

Rincon Heights Neighborhood Association Resolution on the Broadway Project

The City of Tucson's 1987 Draft Final Report on Broadway Boulevard calls for a 150' wide street with eight lanes and a 24' landscaped median as well as a 30' landscaped buffer and sound wall. This would necessitate demolishing all structures on the north side of the street between the alley and Broadway, Euclid and Country Club. This would wipe away virtually all local businesses, several dozen historic structures, and two churches. It would also jeopardize Rincon Heights Neighborhood's Historic District designation by removing 19 contributing properties that face Broadway, and several others from adjacent side streets.

<http://dot.tucsonaz.gov/projects/broadway>

Whereas plans to widen the Euclid-to-Country Club section of Broadway were concluded with almost no public input and despite significant local opposition, both in 1987 and in 2005; and

Whereas this 23 year old plan is based on outdated approaches and inaccurate predictions of traffic volumes, and would cost \$71 million taxpayer dollars we simply do not have; and

Whereas this stretch of Broadway contains several dozen historically and architecturally significant buildings, including longstanding family businesses, that contribute to the unique local ambience drawing tourists and tourist dollars to Tucson; and

Whereas the business sector on Broadway Boulevard between Euclid and Country Club contains 287 taxpaying and tax-generating businesses facing the street alone, and over 500 in the vicinity; and

Whereas the Broadway business district serves local residents for at least a mile radius, some of whom have no local business strip, and, if elderly, disabled or children, do not drive; and

Whereas destroying viable businesses is counterproductive to job and revenue growth and recovery; and

Whereas the City of Tucson, Pima County and the Rio Nuevo TIF taxing district derive revenues from businesses on Broadway; and

Whereas the City, County and other public entities are already facing the worst revenue shortfalls in decades due to the current depression, and

Whereas destroying local businesses and services is counterproductive to the City and County's stated goals of livability, sustainability, walkable streets and accessibility; and

Whereas small businesses account for 50% of employment and 60% of new employment nationwide, according to Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke (12 July 2010 NPR 5 p.m.); and

Whereas local businesses generate 30%-70% more revenues for localities than chain stores; and

Whereas doubt about when the City will widen the street discourages reinvestment, producing blight that depresses property values and in turn revenues;

Be it therefore resolved that Rincon Heights Neighborhood Association go on record opposing the 1987 plan to widen Broadway, and propose instead a genuine street improvement within the existing footprint that will preserve all businesses and other structures on both sides of the street.

RATIONALE

This decades-old plan is not only gratuitously destructive, but unnecessary given current and historic traffic volumes. It will also damage the region's tax base and livability and cost a projected \$71 million taxpayer dollars we do not have to waste.

1. TRAFFIC PROJECTIONS OFF

Traffic projections on which this plan was premised were wildly off. Although the 1987 report is remarkably short on objective data, it does show the street carried 30,000 cars per day in 1984.

<http://dot.tucsonaz.gov/projects/broadway>. Over 20 years later, the 2006 Streetcar Study found only 33,600 cars per day on that stretch of Broadway—barely more than 1984, and a far cry from the 40% rise predicted. This was before gas prices started going up, and the economy tanked. The street may well be carrying less traffic today than in the 1980s.

www.tucsontransitstudy.com/documents/AppendixH:TrafficReport9.14.07.pdf

To solve this non-problem, the project was expected to cost \$71 million in 2006 dollars, money that could be used for more pressing needs.

2. NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON TAX BASE & LIVABILITY

We question whether the expenditure of \$71 million taxpayer dollars will provide benefits to the community outweighing the damage to the regional economy and livability due to the disruption and loss of commercial activity and tax revenues on Broadway.

We are in the worst depression since the 1970s, some say the 1930s, yet the 1987 plan would destroy dozens of locally-owned taxpaying and tax-generating businesses, the backbone of our economy. Businesses on Broadway not only generate revenue for the City, State and County, but form part of the Rio Nuevo taxing district. Destroying these businesses will further depress already lagging sales tax revenues needed for other projects.

Further, the 1987 plan would degrade not only the immediate locality but the livability of a large section of central Tucson. The stretch between Euclid and Country Club is the only commercial strip on Broadway between Downtown and the El Con Mall, neither of which offer a comparable variety of businesses and services. These include auto repair, insurance, restaurants, professional services, and specialty shops of all sorts.

This vibrant commercial cluster serves neighborhoods for at least a mile radius in all directions. Destroying it would force local residents to drive to businesses and services they can now walk to—the opposite of PAG’s stated goals for sustainability. This would impose particular hardship on the elderly, disabled, students and the poor, many of whom do not drive.

This stretch also contains at least 19 contributing properties to Rincon Heights Historic District. Historic districts boost owner-occupancy, thus tax revenues, stabilizing and strengthening vulnerable central city neighborhoods critical to Downtown revitalization. It also contains 39 potential contributing properties to Sam Hughes Historic District.

3. THE PLAN IS SIMPLY OUTDATED

Regional conditions as well as gas prices have changed since 1987. Tucson’s historic fabric and ambience are now recognized as a resource for the tourist economy. Walkability, livability and sustainability are now integral to responsible transportation planning. Neighborhood preservation and mobility are not antithetical but interdependent in planning for our region’s future.

4. PROCESS ISSUES

The planning process itself has suffered from a lack of transparency and accountability:

Public input into the Broadway project has been nil so far. A meeting scheduled for May 17 was cancelled and never rescheduled. In the meantime, the City has been pressuring local property owners to sell (blockbusting) by creating an impression of inevitability about the destruction of their property.

The consultant, HDR has consumed substantial amounts of time and tax money and has yet to produce the historic property inventory and study of alternative alignments or to convene the Citizens Task Force, all mandated in Phase I of the project’s Scope of Work.