Planning  
Manager’s Office

**Background:** The design of Franklin Street downtown has been a topic of discussion for a few years. The road is maintained by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and is currently five-lanes with parallel parking on both sides through downtown Chapel Hill. The discussion has taken form over the past two years:

- **October 2019:** Council Work Session recommendation to pursue a lane reallocation with NCDOT resurfacing in summer 2020
- **January 2020 – April 2020:** Staff worked with Ramey Kemp (RKA) on pavement marking plans and public outreach (survey, public meetings)
- **April 2020:** Final plans with traffic-running bike lanes, approved by NCDOT
- **Summer 2020:** COVID-19 delayed resurfacing to summer 2021, Town installed temporary in-road walkway
- **Spring 2021:** NCDOT notification that OWASA project delayed resurfacing again to summer 2022
- **October 2021:** Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership petition to explore transferring maintenance of Franklin St.

**Maintenance Transfer:** The Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership’s petition led staff to investigate, to the extent possible, the feasibility of transferring maintenance of the street to The Town. Representatives from NCDOT have told staff that they are amenable to the Town taking over maintenance of any portion of Franklin St. in any amount. Staff considered the downtown core, from Raleigh St. to Merritt Mill Rd., to be the most desirable segment of Franklin St. for purposes of aligning the road design with Town goals related to economic development and emphasizing the safety of vulnerable road users.

What does transferring maintenance mean?

Transferring maintenance of Franklin St. means that the Town would take on responsibility for everything within the right-of-way. Currently NCDOT maintains everything from curb-to-curb and the Town maintains the sidewalk and curb. Below is a table showing the increased responsibility after maintenance transfer:

<b>Current Town Responsibility</b>	<b>Additional Town Responsibility After Maintenance Transfer</b>
Sidewalk, brick, curb and gutter	Stormwater
Street sweeping, trash and recycling, pressure washing	Signal maintenance and adjustments
Parking spaces, loading zones, other painting	Crosswalk paint and maintenance
Downtown Partnership maintains planters	Resurfacing, snow removal, other general maintenance
Trees	

## **Staff Memorandum**

Council Work Session– 01/05/2022

### Why transfer maintenance to the Town?

Town control of Franklin St. would allow more autonomy over the design and use of the road. The Town has demonstrated commitment to goals of supporting local businesses and prioritizing safety of vulnerable road users (people traveling outside of personal vehicles), and the current design of Franklin St. is not aligned with these goals. The Town sees Franklin St. as a people-oriented destination, whereas NCDOT believes Franklin St. should function as a throughway. In addition, NCDOT must approve all projects within the right-of-way, and Town staff have struggled to gain approval for projects that deviate from traditional roadway designs (i.e. colorful crosswalks, protected bike lanes, pedestrian safety infrastructure). The road itself is in unsatisfactory condition, with a significant crown making some existing crosswalks non-ADA compliant due to the slope, as well as unmaintained stormwater infrastructure. Finally, NCDOT prohibits the road from being used for commerce, limiting the Town's ability to allow even temporary installations to support businesses and create an inviting place for people.

If the Town controlled Franklin St. we would still need to follow certain guidelines related to roadways. The temporary in-road walkway, as currently configured, could not remain in place due to ADA compliance issues. However, a different design or configuration could be considered.

Financial Impact: The Town's Public Works department has estimated the high-end cost to transfer maintenance and provided both one-time costs and annual costs. The Town would receive approximately \$8,500 in annual revenue from the Powell Bill if we take on maintenance of the street. The potential funding sources for both the one-time upgrades and annual costs have not been identified.

### One-time upgrades:

- Resurfacing to reduce crown: \$825,000 (\$675,000 resurface/paint, \$150,000 reduce crown)
- Geo-technical analysis: \$12,000
- Video evaluation of drainage system: \$31,250
- Stormwater system replacement: \$1,831,100

Total: **\$2,699,350**

### Annual costs:

- General street maintenance: \$75,000
- Traffic signal maintenance: \$27,000
- Pavement marking maintenance: \$6,000
- Stormwater maintenance and crew (includes new staff person): \$82,400

Total: **\$190,400**

Town staff will continue to meet with representatives from NCDOT to determine what, if any, improvements the Department would make prior to transferring maintenance to the

## Staff Memorandum

Council Work Session– 01/05/2022

Town. The stormwater system replacement costs are dependent on the results of the video evaluation.

**Lane Reallocation:** The Town has heard support for a reconfiguration of Franklin St. from many sources. The current five lanes of traffic and on-street parking emphasize single occupancy vehicles above all other uses of the street despite Franklin St. serving as our economic, visitor, and university center. Staff has investigated the potential for two types of bike lanes as alternatives to Franklin St.'s current configuration.

In early 2020 Town staff hired RKA to create pavement marking plans for bike lanes on W. Franklin St. between Columbia St. and Merritt Mill Rd. Staff gathered public input via survey and public meetings and has NCDOT-approved plans for traffic-running bike lanes with buffers on both sides almost ready for implementation.

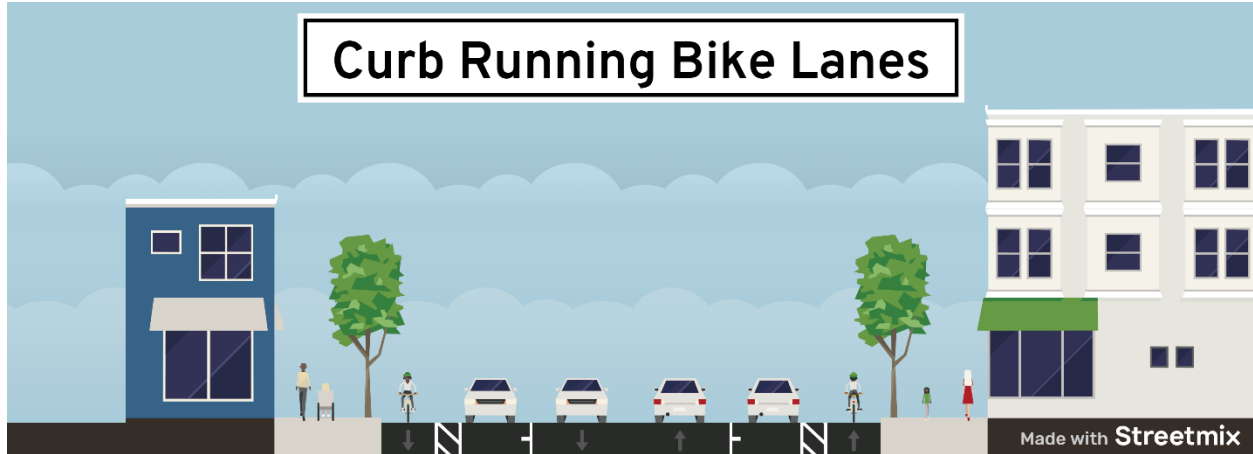
Traffic-running bike lanes: Traffic-running bike lanes do not offer vertical protection to cyclists but are easier for bikes to maneuver in and out of the lane when turning. This option would allow the Town to install one additional on-street parking space and two loading zones.



Curb-running bike lanes: Since the temporary walkway has been in place on Franklin St. staff has received feedback supportive of curb-running bike lanes (bike lanes running between parked cars and the curb). This option was evaluated in 2020 but was not preferred primarily due to fire safety and access concerns, as well as driveway and intersection conflicts between vehicles and bikes. This option offers parked cars as protection and reduces potential conflicts between cyclists and cars entering/leaving parking spaces. This option poses possible conflicts at intersections and for bikes wishing to turn left. It is likely that on-street parking would be reduced with this option to ensure adequate visibility at driveways and intersections.

## Staff Memorandum

Council Work Session– 01/05/2022



**Financial impact:** If the Town wishes to pursue curb-running bike lanes then additional design costs will be necessary. In addition, both traffic-running and curb-running bike lanes will require approximately \$250,000 for signal plans, signal adjustments, median redesign, and median construction. This has always been necessary but the uncertainty and delay of the project has made it difficult for staff to identify funding.

**Next Steps:** Staff seeks guidance from Town Council on whether to pursue a maintenance transfer of Franklin St. from NCDOT. The following are two options for how to proceed:

Option A: Town elects to pursue taking on maintenance of Franklin St.

In this scenario, the Town would identify what, if any, improvements NCDOT will complete before transferring maintenance and what other improvements are needed to meet our goals for the street. Determining those goals would involve a public input process to talk with Downtown stakeholders about what design best serves them within the boundaries of adopted federal road guidelines. The existing temporary walkway could then stay on the street until the Town resurfaces and restripes Franklin St. to the determined design.

Alternately, the Town could transfer maintenance of Franklin St. and NCDOT could still resurface the road in summer 2022. This would perpetuate the existing issues with the street (severe crown, stormwater concerns) but it would be in better condition between summer 2022 and whenever the Town implements the preferred changes in the future.

Option B: Current maintenance arrangement continues

In this scenario, the Town is required to submit our preferred restriping design to NCDOT by late March 2022 for summer 2022 resurfacing. This would include seeking public input from the community on a preferred design and funding to enact that design if it includes bike lanes.