

## Introduction

A brief summary of the purpose and scope of the BIG Picture comprehensive planning initiative was presented by Dennis Madsen, Manager of Urban and Long Range Planning. It was noted that the relationship between the community and its various educational institutions was a key component of our comprehensive planning effort. As a result, the education focus group was established to provide an opportunity for additional dialogue and input on this topic.

## Connectivity

In discussing the importance of connectivity, the following issues were noted:

1. An improved and expanded sidewalk system is a key component in making schools accessible and connected to the community
2. Improved directional signage to schools is needed
3. Pedestrian and bicycle routes should be separated from automobile traffic
4. To insure proper access and connectivity, there should be coordination between the City of Huntsville and Huntsville City Schools as new school sites are selected and construction plans developed
5. A pedestrian/bike connection across Memorial Parkway is needed, particularly in the area of the new Grissom High School site
6. A pedestrian/bike connection across U.S. 72 connecting Providence and the Research Park area is needed
7. Capshaw Road should be made more “bike and pedestrian friendly” as road improvements are planned and implemented

It was noted that, consistent with Huntsville’s general “auto culture,” high school students are resistant to the concept of walking and biking to school. As a result, a significant change in people’s thinking must occur or pedestrian facilities may go unused as was the case with the pedestrian overpass on University Drive at the former University Place Elementary school. It was suggested that Planning might develop a survey, which would be distributed by Huntsville City Schools, to gauge interest and secure input on this issue.

## **Facilities**

The following points were discussed regarding Huntsville City School facilities:

1. The redevelopment of Stone Middle School is a local success story and will have a positive impact on the community
2. The Butler High School and Seldon Center sites on Holmes Avenue are key development opportunities along this important east-west corridor
3. Some concern was noted regarding gentrification in West Huntsville neighborhoods as redevelopment occurs

## **Transportation**

The following transportation issues were noted:

1. It would be helpful if public transit served local K-12 schools as well as area colleges and universities
2. However, it was noted that our land use patterns make it difficult to design a cost-effective system
3. A digital “on demand” system was suggested as a possible solution
4. Data on current taxi routes and ridership might provide guidance and inform our planning efforts moving forward

## **Universities**

The following issues specific to local universities were discussed:

1. There are not enough places to eat in the Downtown and Wynn Drive areas to serve the growing student populations in these communities
2. The creation of university-centered mixed use areas with a “college town” feel should be encouraged in areas adjacent to Alabama A&M, Calhoun, Drake and UAH

## **Other Thoughts and Suggestions**

1. It was noted that involving students in the planning process was important. Funding student-lead projects to address specific problems or issues will encourage “buy in” and foster a sense of civic mindedness.
2. Use of school facilities for various community activities should be continued and encouraged. Such activities help strengthen the sense of community in the City’s neighborhoods.