

Final Recommendations Memo

PROJECT OVERVIEW

East Main Street / Highway 123 is a critical corridor in Westminster serving as the city's main thoroughfare as well as the connection to the South Carolina /Georgia border and Seneca, SC. The City of Westminster envisions that East Main Street will “be a safe, beautiful, and welcoming street that connects Westminster’s downtown and business corridor to the rest of the region.”¹ This study will focus on a portion of the corridor just south of the downtown core between Windsor Street and Oak Street as this area serves as the gateway into downtown (Figure 1).

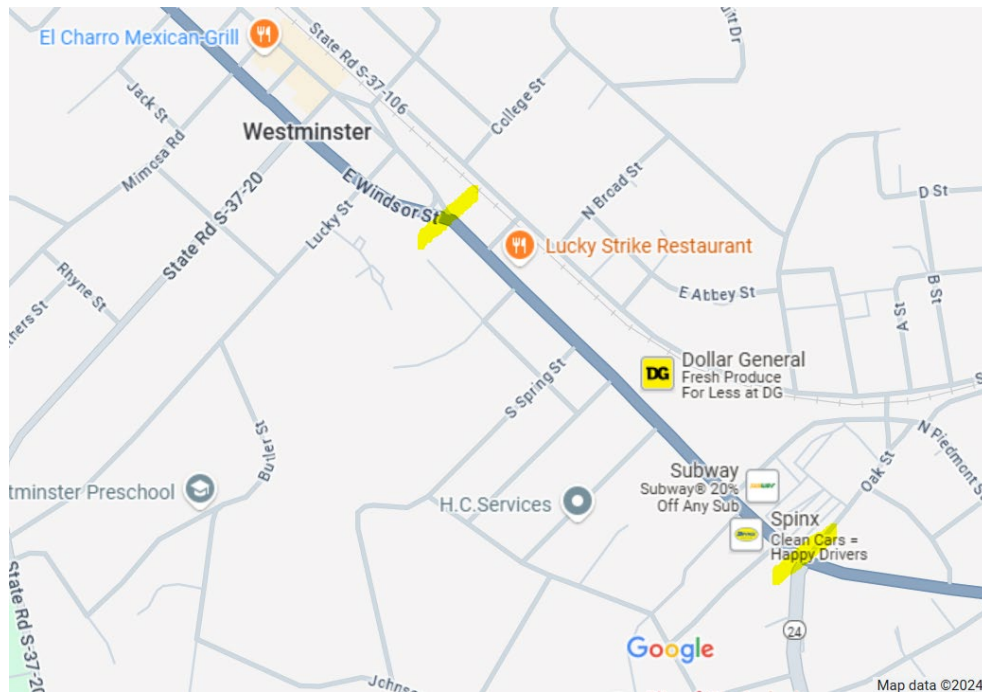


Figure 1. Study Area

Goals for the corridor study include:

¹ Downtown Master Plan. Westminster, SC. 2023. Print. pg. 61.

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1. Evaluate opportunities to make changes to improve safety and comfort for all roadway users.
 2. Analyze existing conditions of the corridor.
 3. Make recommendations for policy, programming, and infrastructure improvements that will be shared with elected officials and the public.

PLAN REVIEW

Six adopted local and regional plans and several ordinances were identified that affect potential policy, project, and programming recommendations for East Main Street. Each plan is briefly summarized below, highlighting policies or projects pertaining to East Main Street.

Oconee County Comprehensive Plan 2020

The transportation element in the Oconee County comprehensive Plan discusses Highway 123; however, there are not any projects listed for the study area. One important note is that Highway 123 is a major arterial designed for vehicle throughput.²

Westminster Downtown Master Plan

In 2023, Westminster completed a Downtown Master Plan looking at an area along East Main Street from North Hampton Street to south of Long Creek Hwy. The plan includes this study's study area, but focuses more on the downtown core. Zoning along the study area is predominately focused on commercial.³ This section of roadway was evaluated to have a planted median. Lastly, East Main Street was recommended to realign at East Windsor St to improve the safety of the area with a signalized intersection.⁴

Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG) Rural Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP) 2024-2033

Oconee County is one of the six counties that make up the ACOG which focuses on rural areas. Within ACOG's RTIP is one project related to the study area. In 2027, \$150,000 will go towards a Highway 123 Corridor Study.⁵

² Comprehensive Plan: Transportation Element. Oconee County. 2020. Print. pg. 5.

³ Downtown Master Plan. Westminster, SC. 2023. Print. pg. 12.

⁴ Downtown Master Plan. Westminster, SC. 2023. Print. pg. 60.

⁵ RTIP. ACOG. 2024-2033. Print. pg. 27.

ACOG Rural Long Range Transportation Plan (RLRTP) 2045

In the Rural Long Range Transportation Plan, ACOG defines projects for the region over the next 20 years. Highway 123 is mentioned several times; however, this project's study limits are not included.⁶

Oconee County State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) 2021-2027

Along with ACOG's RTIP list, Oconee County listed out their specific projects over the next several years. The Corridor Study along Highway 123 is listed again in this plan.⁷

Ordinances

Parking restrictions based on the Westminster code of Ordinances:

(A) Parking is prohibited on streets (not alleys) if it leaves less than ten feet for traffic, except for brief stops to load/unload passengers or comply with traffic signs or police.

(B) In alleys, parking is also prohibited if it leaves less than ten feet for traffic.

(C) The City of Westminster can restrict parking on certain public areas and city property, with violations leading to fines or towing.

(D) Fines start at \$10, increasing to \$20 if unpaid within five days, and vehicles may be towed if the fine remains unpaid after ten days.

Curb Parking:

(A) On streets marked or signed for angle parking, vehicles must be parked at the indicated angle.

(B) Vehicles loading or unloading merchandise/materials may go back into the curb if permitted, and the driver has the permit on hand or in the vehicle. Still, it's illegal to violate any conditions of the permit.

Bus and Taxicab parking restrictions:

Bus and taxicab drivers can only stand or park their vehicles on business district streets if they are at a designated bus stop or taxicab stand. However, they may temporarily stop elsewhere if they actively load or unload passengers and comply with other stopping or parking regulations.

General provisions on sidewalk and curb cut improvements:

⁶ RLRTP. ACOG. 2045. Print.

⁷ STIP. Oconee County. 2021-2027. Print. pg. 1.

Compliance with Provisions Required:

- Owners, contractors, or developers must follow regulations for installing, repairing, or renovating sidewalks, driveway curb cuts, and roadway curbs when constructing or renovating buildings under specific occupancy or use categories.

PLAN REVIEW SUMMARY

Overall, the length of East Main Street from Windsor Street and Oak Street is not often mentioned in existing plans. The Downtown Master Plan is the only plan that takes a look at the existing roadway and begins to make safety recommendations. Since this roadway is operated by the state and is a connector to outlying areas, it will be important to consider ways to redesign for a more walkable and comfortable environment for bicycles and pedestrians.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATION OPTIONS

Westminster is a city poised for new investment and redevelopment. The central recommendation for the City is to be proactive in setting the stage for new investment along the corridor. New homes and subdivisions associated with population growth across the Upstate and Oconee County will lead to reinvestment in the Highway 123 corridor. Westminster should consider updating ordinances and development regulations while working with Oconee County and regional partners like the Appalachian COG to set the stage for new development. By taking action proactively, the City can position itself as an attractive partner for new businesses and enable changes in the built environment that make the corridor an asset to the City.

Coordination & Collaboration with SCDOT and Appalachian Council of Governments (ACOG):

The City of Westminster can use policy to shape the future of the Highway 123 corridor. In order to have productive conversations with the public, City staff should meet with SCDOT District 3 and ACOG staff about the future of the street and discuss local preferences for topics including:

- Streetscape design elements & consistent application (eg: sidewalk width, bicycle facilities, driveway typologies and location and cross access requirements, street trees and landscaping, etc.)
- Integration with other City, County, and SCDOT planning processes

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- Needed planning initiatives/processes/projects that would facilitate future conversations with SCDOT

These conversations inform agencies working at the regional level to local needs. These agencies can influence funding streams, can support grant funding identification, and potentially administration to support changes in future regional planning processes and projects.

Complete Streets & Safety

The City should determine its position on creating “[complete streets](#).” For example:

How do people in each mode feel in this space? What improvements can be made to create more parity among all modes? The City should consider additional planning processes as follows:

- **Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan** - This plan enables the City to have a conversation with the public about the types of facilities they want as they walk and bike. Adopting this type of plan facilitates conversations with SCDOT and ACOG to implement future conversations as part of Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) projects.
- **Supporting SC Vision Zero** - [Vision Zero](#) (VZ) is a state-wide objective to reduce traffic fatalities and crashes. Adopting a resolution of support for VZ demonstrates the City’s support for this process.
- **Revitalize and reuse existing building stock** - The corridor includes a number of historic buildings. Incentivizing redevelopment will help create more activation along the street which helps create an environment that is more attractive for pedestrians and the community as a whole.
- **Consider updating zoning** - Land use regulations can be important for shaping the way people move and interact with businesses along the corridor. Consider updating zoning to allow for a greater mixture of uses so that people have opportunities to live near the places they work, shop, and dine.
- **Plan for future sidewalk improvements** - The Public Right of Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) are published by the USDOT and provide specific guidance for street and sidewalk design that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title II. Consider updating development regulations to require compliance with ADA, and work with SCDOT to implement PROWAG guidance as part of projects they fund.

PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY CHANGES

Conduct a detailed corridor study to evaluate travel conditions on Highway 123 and to determine infrastructure changes that improve the look and feel of driving and walking. The City can explore specific streetscape design elements like landscaping, street trees, driveway consolidation, cross-access requirements, locations for pedestrian refuge islands and pedestrian hybrid

beacons, Continuous or intermittent landscaped median, gateway landscaping/signage, banners for utility poles, etc.

LAND USE & REGULATORY CHANGES

After the corridor study, a zoning ordinance audit to determine specific regulatory changes that could be implemented to incentivize reinvestment in the corridor in the form of building upgrades and redevelopment. The city should align the zoning code to support this goal and implementation of the corridor study. Possible changes could include the following:

- Consider lower parking requirements OR consider adopting parking maximums to allow the market to determine parking needs for businesses
 - E.g.: An existing site is built with a 4800 sf building and 25 spaces. The site would not allow for a new restaurant without a variance for parking.
 - E.g.: Ingles has an extremely large parking field - likely more than it needs to operate.
- Consider allowing/encouraging shared parking agreements
- Consider adopting design regulations that discuss things like:
 - Parking field design & location
 - No parking in first 30 ft of setback
 - Pedestrian facility design
 - Access Management - Cross access requirements, driveway consolidation - reduce # of driveways, vegetated medians
 - Building placement
 - Signage
 - Landscaping - Street trees, parking lots, along buildings

TARGETED STRATEGIES

- Evaluate applying for the MASC South Carolina Main Streets program. In 1983, South Carolina established its Main Street program to help revitalize South Carolina's historic downtowns. As a program of the Municipal Association of South Carolina, Main Street SC offers comprehensive technical assistance, expert training, and a supportive network to transform our state's historic commercial districts into vibrant economic and cultural hubs. The program focuses on four primary areas: Organization, Proportion, Design, and Economic Vitality.

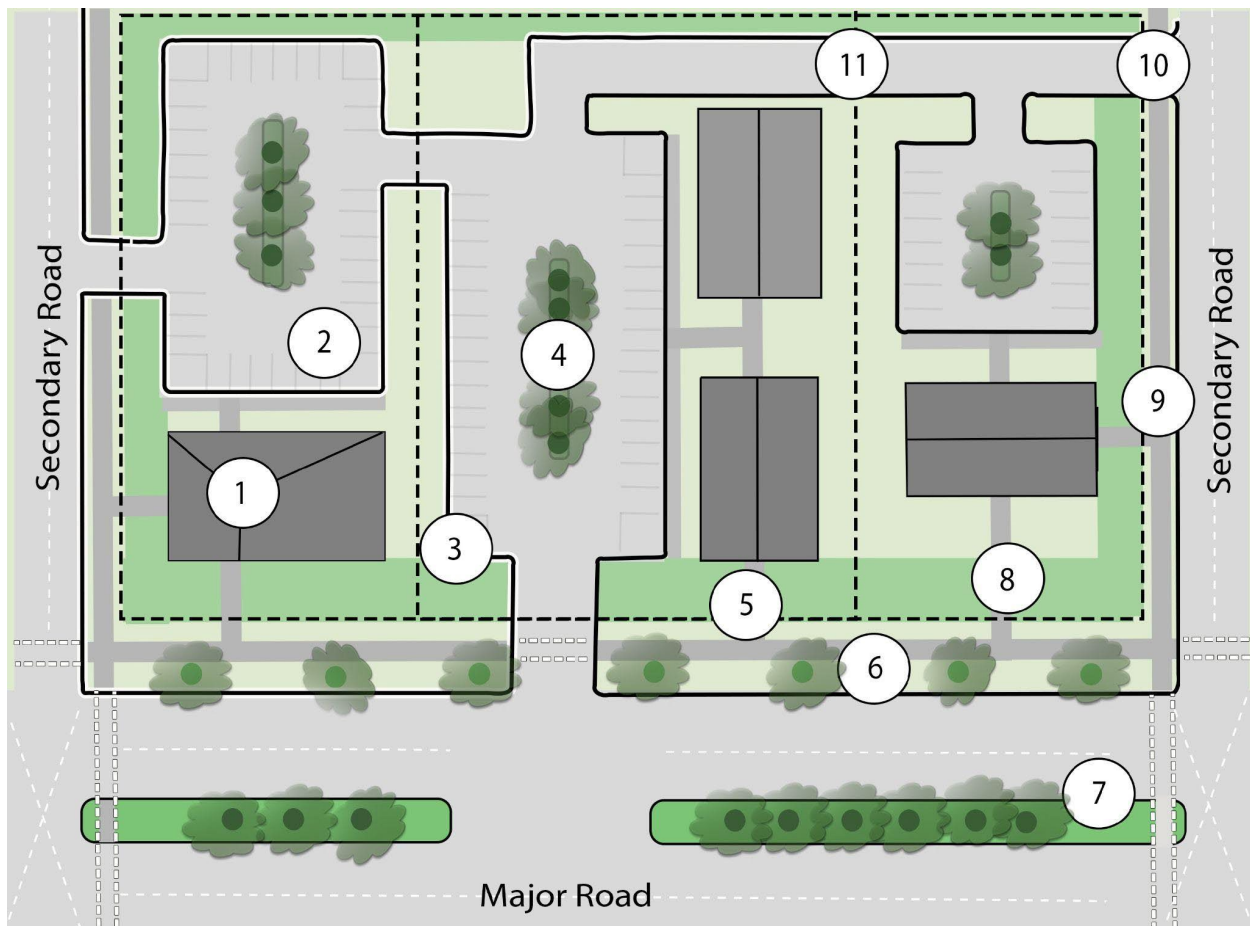


Figure 2. Conceptual site layout

Each of these considerations plays a vital role in shaping the functionality, safety, and aesthetics of a community, contributing to a well-designed, sustainable, and accessible urban environment.

1. Building Placement :

Placing buildings closer to the street encourages a pedestrian-friendly environment by reducing the walking distance between people and key amenities. This creates a more inviting, human-scale urban experience, fostering a sense of community. It also promotes vibrant streetscapes by activating the public realm and discouraging sprawling, car-centric development.

2. Parking Placement:

Locating parking behind buildings, instead of between the building and the street, enhances the aesthetic appeal of the development and minimizes the visual dominance of parking areas. This approach prioritizes the pedestrian experience by keeping streetscapes uninterrupted, while also reducing the heat island effect and promoting walkability.

3. **Parking Setback:**

A 30' setback with screening for parking lots placed adjacent to streets provides a buffer between the pedestrian zone and vehicle traffic. This improves the visual aesthetics of the street and reduces the impact of parking on the urban environment. It also promotes safety by creating clear distinctions between areas designated for pedestrians and vehicles.

Landscaping *(see Figure 3)*

4. **Landscape Islands and Medians:**

Incorporating landscape medians and islands within parking lots and between properties serves multiple purposes. It not only enhances the visual appeal but also provides environmental benefits, such as improved water filtration and reduced runoff. These green spaces also reduce the urban heat island effect, cooling the environment and making parking lots more comfortable and ecologically responsible.

5. **Street Trees:**

Street trees improve the character of roadways by creating a more visually attractive and shaded environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers alike. They also act as natural buffers between the road and sidewalk, improving safety by offering separation from traffic. Trees help reduce urban heat and contribute to local biodiversity, making streets more pleasant and environmentally friendly.

6. **Landscaped Medians on Roadways:**

Landscaped medians provide not only aesthetic value but also environmental benefits such as stormwater absorption and temperature moderation. Medians can help with access management by controlling turning movements, improving traffic flow, and enhancing pedestrian safety by offering a safe place to pause while crossing multi-lane roads.



Figure 3. Landscaping concept

Pedestrian Considerations

7. Pedestrian Refuges:

Pedestrian refuges, such as small islands or raised areas in medians, make street crossings safer by providing a safe place for pedestrians to wait while crossing wider streets. This is especially important in high-traffic areas or for streets with multiple lanes, offering a moment of respite and reducing the perceived distance between destinations.

8. Internal Connectivity :

A well-connected pedestrian network within a development ensures that people can move easily and safely between parking lots, buildings, and other key areas. It reduces the need for cars, encourages walking, and supports a healthier, more active lifestyle. Internal connectivity also fosters a sense of community by enhancing accessibility.

9. Secondary Streets:

Sidewalks and pedestrian paths along secondary streets help to improve connectivity between neighborhoods and commercial or civic centers. These routes provide alternative pathways that reduce reliance on primary roads, facilitating local mobility and creating opportunities for safe, walkable urban spaces that connect people to broader areas, such as downtowns.

Access Management

10. Limiting Curb Cuts :

Limiting curb cuts along primary roads improves traffic flow and safety by reducing congestion, minimizing points of conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, and allowing for better control of access points. This approach encourages drivers to use secondary roadways, leading to more organized and less hazardous street environments.

11. Cross Access:

Providing shared access between adjacent properties helps limit the number of curb cuts needed on primary roads. This reduces traffic congestion, improves pedestrian safety, and encourages a more efficient use of land. It also promotes connectivity between sites and reduces the impact of individual developments on traffic flow.