

Arlington C-J > News

NEWS

RSS | Mobile | Newsletters | MY YAHOO!

Connect with us on Twitter

Civic leader sets up live camera to show traffic flow on Abram Street

Posted Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2013 | 1 comments | Print | Reprints | Share | Like 78

ARTICLE | PHOTOS (1) | COMMENTS

BY MONICA S. NAGY
mnagy@star-telegram.com

Bob Johnson has peered out the window of his building and watched cars travel down Abram Street for more than a decade.

Johnson believes that the five-lane-street would best serve the residents of Arlington if it were reduced to three lanes, which would make room for expanded sidewalks and shade trees that beckon people to stop and get out of their cars instead of drive on by.

The proposal to reduce the street by two lanes is under study by the City Council and has divided some members of the community.

On one hand the city is concerned that there is too much traffic on Abram to allow lane reductions. On the other hand, some leaders want Abram to become a pedestrian-friendly street that draws people to the downtown area.

A few months back, Johnson installed a traffic camera on the top of his roof at Pinnacle Corp. on the corner of Mesquite and Abram streets to show just how slow the traffic can be.

The former [Downtown Arlington Management Corp.](#) chairman and current Pinnacle Corp. president streams a live traffic feed on a website he also created called [abramstreet.com](#), which is centered on the importance of revitalizing Abram Street, a topic that has become [somewhat divisive](#).

"I kept hearing a concern that the volume of traffic on Abram is such that it wouldn't be possible to reduce the lanes," Johnson said. "My building has been on corner of Mesquite Street for the last 13 to 14 years, so when there was some conversation about rush-hour traffic jams, I thought, 'Why don't we just record that intersection?'"

Complete streets

Abram Street has two eastbound lanes, two westbound lanes and a center turn lane. City officials paid \$55,000 for a [traffic study](#) last year and have gone back and forth on whether the street should stay the same, be reduced to four lanes or down to three.

Johnson would like to see a two-lane-reduction, which would add 20 feet for sidewalks and landscaping.

Johnson said he created his website to provide more detail on a "complicated issue involving different people with different interests." He said he is concerned that a bad decision will be made on a topic that has long-term implications for the city.

In October, the city approved a \$187,538 contract with Gresham, Smith and Partners of Nashville, the same consultants they paid to do the traffic study, to seek public insight about the future of the street. Meetings are scheduled to start in February.

"The biggest objective is ... how do we increase the vitality of downtown and its contributions financially and culturally?" Johnson said. "I think it's probably the most important issue that is front of us now for downtown, and it's really important that we get it right."

Johnson said Abram Street needs to be viewed as the east-west gateway to downtown and it needs to be a complete street, a concept that is foreign to Arlington but not other cities.

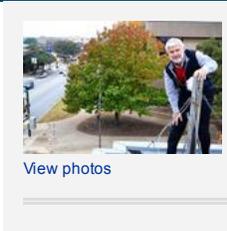
A [complete street](#) is accessible for cars, pedestrians, bicyclists, it connects the community to the area, it drives people to the area.

"The premise that narrowing the streets is going to narrow the access to businesses is not a valid premise. The key is not the number of vehicles you can pass by a building, its the number of customers that are available," Johnson said.

Debbie Simek bikes to downtown Arlington from her home in Interlochen Estates quite often. Simek has lived in Arlington for 30 years and said she remembers when UT Arlington didn't have much of a "college feel" in 1984, but now the city needs to recognize it has a presence and capitalize on the student population, she said. That can be achieved by fixing, or completely closing traffic to Abram, she said.

Simek thinks the city should completely close motor traffic so that tables, benches, and landscaping can be implemented along the street to create a Parisian-type environment.

Simek said traffic concerns are not the problem when Division Street provides a means of transportation.



View photos

Other favorites:
Cowboys | Rangers | Mavs | Stars | TCU | UT
A&M | Tech | OU | UTA | UNT | SMU



CLICK to shop with ACCENTS

home decor | fashion | beauty | events | gifts | gourmet & more
fashion | beauty | events | gifts | gourmet & more

MOST POPULAR

- Family faces another lawsuit from fatal wreck
- Nelson Cruz leaving a 'lot of good memories' for Rangers
- Historic downtown Fort Worth post office to relocate
- Wrecker driver shot during early morning altercation in Fort Worth
- Several deaths linked to swine flu in Texas

"Division is one block north of Abram. It's like really? Is that really a big issue? There are ways to plan the traffic flow so it wouldn't be a huge issue," she said.

Keeping up

Val Gibson owns the building [The Tin Cup](#) restaurant is located in and the shopping strip around it on West Abram Street. Gibson said he sees many cities in his travels around the country and Europe that have pedestrian-friendly streets where the car isn't king.

"I just don't understand why they wouldn't want a pedestrian friendly area for people to get out and walk around," Gibson said.

The longtime resident used to serve on the park board and was involved in other civic duties. He said developing businesses need foot traffic, not just vehicular traffic to thrive.

"My experience is you want people to notice your business they are not going to notice it by driving by, they are going to notice it by walking by," he said.

Johnson said for decades they downtown core has deteriorated because there has been no investment in downtown, it's all been along Interstate 20 and north Arlington, he said.

"There is not enough people down here coming to visit these restaurants and stores. Re-crafting Abram Street is to change the environment downtown where people want to live, work and play ... there is a reason why land in West Texas is cheap, it's because there is nobody there," Johnson said.

Monica S. Nagy, 817-390-7792 [Twitter: @MonicaNagyFWST](#)

[Looking for comments?](#)