FIU and City of Sweetwater, Master Planning Activities, 2010-2012

The City and the University have worked collaboratively in several master planning activities and grant applications. The overall objective is to create University City, a mixed-use district where the University and the City promote a high quality urban environment for students and residents.
UNIVERSITY CITY
PROPOSED STEWARDSHIP AND PROSPERITY STRATEGY
The City has conceptualized several capital projects that provide pedestrian enhancements within University City.
For the past several years, the City of Sweetwater and Florida International University (FIU) have collaborated in several planning efforts designed to enhance pedestrian linkages and urban activities between the two. This strategy will result in a lively mixed-used district known as UniversityCity.

As a result of many discussions and proposals, the City of Sweetwater has developed a series of capital improvement projects that will encourage and support the incremental redevelopment of UniversityCity. Those projects include:

1. Municipal parking garage and liner building
2. City Hall Plaza
3. 109th Avenue sidewalks and crosswalks
4. Plaza and sidewalks around proposed new student housing project
5. Restoration of historic bridge for pedestrian use
6. New crosswalks and median on 8th street
7. Related street improvements within the City of Sweetwater
8. Future pedestrian bridge, to cross eighth street

Implementation and funding for the projects will depend on several entities, including the City, FIU, FDOT and private developers. The City and FIU have explored available grants and plan to continue pursuing grant funding in the future.

This report summarizes many of the projects and ideas suggested to date, and it is intended to provide information to the City of Sweetwater’s Commission as it sets priorities for the City.
The area within the white oval identifies the location of most proposed capital projects. The yellow arrow is 109th Avenue, the City’s Main Street.
Existing roundabout, 109th Avenue
The City has implemented some public space enhancements at strategic locations.

TIGER Grant, 2012
The City of Sweetwater and FIU have a successful track record of collaboration in master planning capital improvements to enhance pedestrian activity and mixed-use.
This map describes the opportunities to coordinate infrastructure investment in order to encourage the redevelopment of University City.
Recent planning efforts by the City have focused on the quality and function of pedestrian space throughout the University City district.
In recent years, the City has implemented many small capital projects that have enhanced pedestrian safety and activity.
The City of Sweetwater has targeted its capital improvement strategy to enhance its emerging role as the college town of the largest state university in Florida. Private developers are key partners in this effort.
FIU and City of Sweetwater, exiting conditions, 2012
The City and the University have developed side by side, with 8th street as a boundary.

Within the white rectangle, site of proposed student housing, privately developed.
The residents of the proposed student housing building will use the existing parking garage located across Eighth street, at the FIU Campus. Although a pedestrian bridge has been discussed for Eighth street, the City and FIU have begun discussions with FDOT to provide ground level enhancements to the exiting pedestrian facilities, as a first phase improvement for the enhancement of the pedestrian linkages between the City and the University.
Proposed student housing, by private developer

A private developer and the City of Sweetwater are coordinating the implementation of a major redevelopment project for UniversityCity. FIU also plays an important role in this effort, as parking will be provided within an existing parking garage on campus.

The first phase of UniversityCity will include projects that will immediately enhance the life and activity of the UniversityCity district. A private developer has proposed a 15 story residential building for FIU students, with commercial uses in the ground floor. This building is located at the entrance of the city, along the commercial Main Street.

The project proposes substantial enhancement of the pedestrian areas around the building by coordinating the design of the site and the surrounding city right-of-ways. For example, a portion of SW 7th Terrace will be transformed into a pedestrian plaza. The plaza will provide safe access to pedestrians, as they walk to campus, and will also create an attractive entrance into the city. In addition to landscape, pavers, benches, decorative lights and other amenities, the new plaza will provide opportunities for memorials and public art, at the discretion of the City Commission.

Public space projects driven by private development will become a key component of the implementation strategy for the district.
PARKING GARAGE OPTIONS
PROPOSED STEWARDSHIP AND PROSPERITY STRATEGY
Public parking garage, City of Miami Beach
Parking structures throughout South Florida have often incorporated commercial activities and unique design features, and have become assets to the appearance of their community.
One of the strategic projects that the City of Sweetwater is exploring is a municipal parking garage. A public garage is a key component of the UniversityCity district, as it will encourage infill redevelopment and commercial activity.

The Commission has identified the preferred location: several parcels to the East of City Hall, across from 109th Avenue.

This location allows for the implementation of related projects that are also critical components of the UniversityCity district: a mixed-use liner building along 109th Avenue (which will hide the garage from view), and a plaza between the liner building and City Hall (which will enhance the aesthetics of the district and provide a comfortable location for outdoor activities such as a farmers’ market or an art fair).

All of these strategic projects will require careful design and implementation, as they may include the relocation of existing public parking and current activities. It is anticipated that the process of design and implementation will include effective public input, and close collaboration between the City of Sweetwater and FIU.

As a first step in this process, The City Commission should consider its options for the parking garage and related streets and public spaces, and make decisions about the size and scope of the project, taking into account funding considerations.
Miami Beach parking garage
On top, overall street view, on the bottom, facade details.

The architectural features are appropriate for the location in a historic district, and the scale and massing are consistent with neighboring structures.
Infill parking garages in urban areas have become increasingly common in recent years. Cities have realized that parking may be provided as a shared infrastructure resource, in order to encourage redevelopment. In addition, in recent years the architectural quality of public parking garages has improved, as consideration for compatibility and existing community character has played a larger role in discussions about design.

The example in this page, located in Miami Beach, is similar in scale and design quality to the proposed Sweetwater garage, as it has been discussed to date.

There are significant distinctions, however, which the City of Sweetwater's garage may improve upon. For example, there are no liner building or ground floor commercial uses. In this case, this may not be a major shortcoming, as South Miami Beach already has much activity in the surrounding areas. In Sweetwater, on the other hand, mixed-use activity, the core component for the success of the University City district, will be enhanced by a liner building.
City of Fort Pierce Parking Garage
Opposite page, top, ground level
Opposite page, bottom, elevations
This page, top, current aerial photographs
This page bottom, entry plaza (Parking structure and liner building on the right of the image).

This parking garage provides a comparable example for a public parking structure and liner building. The dimensions and program are similar to some of the garage options for the City of Sweetwater.
FIU and City of Sweetwater, Master Planning Activities, 2010-2012
The City, in close collaboration with FIU, has began the conceptual design of several strategic projects for the implementation of University City. The parking garage and related buildings and access points provide opportunities for the long-term redevelopment of the district.
City of Sweetwater, proposed location for parking structure, liner building and City Hall plaza

The City of Sweetwater has led an ambitious planning effort to transform its core commercial area into the mixed-use district UniversityCity. This transformation will be achieved in part through the implementation of strategic infill projects and the enhancement of public spaces as centers of pedestrian activity.
Proposed parking garage, options for land acquisition

The City of Sweetwater must decide which land assembly option is preferable for the implementation of the municipal parking garage and liner building.
As the City Commission decides upon the preferred course of action for the municipal parking garage, the following considerations should be taken into account:

**Land acquisition**

The City must acquire the land for the parking garage. In this case, land assembly may require negotiations with multiple owners, depending on the preferred design adopted by the Commission.

**Design constraints of parking structures**

An efficient parking garage is approximately 124 feet in width. This allows two full bays of perpendicular parking, which result in the maximum amount of spaces. A parking garage that does not reach that width will result in less spaces, and in higher costs per space. The existing lots are only 100 feet in depth. Thus, the Commission must decide to build a smaller garage or acquire additional land.

Two design options are illustrated in the opposite page. On top is the smallest parking garage and liner building concept, which would range between 180 to 220 spaces (within four stories), depending on whether the upper stories of the liner building are used for parking or mixed-used. On the bottom is a larger garage, with an enhanced mixed-use building, which would be possible only with the acquisition of additional land. This option would provide more parking, at a lower cost per space.

**Management**

The City may decide to run the garage or to lease it to a private company. This decision should be made based on the City's staffing ability and the overall goals for the district.

**University City District**

In the final analysis, the municipal parking garage should be seen as an investment on the public infrastructure of a mixed-use district at the heart of a redeveloping college town. Thus, the garage would not be very valuable in isolation, but it is an essential component of an overall redevelopment strategy. The Commission should always keep in mind the long term strategic impacts of decisions about the scope of the project.

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**Parking Garage Options**

Top, small garage, with minimal property acquisition.
Bottom, larger garage, if two additional parcels are acquired.
Option A, 100' wide, minimal land acquisition

Option B, 124' wide, additional land acquisition
FIU and City of Sweetwater, Master Planning Activities, 2010-2012
The proposed grant application of 2012 included two plazas, at either end of a redesigned 109 Avenue.
The City and University have conceptualized and described a series of capital projects that will enhance the pedestrian connections and uses between the City’s Main Street and the Campus. The City of Sweetwater Commission should consider overall coordination as well as the individual impact and cost of each project. The success of UniversityCity will depend on the timely investment of public funds in key strategic projects.

The proposed parking garage is one of several carefully considered infill and public space projects that make up the overall stewardship and prosperity strategy for UniversityCity.
109 Avenue, City of Sweetwater’s Main Street
The overall planning strategy build upon the existing assets in the community and enhance the synergies between the Town and the Campus.

Recommendations
During the next three years, the City of Sweetwater should take the following steps:

1. The Commission should adopt an overall strategy for public spaces and public buildings, including a new parking garage and liner building, a city hall plaza, and pedestrian improvement for 109th Avenue and eighth street.
2. Staff should evaluate design options for parking garage and recommend the preferred option based on funding and implementation opportunities, for Commission consideration.
3. Staff should prepare a phasing strategy, based on City priorities, and make recommendations to the City Commission, as funding becomes available.
4. Staff should continue to work with Florida International University to identify grant opportunities.
5. Staff should continue to coordinate private and public investment and design at the ground level, to promote pedestrian and commercial activity.