

Position Paper: Collaborative Proposal for West Ash Street Improvement Project

Introduction

We, the undersigned residents of the West Ash Street neighborhood in Columbia, respectfully submit our concerns and suggestions regarding the current plans for the West Ash Street Improvement Project. While we appreciate the city's efforts to enhance infrastructure and safety, we believe there are opportunities to achieve these goals in a way that better reflects the needs and character of our neighborhood. The recent public input meeting held at the ARC on March 19, 2025, unfortunately, did not seem to fully capture or address the concerns that residents have been voicing for months. We hope this document will serve as a constructive contribution to the planning process, rooted in our mutual interest in creating a safe and accessible community.

Resident Requests

We have identified several key areas of concern and ask the city to consider the following requests, which we believe will enhance safety, preserve the neighborhood character, and ensure that improvements benefit all residents.

1. Reclassification of West Ash Street

We request that West Ash Street be downgraded from a Major Collector to a Neighborhood Collector. This change would better reflect the street's physical characteristics and actual usage. West Ash is a neighborhood-use street where residents walk, ride bicycles, wait for the school bus, walk their dogs, interact with neighbors, and access local amenities such as the grocery store, the ARC, schools, and parks. Additionally, many driveways open directly onto West Ash, a characteristic that does not align with a Major Collector designation. Addressing excessive speeding on this road is critical, and we hope to work with the city to find effective solutions that enhance safety for everyone.

2. Protection of Trees and Private Property

We strongly oppose the removal of trees unless they are confirmed to be dead or dying. The proposed removal of over 100 trees is a significant concern and is not necessary. Preserving these trees is essential for environmental protection, maintaining the character and beauty of our neighborhood, and combating climate change. We respectfully ask the city to eliminate tree removal from the project plan, except in cases where trees are confirmed to be dead or dying. Additionally, we are firmly opposed to any changes that would impact private property boundaries to complete this project. Many properties along West Ash Street would be left with little to no front yard if the current plan is implemented, resulting in diminished property values, loss of privacy, and reduced enjoyment of one's home. We strongly urge the city to only consider improvements that can be achieved within the existing footprint of the road and sidewalks.

3. Traffic Calming and Crosswalk Safety Improvements

Traffic calming has been a longstanding concern for West Ash Street residents. We support improvements that enhance pedestrian safety and slow down traffic, provided they are made within the existing infrastructure. Specifically, we recommend:

- Installing speed bumps where appropriate to reduce excessive speeding, similar to those successfully implemented on Stewart Road.
- Painted crosswalks and pedestrian crossing signs placed in the middle of the road where applicable.
- Repairing existing sidewalks and ensuring their quality, rather than expanding sidewalks or adding new ones that infringe upon private property.

Conclusion

We are hopeful that our concerns and suggestions will be thoughtfully considered, and we remain eager to work collaboratively with the city to develop a plan that enhances safety and accessibility while preserving the character and well-being of our neighborhood. The high turnout of West Ash Street residents at the March 19, 2025, meeting demonstrated our community's dedication to finding a balanced solution. We ask that the city engage with us in an open dialogue to achieve a plan that effectively meets the needs of all stakeholders. Together, we can create a plan that truly reflects the needs and values of our community.