City of Snohomish x University of Washington

First Street Transportation Report

CEP 460 Fall Quarter 2023

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Summary or Executive Summary

First Street is an essential business corridor and popular tourist destination in Snohomish, WA. It serves as a shopping center for people in and out of the area with its many unique small businesses. However, being an older historic road, there are some issues that need to be addressed on First Street so it better serves the public and its community. This project aims to identify some of these issues by talking to the public on First Street and seeking their feedback about what some of these issues related to urban planning are, and what they would like to see done about them. Alongside this, additional research will be conducted to look at potential solutions to these problems as well as to properly recognize the current state of the street and surrounding areas to see what possible solutions might be feasible. After that, multiple different solutions shall be proposed and paired with feedback from the public based on its expected impact and effectiveness. The goal of this project is to gather valuable information and use it to guide the City of Snohomish into implementing necessary improvements to First Street. This work is important as it can impact the way people experience First Street for the better and benefit the businesses along the street.

Introduction

We are a team of six individuals from the University of Washington working on a project with the City of Snohomish as a part of the Livable City Year program. Our objective is to contribute valuable insight and recommendations regarding the transformation of First Street in Downtown Snohomish, relating to its small businesses and pedestrian mobility. With this project being a part of our coursework, each of us brings a unique set of skills and perspectives to address the challenges and opportunities that are associated with this task.

As students, we approach this project with enthusiasm to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing development of Snohomish. This report encapsulates our collective efforts to use both our academic knowledge and practical experience, ensuring that our recommendations are not only insightful but also tailored to the specific needs and aspirations of the Snohomish community.

Purpose & Scope

This report is prepared for the Snohomish City Government, providing key insights and recommendations related to the transformation of First Street in Downtown Snohomish. The purpose of this report is to establish public opinion about potential transportation changes to First Street, based on the perspectives of both business owners and visitors. The City of Snohomish is in the early stages of a master planning process for First Street and Historic Downtown. The outcome of this project is meant to determine areas of demand and support, pointing out potential solutions and areas to focus on in the master planning process. The scope of this project was determined by City of Snohomish's five requested deliverables: site assessment, parking assessment, off-site parking solutions, pilot event proposal, and public opinion report. Our site and parking assessments consist of relevant details related to site context, characteristics, parking usage, vehicle traffic, and more. The off-site parking solutions present opportunities for expanding the parking around First Street, listing the potential number of stalls and weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each option. The pilot event proposal provides a conceptual framework for a weekend long event that would test a potential pedestrianization approach and off-site parking solution. The public opinion report details the methods and results of our three in-person surveys in Downtown Snohomish.

Methodology

Public Opinion Surveys:

Our first visit to Snohomish we met with the Snohomish team and had an in-depth tour of the Downtown area. This was the first time in Snohomish for many of our team members, and gave great context to our project. We noticed how car-centric the street was and saw first-hand how difficult it was for cars to find parking. During this visit we noted the low-visibility of pedestrians crossing the intersections with both sides of the streets being angle parking, which block the sidewalk from having a clear eye-line into oncoming traffic. We also learned about recent removal of the trees that previously decorated that corner of the intersection. These trees needed to be removed for safety reasons surrounding the power lines and recent windstorms, but had resulted in backlashes from removing the trees. These initial observations shaped the methods of our subsequent visits and the questions we would be asking businesses and community members.

Our team visited Snohomish 3 times after our initial walkthrough with the Snohomish Team. Our first visit took place on Friday October 13th from 12pm-3pm. During this visit we split our 6 person team into three 2-person teams and split up Downtown First Street into 3 stretches of 2 blocks of businesses. Each team then walked into every open business to talk to a store owner or employee. We made sure to be respectful of business' customers and did not talk to businesses where we could tell employees were overwhelmed with customers. We introduced ourselves as students from the University of Washington doing a project with the City of Snohomish about the public opinion of First Street, and asked for a few minutes of their time to talk with us about their experience and perceived pain points when using First Street. With one person on the team being the interviewer and the other acting as a note-taker, we led the business owners and employees through our pre-set list of questions [Figure A] about parking, safety, comfort, and concerns about First Street. We then had them rank potential levels of pedestrianization that could happen to First Street. Through this method we interviewed 19 businesses [Figure B]

Our second visit took place ten days later on Monday October 23rd from 12pm-3pm. During this visit we focused on public opinion. We set up a University of Washington College of Built Environments table on the concrete pad on the southern corner of First and Union [Figure C]. We have 2 team members sit at the booth and 2 other team members walk up and down the street and talk to people in front of shops on the street. During this visit we approached people as they were walking by and asked them about how they used First street, where they parked, how they view the struggle to find parking, their thoughts on pedestrianization, and if they would be willing to park farther away if First street was pedestrianized. In both of our teams we had one team member leading the interview and the other recording the answers in a google form to track the data.

Our third visit to Snohomish took place on Tuesday November 28th from 12-3pm. During this visit, one team member set up the University of Washington College of Built Environments branded table and banner [Figure D], and set up outside Ranee-Paul Antiques (with the businesses permission) on First and Union Street. During this visit, the goal was also to gauge public opinion of pedestrianization in a more quantitative way. Our team had made visual designs of what 4 different levels of increased pedestrianization levels would look like. These levels of pedestrianization include, 1. Expanded Pedestrian Intersections, 2. One-Way with Expanded Intersections, 3. One-block Pedestrian Plaza, 4. Fully Pedestrianized First Street [Figures E-H]. Our representative asked pedestrians who walked by to rank their preferred potential change to First street, and had conversations with the public about what matters to them in their Downtown experience.

Site Analysis:

Site analysis was performed through online research, in-person observations, and survey results. Online research provided historical context, giving our team a more solid understanding of Downtown Snohomish's stages of development. During our site visits, we were able to assess the objective details of the site: business character, usage, walkability, vehicle presence, pedestrian safety, et cetera. Participant feedback from our in-person surveys also provided important insights into the history of downtown and the subjective experience of the area.

Parking Analysis:

Our parking analysis was based on observations during our visits to Snohomish, survey feedback, and analysis of satellite maps. Our analysis focused on two primary elements: First Street Parking layout/usage, and off-site parking solutions.

During our first site visit, we looped each block in a car, taking note of the type of stalls (angled, parallel, handicap, 30 minute) and the level of usage. We continued to perform this usage analysis throughout our visits. We also utilized satellite maps to count the number of stalls in the downtown area, and measure walking distance from potential off-site parking locations. Potential locations for off-site parking were determined based on survey results and map analysis. During our second visit, we drove to each potential site, taking notes on feasibility, strengths, and weaknesses. During our third visit, we talked to interviewees about these concepts to gauge favorability.

Results and Conclusions

Site and Parking Assessment:

Snohomish's Historic Downtown is the town's primary center of commerce and tourism. Being the center of life in Snohomish since before its incorporation in 1890, the historic district was listed on the National Registry of History Places in 1976, seven years after the historical society was formed. Through this designation and the work of Snohomish community members, the downtown area has maintained its character through intentional preservation efforts. Buildings must match the turn-of-the-century style in which they were developed: flat "western" front facades; repeating, vertically oriented windows; defined, substantial cornicing; hip-tiled roofing; and recessed entries often detailed with tiled letterforms on the floor. Materials are restricted to brick, stone, wood, stucco, cast iron, and metal panels. This defined historic character is what brings many to Snohomish's downtown today.

Snohomish's downtown has a long standing reputation for having a focus on antiques, with several stores boasting strong inventories of vintage memorabilia, clothing, furniture, and more. In the past decade or two, the commercial profile of First Street, downtown's primary corridor, has expanded and diversified. Today you can find wine shops, boutiques, pubs, various cuisines, along with the remaining antique stores. The array of businesses in this charming location draw in roughly 1.8 million visitors each year, both locally and from neighboring counties. Downtown Snohomish is faced with a number of challenges in attending to this high level of patronage and the vehicle / foot traffic that it brings. On First Street and its adjacent blocks there are approximately 350 parking spaces. Just over half of these are found on First Street itself in the form of angled, front-in stalls. The rest are found on the adjacent avenues – A, B, C, and Union – in the form of both parallel and angled stalls. In the mixed commercial/residential neighborhood just east of Union Ave there are several opportunities for on-street parking, with over 600 parallel parking spaces available. Additionally, there is a gravel lot off of First Street on the west side of D Avenue next to the industrial park that has 120 parking stalls.

In terms of usage, street parking on First Street is highly utilized, with a vast majority of stalls being occupied throughout the day. This is impacted by the fact that many employees and business owners are the first to arrive, and occupy stalls throughout the day. The offsite lot on the west side of D Avenue was utilized minimally during our three visits, which took place on a Tuesday and two Fridays during the fall, a season in which visitorship is lower than in Spring/Summer. Each block on First Street has two 30-minute stalls, which we found were almost always in use. Additionally, there are handicap stalls located on the avenues and on the west side of First Street, which we observed had medium-level usage.

First Street experiences consistent vehicle traffic throughout the day. There are no stop signs on the Downtown portion of the street, and one stop light on the West end at D Avenue. Some interviewees brought up safety issues related to traffic, such as the need for crossing flags and improved lighting for nighttime safety. Another stated that driving down First Street was a feature of their driving exam, as it was one of the more congested and tricky-to-navigate areas in town. In general, however, visitors feel that the area is very pleasant and has a fair level of walkability.

Public Opinion Report:

From the interviews conducted in Snohomish regarding the pedestrianization of First Street, a variety of perspectives and opinions emerged. Throughout our several visits to Snohomish, we were able to talk to and interview all of the major groups that use First Street and would be affected by changes made to it such as business owners and residents of Snohomish. Engaging with local business owners, frequent visitors, and individuals with a long-standing connection to the town provided a multifaceted understanding of the potential impacts of pedestrianization on businesses, daily commuters, and visitors. Considering this, we employed several different methods and strategies of interviewing to try and best understand what the town of Snohomish wants to see done with First Street. We surveyed the public through face-to-face engagement, structured interview questions, and open-ended conversation with note taking.

Overall, while opinions varied in regards to the potential of pedestrian installations, a recurring theme across most interviews was the recognition of the need for a parking solution alongside any pedestrianization efforts. Different suggestions emerged, including making First Street a one-way street, building parking garages, installing pedestrian bridges, and improved signage to address concerns about parking accessibility and traffic congestion. Drawing from the feedback from our interviews, there appears to be a general consensus on the potential benefits of pedestrianization, although opinions diverge on the extent and methods to achieve it. A shared enthusiasm exists for the potential benefits of pedestrianization, ranging from a European-esque style of design to simple enhanced walkability features and modernized urban design. Each opinion voiced reflects a distinct facet of the town's identity, aspirations, and pragmatic concerns, signifying the complexity involved in deciding the future of First Street in Snohomish. Additionally, there were some concerns about the crosswalks and how safe they were. They claimed there were visibility issues so people driving along First Street and people walking across the street would be unable to see each other at times which is a hazard. Lastly, in terms of how people felt overall about the walkability of the street, almost all people thought that it was walkable and they felt comfortable walking along First Street.

Recommendations

Offsite Recommendations:

Our group analyzed various potential offsite parking lots in Snohomish, and we settled on four recommendations that could be feasible to pursue. The first lot we analyzed is the boat launch at 20 Lincoln Ave (Figure I). This lot was selected due to its relative proximity to historic First Street, as well as the vast space that exists in the surrounding area. The boat launch is a 10-minute walk, or two-minute shuttle ride from historic 1st St, Which could mean that this is a feasible offsite parking lot assuming a consistent shuttle service is created by the city. Most of the lot is currently unpaved. The existing paved stalls are reserved for vehicles with boats, and the unpaved grass parking area is reserved for overflow parking. If this lot were to be made an official off-site parking lot with a formal shuttle service, the grass overflow lot would likely need to be paved or covered with gravel to reduce the amount of mud that can accumulate during rainy days or floods. A downfall to this lot is that it is away from all major right of ways. Notable signage would be needed off 2nd Street to direct drivers to turn south onto Lincoln Ave and go towards the parking lot. If this off-site area were to be used, additional signage should be placed on Avenue D directing people east on 2nd Street, towards this off-site lot. If the city is looking to pursue a daily formal shuttle system and is willing to pave or gravel this lot, then this lot is a great option for an off-site parking system.

A second off site area analyzed by our group is the student parking lot for Snohomish High School, across from Veterans Memorial Stadium, at 1400 7th Street (Figure J). This lot is more centrally located in town, closer to major public right of ways. This location, however, would likely still require a city shuttle service, as it is a 12-minute walk from historic 1st Street. Due to this lot's more central location, closer to main roadways, this lot would only require limited signage if it were to be used as an off-site parking lot. The only additional signage required would be to direct drivers on avenue D to turn West on 7th St. towards the lot. The biggest upside to this lot is that it is already paved and maintained, and it is gated and vacant on the weekends. The downfalls to this lot are that it is currently used for high school student parking on weekdays and has limited room for expansion in the event of the lot becoming full. This lot could be a great option if the city looks to pursue a shuttle service or off-site parking system only on weekends.

The third off-site lot that our group analyzed is the county warehouse lot across the Snohomish River (Figure K). This lot is the closest in terms of proximity to historic 1st Street, however the biggest barrier to this lot is the river between the lot and Historic 1st St. If this space were converted to a parking lot or garage, the only current pedestrian access between the lot and 1st Street would be via the Airport Way bridge. The bridge currently has very small sidewalks and very high vehicle traffic. The sidewalk also currently ends at the south end of the bridge. Alternatively, the city could wait for the future Eastrail project to be completed, which would convert the old railroad bridge east of historic 1st St. into a pedestrian only bridge. However, to my knowledge this project has not yet been funded officially, so it would be many years before this project was to be completed. As a third, but significantly more expensive option, the city or county could look to build a parking structure in the county lot, and then build a new pedestrian bridge between the county lot and Kla Ha Ya Park. While this off-site recommendation would cut the need for a cost of a potential shuttle service, it is also by far the most complicated and expensive lot plan, as at a minimum the city would need to expand sidewalk access south of the Airport Way bridge. This lot could be a great option if the budget exists for it, but this option would likely require a large investment to be constructed.

Our last offsite parking recommendation is likely our simplest one. Located around 1513 1st Street, this option involves creating additional on-street parking on the section of 1st Street that is west of Avenue D (Figure L). These parking spaces are a 3-minute walk to historic 1st Street, which could be deemed reasonable for someone looking to spend a long period of time at historic 1st Street. The city would need to pave and clearly mark these parking spots to make them seem available to the public. Currently, these spots are unmarked gravel on the side of the roadway, and they do not look like parking spots despite there being no signage saying that you cannot park in them. Along with paving these spots, the city would need to create additional signage to direct drivers to these parking spots. If drivers know about the existence of these parking spots, they may be more likely to drive straight there and park in a spot rather than circle around historic 1st Street looking for parking for several minutes. Additional signage should be erected at the intersection of Avenue D and 2nd St, Avenue D and 1st St, and at the interchange of State Highway 9 and 2nd St. This off-site parking recommendation is the simplest and likely cheapest of our recommendations, but we are unsure how effective it will be as many people seemed less willing to walk up to 3 minutes on 1st Street to get to their destination.

Downtown Snohomish Weekend Pilot Closure Event:

Executive Summary:

This pilot street closure will be a two-day weekend event that will be designed to test the feasibility of having a pedestrian plaza on First Street in Downtown Snohomish.

On the first day, a street fair will be hosted within the closed off block on First Street. It will be an exciting community event that will bring residents, businesses, and visitors together for a day of fun and engagement, with the potential of increased frequency in the future.

The second day will have the space be open to the public as a plaza. This transformation aims to reclaim public space and promote community interaction in the downtown area.

Overview:

Location: First Street in Downtown Snohomish

Street Closure: One block of First Street bordered by Avenue A and B Proposed Road Changes:

- First Street, Avenue A, and Avenue B will changed into one way streets
- First Street traffic will be going west from Avenue C to Union Avenue
- Avenue A will be going north from First Street to Second Street
- Avenue B will be going south from Second Street to First Street
- To accommodate for the parking lot on Avenue A, south of First Street, two stop signs will be placed at the intersection First Street and Avenue A

Weekend Overview:

Day 1 (Saturday): Street Fair

The Downtown Snohomish Street Fair will be a community event aimed at assessing the feasibility of transforming First Street into a pedestrianized street plaza. This initiative seeks to gauge community interest and evaluate the potential for creating a more pedestrian-friendly downtown space.

Key Features:

- 1. Vendor Booths: Local businesses, artists, food vendors
 - a. The businesses located within the street closure may have first pick for locations
- 2. Entertainment: Live music, performances, and interactive activities
- 3. Community Engagement: Information booths and interactive polls to gauge opinions on the pedestrian plaza idea, signage with QR codes
 - a. Booths are located on both ends of the block
 - b. For signage, "why is this street closed" with a link to surveys and information
- 4. Outdoor Seating Areas: Adding temporary outdoor dining areas, benches, conversation areas, and other seating
- 5. Activity Area: Games (board games, cornhole, giant chess, etc), chalk art area, arts & craft
- 6. Street Beautification: Temporary planters (like potted plants, hanging plants from lamps, and greenery installations), chalk art, and signage
 - a. Can commission from local florists and artists

Event Timeline:

Pre-event:

- \succ Licenses and permits
 - Event/public street use
 - Food and business vendors
- > Promotion
 - Social media campaigns, local partnerships, community outreach
 - Give First Street businesses advance notice of the event
 - Advance notice for street and traffic changes

\succ Logistics

- Street closure notice
- Changing traffic direction
- Additional crosswalk safety in surrounding areas
- ≻ Risk Management
 - Crowd control
 - Emergency procedures

Set-up:

- ➤ 6:30AM: Traffic redirection begins and street barricades are set up
- \succ 7:00AM: Set-up begins

Event Kick-off: 11:00AM

> Opening speech, performances, etc

Closing Time: 7:00PM

 \succ Closing speech

Clean-up: 7:00PM-11:30PM

 Items like seating and planters can be left overnight for use the next day (depending on security of the area, weather conditions, and local regulations)
 Post-event: Measure success with factors like attendance numbers, vendor satisfaction, and community feedback

Street Fair Feedback Example Survey: click link

Day 2 (Sunday): Public Plaza Activation

Following the Street Fair, the closed-off block will serve as an open public plaza for residents and visitors to use for one day. This initiative seeks to create a safe and vibrant space for people to use, enhancing community interaction and providing the experience of a pedestrianized zone for everyday use.

Key Features:

- 1. Public Seating: Install temporary seating, benches, and picnic tables
- 2. Beautification: Temporary planters (like potted plants, hanging plants from lamps, and greenery installations), chalk art, and signage
 - a. Can commission from local florists and artists
- 3. Community Engagement: Tabling to gather opinions and survey, signage with QR codes linked to surveys, papers with information about street closure
 - a. Information on why the street is closed and the idea of pedestrianization
- 4. Activity Area: Games (board games, cornhole, giant chess, etc), chalk art area, etc
- 5. Local Business Activation: partner with businesses to have sidewalk sales and outdoor dining

Pre-event:

- \succ Licenses and permits
 - Event/public street use
- > Promotion
 - Social media campaigns, local partnerships, community outreach
 - $\circ~$ Give First Street businesses advance notice of the block closure
 - Advance notice for street and traffic changes
- \succ Logistics
 - Street closure notice
 - Changing traffic direction
 - Additional crosswalk safety in surrounding areas
- ≻ Risk Management
 - Weather conditions
 - Emergency procedures

Set-up:

- > 6:30AM: Traffic redirection begins and street barricades are set up
- ≻ 7:00AM: Set-up begins

Plaza Opening: 9:00AM

Closing Time: 9:00PM

Clean-up: 9:00PM-11:00PM

Post-event: Measure success with factors like attendance numbers, community

feedback, and economic impact on local businesses

Public Plaza Activation Feedback Example Survey: click link

Off-site Parking:

The temporary closure of First Street is expected to lead to an increase in parking demand. A surge in attendance is also anticipated, as it will be a special event weekend, and there will be a need for additional parking spaces.

Suggested Options:

High School Parking Lot:

The use of the nearby high school parking lot can be considered as a temporary off-site parking solution.

Benefits:

- > Location is nearby, being a 3-4 minute to First Street
- \succ Lot is vacant on the weekends
- ➤ A pre-existing parking lot

Testing Shuttle System:

The inclusion of the high school parking lot offers a unique opportunity to test the feasibility and efficiency of implementing a shuttle system from a designated parking lot.

Testing One-Way Streets:

In conjunction with the offsite parking solution, this arrangement can also test how compatible a shuttle system can be with a one-way street system on First Street. This approach aims to evaluate the impact on traffic flow, safety, and logistical considerations during the event.

Additional Signage:

Another option to consider is having additional signage around the First Street area that will guide users of First Street to existing offsite parking lots, which will relieve some traffic congestion from the main street.

Figure M depicts an illustrative sign from the "Walk [Your City]" initiative. The purpose of this sign is different from the signs that are intended for First Street. However, it still serves as an excellent example of:

- ➤ Readability:
 - The featured sign exemplifies a design that facilitates easy readability, ensuring that information can be quickly and comprehensively read by observers
- > Multifunctionality:
 - This sign is able to accommodate the representation of multiple locations on a singular sign
- ➤ Time Estimates:
 - The sign indicates how much time it will take to walk, drive, or use a shuttle service from that specific point, offering practical insights for users

Other Information

Case Studies:

We used other nearby pedestrianization projects that helped inform our project. One example that we looked to was the on-going pedestrianization pilots in Downtown Kirkland to help inform the Kirkland 2035 Comprehensive Plan. The city ran an "Evenings on Park Lane" program that ran through summer of 2021 and 2022. This pilot was a result of a spring 2021 poll in which ²/₃ of participants supported a fully-pedestrianized Park Lane. The two-block commercial stretch in Downtown Kirkland then became closed to cars during the evenings for the following 2 summers. Restaurants reported increased business during this time, while retail shops reported lower returns and cited parking access and visibility as drivers of their economic success. In July 2023 a 1000+ signed petition was presented to the City Council in July opposing a permanent or seasonal closure of the Park Lane, however a sizable number of the signatures were from non-Kirkland residents. This pilot closure program could be replicated in Snohomish to gauge if the town would have a successful permanent pedestrianization project.

Edmonds Washington also ran a pilot pedestrianization project during the summers of 2020 and 2021 in an attempt to revitalize their downtown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Edmonds "Walkable Main" program closed 4 blocks of their towns during weekend daylight hours. The program pedestrianized downtown on both Saturday's and Sunday's during their first year in 2020, but moved to only run the program on Sundays during 2021 due to the "SOS: Save our Saturdays' ' campaign that arose in response to the reduced economic activity retail business faced during the 2020 weekend closures. This case study shows the importance of making sure retail businesses are on board with the closures, as well as the importance of making sure ships on a pedestrianized street get additional exposure and marketing to support the business they may be losing from decreased exposure of potential customers driving by. In addition, the City of Edmonds circulated an easy-to-read map [Appendix 8] of available public and private lots in the blocks surrounding the street closure. This is a static Snohomish could use to direct parking and traffic away from First Street.

Appendix

University of Washington: Surveying Public Opinion on First Street Business owner Cedestrian	Please rank these option):	options on a scal	e of 1-6 (1 being th	e best option, 6 be	ing the worst	
How do you currently get to First Street?	First St	reet is fully closed of	off to cars, for pede:	strians only		
	First St	First Street is fully closed off to cars during a weekend day				
If you drive, where do you usually park?	Closing	Closing First Street to cars for special events				
	Making First Street a one-way street with an expanded sidewalk					
What transportation improvements should be made, if any, to First Street?	Increas	Increasing the width of sidewalks and sidewalk intersections but maintaining 2-way traffic				
	Keep F	Keep First Street the same				
What do you like most about First Street?	What is your currer	2	3	4	5	
	Not comfortable at all	Somewhat uncomfortable	I feel neutral about this	Somewhat comfortable	Very comfortable	
What do you like the least about First Street?	Do you have any q	uestions or comme	nts for us?			
What improvements to the street/sidewalk could be made?						

Figure A



Figure B



Figure C



Figure D



Figure E



Figure F



Figure G



Figure H



Figure I



Figure J



Figure K



Figure L



Figure M