

THE BEACH DISTRICT



T R E A S U R E C O A S T R E G I O N A L P L A N N I N G C O U N C I L
I N D I A N R I V E R - S T . L U C I E - M A R T I N - P A L M B E A C H

At the end of Atlantic Avenue, between the Intracoastal Waterway and the Atlantic Ocean is the third part of the City's downtown: the Beach District. Delray Beach has some of the last and most beautiful public beaches in Palm Beach County. This Beach is a regional destination. The City has embraced the great opportunities that the beach has to offer, and profits from this condition as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the area.

At the Beach District, people stroll, friends chat with neighbors, and children walk or bike to the town center and the beach. Both during the charrette and a previous visioning workshop, the residents talked about the "Village Character" of the District and made great emphasis in the importance of its preservation.

The Beach District's traditional structure of streets and alleys and the mix of uses throughout, are a perfect example of traditional urban planning and its positive effect on public life. The primary design issue to further enhance this effort is to preserve and enhance the character of this District, the public condition of the beach, the vitality of its center and the natural environment.

Wide sidewalks with beautiful pavers, elegant street lighting, signage and furniture in general are present throughout the entire length of the Avenue through this district. On the other hand, an excessively wide street, scattered retail, buildings with uneven setbacks, walled-off towers next to one and two story buildings and parking lots along sidewalks are all entwined along this same section. This mix of scale, character, and setbacks is detrimental for the overall "Village Ambiance".

Pedestrians going to and from the beach and to the local restaurants, heavily transit the intersection of A1A and Atlantic Avenue. The Avenue here is 80' wide. Pedestrians need to cross five lanes of traffic to get from one side of the Avenue to the other. Furthermore, the width of A1A at this point, together with the excessive block turning radii, allows for cars to turn at speeds in excess of 35 mph, making this intersection one of the most dangerous along the Avenue.

The Master Plan proposes 5 steps that will complete the Beach's Center and enhance its Village qualities:

1. Reduce the pedestrian crossing distance along Atlantic Avenue by installing a median between A1A and Gleason Street.
2. Reduce the curb radii at the intersection of A1A and Atlantic Avenue to 15'.
3. Infill vacant property: The setbacks of some buildings along the Avenue are such that linear buildings could be built along the property line, completing the gaps and creating an environment that is more attractive to the pedestrian.
4. Open windows on blank walls
5. Locate parking in the rear of buildings
6. Add an arcade to buildings that have excessive setbacks.



The Physical Changes to the Avenue

1. Reduce the pedestrian crossing distance:

Human scale should prevail over the automobile. Traffic calming is one of the essential tools that should be used to accomplish this. At the entrance to the District, any traffic-calming device proposed should serve the double purpose of creating a safer pedestrian environment while announcing the entrance to the District and the City that lies ahead.

A 26' median is suggested along Atlantic Avenue for the section between A1A and Gleason Street. This is a gesture that will act as an effective traffic-calming device and at the same time contribute to one's sense of orientation within the City. The result is a townscape that is active without being overly complex. It is a powerful tool that forces people to slow down at one of the most critical intersections of the Avenue. It cuts the pedestrian crossing distance and forces cars to slow down both entering and exiting this section of town.

Existing Condition:

- Two 7' on street parking lanes
- Two 11' travel lanes
- Two 12' travel lanes
- Two 2' curb & gutters
- Two 8' sidewalks
- Total ROW: 80'

Proposed Changes

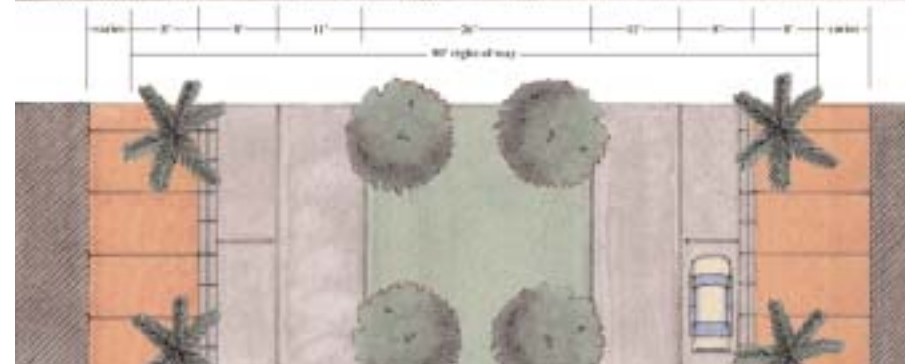
- Two 8' on street parking lanes including curb and gutter
- Two 11' travel lanes
- One 26' median
- Two 8' sidewalks
- Total ROW: 80'

After analysis by the traffic consultant, it was determined that this recommendation should be modified to include a left-turn lane within the median at the A-1-A intersection.

2. Reduce the Curb Radii at the Intersection of A1A and Atlantic Avenue to 15'

Reducing the curb radii will force cars to turn at slower, safer speeds. This, combined with the central median will enhance the entrance to the District and increase the safety of this intersection where a high volume of pedestrians walk to and from the beach. In addition to reducing the radius, the Southwest sidewalk and corner are extended eastward and then gradually tapered southward. This will reduce access speed onto A1A as well as increase vehicular visibility.

After analysis of this proposal by the traffic consultant, it was determined that reduction of the turning radii is not feasible. In addition to not meeting DOT standards, the traffic consultant states that



“The reduction to 15 feet would result in vehicles encroaching onto the curb or into adjacent travel lanes”

3. Infill vacant property

The images on the right are figure ground drawings of Atlantic Avenue through the Beach District. Existing buildings are represented in black. The gaps, or infill opportunities, are represented in yellow.

Wherever the buildings are pushed back from the street line, an ambivalent zone is created. This, together with the disparity of building heights and types, blurs the structure of the Avenue. The existing condition, in general, accentuates the primacy of the single building. The street therefore disintegrates into a series of isolated buildings. It is seen as open land into which buildings are introduced as objects. As a general rule, the dignity of freestanding object is accorded to public monuments, while the ordinary fabric takes form out of more or less contiguous buildings, as if the streets were carved out of what was once a solid mass.

The Spanish River Resort, soon to be remodeled, is a good example of this condition: A high-rise building surrounded by a parking lot. The opportunity to properly infill this property is at hand. A liner building should be added along the Avenue. This building could house the hotel's public program: café, bar, restaurant, exercise room, beauty salon, etc. These public uses should open up to the street and attract the hotels' customers as well as neighborhood business.



4. Locate parking in the rear of buildings

Parking lots in front of buildings duplicating the suburban strip shopping center model should be avoided. Parking lots along the Avenue should be infilled with liner buildings. On the south side of the 1000 block, an existing shopping center presents an opportunity to infill its parking lot, moving the recessed portion of the building towards the street. Once this new configuration is reached, the core should be cleared for parking. The location and dimensions of this new surface parking lot are such that it becomes the perfect setting for a parking garage. This condition is further explained in the section of this report dealing with parking.

5. Add an arcade to excessively setback retail buildings.

Some retail, like the shopping strip on the 900 block, is setback and separated from the pedestrian by a wide and dense landscaping strip. This creates a break between the retail and the pedestrian that is hard to overcome and is detrimental for business. By adding an arcade along the buildings' front, it is brought closer to the sidewalk and consumers, and a special, shaded walkway is created. This also opens up opportunities for cafes and restaurants. By adding a vertical element, tower or break at the corner, the overall appearance of this monotonous building is improved.



Infill parking lots - Proposal on the 1000 block of Atlantic Avenue

Existing condition and proposed changes to the shopping center on the 900 block of Atlantic Avenue



New construction and building renovations should make windows on the façades along the Avenue mandatory—In many of the existing buildings along the beach, there is a second story that should be converted to livable space that opens up to the Avenue.



Once the median is incorporated and the lane widths reduced, the existing gazebo could be moved or a new structure constructed at the end of the Avenue along the beach. This is a strategic location within the Avenue. It is announcing the entrance to those who visit from communities North and South and use A1A as an access route. It is also the culmination of the wonder that visitors will experience along Atlantic Avenue.



The Eastern Edge of the District

A1A plays a very important role in the City. It is the Eastern Edge of the Beach District, and in many cases, the only image of the City that those traveling North and South along A1A might have. As such, it should be considered as an area that projects the character of the community, and should be such that passersby are tempted to stop and explore the City.

A1A, at the intersection of Atlantic Avenue, is very wide, with angled parking on the East and very narrow sidewalks on the West.

Given the existing right-of-way, there is enough room to reconfigure this road, only for the section between Miramar Drive and Thomas Street. The proposed reconfiguration maintains the angled parking on the East, two 10' travel lanes, an 8' parallel parking lane on the West, shielding the sidewalk and protecting pedestrians, and a Western sidewalk that is expanded by 6'. Alternatively, instead of a parallel parking lane, the sidewalk could be widened an additional 2' and a 6' landscape strip could be provided as a buffer between the pedestrians and moving vehicles.

This new section will not only slow down traffic and create a safer environment for pedestrians: It will be a powerful move in the Avenue that indicates to drivers that they are passing through a special section, and invites them to explore the City that lies West. By increasing the sidewalk width and shielding it with parked cars or landscaping, pedestrian oriented activities are given a priority over the automobile.





Looking South along A1A: Existing condition and proposed street, sidewalk and parking reconfiguration.