

March 24, 2003

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Dear Tom:

Pursuant to your request that I provide you something suitable for your website regarding the Natural Area Teaching Laboratory, I have assimilated this letter from the various meetings and speeches I have given about SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue. This information should encapsulate the University's rationalization for not only SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 62<sup>nd</sup> Boulevard, but also the granting of the right-of-way that would allow SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue to connect with Archer Road.

The initiation of the SW 20<sup>th</sup> review began almost eight years ago when the MTPO targeted it as one of the areas that needed evaluation and review. Shortly thereafter, the SW 20<sup>th</sup> charette occurred. The University of Florida participated in that charette and shared its vision with regard to the area that is currently under discussion. In those discussions, it was the University's opinion that the off-campus student village concept was very much needed. At that time, there were a number of apartments on the SW 20<sup>th</sup> corridor. A couple of years after the charette, we found that our first real mass transit success occurred on SW 20<sup>th</sup>. Because of the density along that road, we were able to send buses on routes that filled very quickly and efficiently. Thus, it began to train our students that mass transit could work in Gainesville and mass transit was something in which our community should invest.

Given these two issues, transit and the student village concept, the SW 20<sup>th</sup> charette recommendations became a component of the University's Master Plan and subsequently became a critical component of the Campus Development Agreement. This is critical because the University of Florida committed and gave to Alachua County \$3.2 million for the development of the SW 24<sup>th</sup> segment to SW 43<sup>rd</sup> and continuing on to SW 62<sup>nd</sup>. During this charette, there were a number of options presented that would encourage a grid system of roads that would attract developers to build apartments, thus creating the student village area. One of these options was to four-lane Hull Road from 34<sup>th</sup> Street to SW 62<sup>nd</sup> Boulevard. There was mention of three-laning or four-laning SW 20<sup>th</sup> from 34<sup>th</sup> Street to SW 62<sup>nd</sup> Boulevard, as well as the two-laning of the current SW 24<sup>th</sup> limestone road. I bring this to your attention because many of the proposals that were mentioned in the charette would have added at least 4-6 new lanes of east/west traffic to this area. Today there is only funding to complete the SW 24<sup>th</sup> segment. There is no funding to purchase the right-of-way for the Hull Road extension, nor is there adequate funding to provide any major improvements to SW 20<sup>th</sup>; thus, leading to the assumption that if we are to have additional capacity in this area, it would be advisable to four-lane SW 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Further, the SW 20<sup>th</sup> charette envisioned SW 24<sup>th</sup> connecting to Archer Road

and, subsequently, this vision was memorialized in the Livable Community's Reinvestment Plan, as approved by the MTPO.

There are a number of reasons why the SW 20<sup>th</sup> charette and the development of a grid system of roads in this area is good for Gainesville and good for our community. The SW 20<sup>th</sup> charette vision was about a holistic plan that would improve the future of Gainesville. Not only does it create the student village, which is convenient and accessible to the University, but also it creates a high-density area that will continue to foster good mass transit. Infill is good for Gainesville. It is what our visionary leaders and master planners have said should occur. Infill in this particular area is extremely valuable because there are commercial support services nearby and the SW 20<sup>th</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> area is very accessible to the University. This road will continue to encourage the density and infill and will, likewise, discourage urban sprawl. Gainesville needs to encourage its growth in established and developed commercial areas that support this density.

Another benefit is the east/west road connector. Gainesville and Alachua County are attempting to grow and revitalize the east side of Gainesville. Plan East Gainesville has been developed, presented, and accepted by the MTPO. A connecting road east to west is one of the essential needs identified in this plan. In this plan is a "bus rapid transit" proposal, which will require thoroughfares that will accommodate RTS buses traveling from the east to the west and west to the east. The SW 24<sup>th</sup> connector to Archer Road is critical to this eastside plan, as are the four-lanes. Today, even though mass transit is successful and desirable, the frequent stops of buses on our two-lane roads create the most frustrations for our motorists.

The next benefit will be to our neighborhoods. The traditional neighborhoods and older neighborhoods contiguous to the campus are in great need of restoration and protection. The University has an aggressive plan to assist in this. If we are to relieve the pressure on our older and traditional neighborhoods, we need to provide an area where student housing is available that is convenient and accessible to the University. This is accomplished by the student village concept, which we believe will reduce the pressure currently existing on our traditional neighborhoods.

The next issue is road failures. Currently, SW 34<sup>th</sup> Street is failing. Archer Road is failing. SW 20<sup>th</sup> needs relief. University Avenue needs relief. If we are to encourage density and growth in a focused area, we must provide the road infrastructure to support growth and mass transit. A four-lane road will provide the capacity and safety to encourage this continued growth, thus providing a benefit.

In summary, the University supports the SW 20<sup>th</sup> vision, which includes the SW 24<sup>th</sup> connector to Archer Road. We now know that mass transit in Gainesville can be successful. RTS had over seven million riders in the last year. In the month of October 2002 alone we had one million riders. In 1996, we barely had one million riders in a single year. We do know that we can encourage density in the right places. We do know that we can encourage growth in the right places. I think we would all agree that infill is good and sprawl is bad. The University is encouraging this type of development in this particular area to the southwest because we think it is good for the Gainesville economy, and it is responsible growth. We need to facilitate what we now see as good growth in the right place. Let's not handicap it or limit its potential by failing to recognize and support the need for road infrastructure. The University is encouraging this vision, and it starts with SW 24<sup>th</sup> and its connection to Archer Road. The University does recognize the potential impact this road may have on the Natural Area Teaching Lab. We believe the impact can be minimized and mitigated, and we are willing to work with those who can provide these solutions. It is our proposal that this road would be placed at the southernmost tip of the Natural Area Teaching Lab, only utilizing some three acres of the 46-acre tract. We would encourage you to support this plan because it is in the best interest of Alachua County and Gainesville. The University of Florida is a critical partner in how we develop and manage our community and our home. We believe the citizens of Alachua County expect the University to be a cooperative partner if it is for the greater good of our community.

Sincerely,

Ed Poppell  
Vice President for  
Finance and Administration