

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SW 24<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE FOCUS GROUP FINAL REPORT</b></p>
--

**FEBRUARY 25, 2004**

In March 2003, the University President established a SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue Focus Group with the charge to

- 1) *Identify and assess the potential impacts that this proposed road may have on the University's academic and research programs; and*
- 2) *Identify or develop measures or alternatives that could mitigate or minimize any impacts this proposed road may potentially create for the university.*

The Focus Group met five times from May 2003 through February 2004. The meetings explored various benefits and costs of the proposed eastern extension of SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue from SW 34<sup>th</sup> Street to Archer Road. This exploration included interviews and presentations with transportation planners from the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization and Alachua County. Faculty from various colleges and departments made presentations about impacts to academic programs. The Faculty Senate President and Vice Provost selected the faculty that made the formal presentations. Each of the meetings was open to the public and included question/answer periods for other faculty and students. After extensive investigation, the Focus Group developed recommendations to mitigate and minimize identified negative impacts.

Meeting summaries and materials are included as an appendix to this report along with a draft of the Campus Master Plan Amendment text. The Focus Group submits this report and its appendices to the university's project review committees (Lakes, Vegetation and Landscaping; Preservation of Historic Buildings and Sites; Transportation and Parking; and University Land Use and Facilities Planning) for consideration and recommendation to the University President. The following is a summary of likely impacts and minimum recommended mitigations in non-priority order.

**Observations:**

A. Natural Area Impacts (not in priority order)

1. Wildlife and vegetation native to this area will have a smaller and fragmented habitat area, and reduced access to water.
2. The flora and fauna currently present at the NATL will be diminished, altered and impaired by the intrusion of this proposed road.
3. Development of a road on the NATL's southern border will reduce area that is available for research and teaching.
4. A road will bring noise pollution, air pollution, light trespass, stormwater runoff and related pollutants, exotic seed sources and other undesirable edge effects into the NATL beyond the road right-of-way.

5. The NATL cannot be duplicated or reproduced on campus with the same habitat diversity, established data history and convenient accessibility.
6. Presence of the road will preclude certain management techniques including prescribed burns that maintain upland pine habitat and enable the best use of the land for teaching and research.
7. Other impacts will be identified and addressed through an Environmental Impact Statement that will be required as part of the Planning, Design and Environmental (PD&E) study prior to road construction.

B. Transportation Impacts (not in priority order)

1. Existing traffic studies are based on old data and have had mixed results measuring the impacts and increases in roadway system capacity that are expected to result from construction of this road.
2. The MTPO's Long Range Transportation Plan Update will validate the regional model and provide more accurate measures of roadway benefits. This study will begin in early 2004 and conclude in late 2005. An Archer Rd/SW 16 Ave. Charrette will provide additional analysis early in 2005.
3. Construction will proceed on SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue west of SW 34<sup>th</sup> Street as a two-lane roadway with an unsignalized intersection at SW 34<sup>th</sup> Street.
4. The SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue eastern extension is currently unfunded. Once funded, the first phase of design is the PD&E study, which will determine the necessary road cross-section, cost feasibility, environmental impact and ROW need.

C. Academic Impacts (not in priority order)

1. At least nine departments in several colleges use the NATL regularly for classwork and student research in multiple courses at both the graduate and undergraduate level.
2. The primary benefits of the NATL for academic purposes are accessibility, proximity to campus, and the diversity and uniqueness of species and habitats on campus.
3. There is an established data collection grid and about ten years of historical data available for the NATL.
4. The NATL is currently being proposed as a site for the National Ecological Observatory Network, a consortium of universities with ecological field stations.
5. The NATL is a unique natural area located on campus in close proximity to the Florida Museum of Natural History and the Cultural Complex.

**Mitigation and Minimization Recommendations: (These recommendations are minimum proposed measures to mitigate for anticipated impacts based on available information. Quantification of impacts and possible identification of additional impacts, to be provided by the PD&E study, will result in quantification of mitigation requirements and may result in additional efforts to mitigate for loss)**

- A. Require a detailed, quantifiable environmental impact assessment as the first priority and condition of the land donation.
- B. Minimize the width of the proposed ROW donation to no more than eighty feet.
- C. Require removal and/or relocation of certain buildings to ensure a wide enough corridor for wildlife to access the sinkhole in the southeast corner of NATL.
- D. Require a sound attenuation wall be constructed within the ROW as part of the roadway project.
- E. Require light attenuation measures be implemented, such as full cut-off luminaries, as part of the roadway project.
- F. Require all associated stormwater retention facilities be provided on non-University property.
- G. Provide enhanced facilities and resources for teaching and research at other natural areas on the main campus.
- H. Require enhancement of other university properties and/or acquisition of new properties in proximity to campus with similar habitat and ecological value.
- I. Provide transportation to off campus areas if used as mitigation for loss in academic programs due to road construction.

**Conclusion:**

The SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue Focus Group concludes that the proposed road between SW 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Archer Road would create significant and detrimental academic impacts that cannot be fully mitigated. Even with mitigation, there would be a substantial and permanent net loss. The Focus Group was not able to obtain enough reliable information to assess benefits of the proposed road, nor was it charged with that task.