

CITY OF SARASOTA, FLORIDA
PROJECT COORDINATION PROGRAM

Five Major construction projects were scheduled to occur simultaneously in a concentrated area in the core of the downtown that each would impact the use of the public right of way, create issues with traffic circulation, project scheduling, loss of public parking spaces, and infrastructure improvements and upgrades within a common footprint. The projects consisted of an \$80 million mixed-use project, a \$50 million mixed-use project that included a supermarket and a parking structure with 300 parking spaces, a \$3.5 million bus transfer station, a \$3 million four block streetscape project that included major water and sewer upgrades and replacement of aged infrastructure, and a multi-million dollar under grounding and upgrade of the electric utility system that included both transformers and lines. The epicenter of the construction area was three adjoining blocks and surrounding streets where the most intense construction activity took place and which had the potential to bring the most disruption to downtown businesses and customers. Since so much construction was scheduled to take place in overlapping areas, the City needed to insure that the construction schedules meshed. Potential conflicts that could arise from one project's schedule as it would impact another project had to be avoided at all costs. Were conflicts to occur, it would have resulted in delays, schedules would not have been met, and there would, likely, have been areas of streets, sidewalks, and curb & gutter that would have been reconstructed then torn up for further work by a different project. All of the construction had to recognize the need to preserve access to downtown businesses to the maximum extent possible.

Implemented in December 2002, approximately ten months before any construction was scheduled to begin, the City initiated a program of regularly scheduled weekly meetings in which representatives of each project were invited to participate. Participants in the project coordination program included the City, the County, developers and contractors from the two mixed-use development projects, area representatives and project managers from the cable franchise operator and the telephone company, and the area manager from the electric utility. Participating City departments were the City Manager's Office,

the Building Department, City Engineer, Public Works Department, and the Planning and Redevelopment Department. County participants were the Transportation Department and Facilities Services. Strong City representation was necessary to insure that answers could be given to any question or issue raised by any of the projects representatives. The format of the weekly meetings was that the City moderated an interactive discussion of the status of each project, problems either encountered or anticipated, and future scheduling and activity that had the potential to impact one of the other projects. A report was made for each project, usually by a Senior Project Manager and /or a senior representative of the developer, and participants from other projects and City staff would then ask questions or bring up other information that was helpful to that particular project as it moved forward. On the few occasions when a project representative as unable to attend, they would provide their update to City staff who conveyed the information at the meeting. When the program commenced, the City had objectives of minimizing private use of the public right of way, maintaining good traffic circulation, meeting project construction schedules, minimizing loss of public parking spaces, maximizing business access in the construction area, and coordinating construction of infrastructure improvements. Coordinating construction scheduling was particularly important in Sarasota because the business economy is heavily dependent on the seasonal population, and it was necessary to try and minimize the construction disruption during that time. When the project coordination program began in 2002, the focus was in pre-planning construction schedules so that overlap of activity in the public right of way was prevented from happening, discussing potential street closings and length of closures, and traffic circulation. As the program progressed, finalization of construction schedules, coordination of plan submittal for review and issuance of building permits, parking and circulation, and business impact became more critical. Construction commenced in 2003 when one of the mixed-use projects broke ground, and the other projects followed soon thereafter. Three of the projects were completed in late 2004 and early 2005 – the City streetscape project, the bus transfer station, and the electric utility project, while the two mixed-use projects are scheduled to be completed later this year. The program had a number of successes that resulted from the weekly meetings some of which are: 1. there was agreement to jointly share a construction crane by the two mixed-use projects

which eliminated the need to close additional public streets; 2. the City and the electric utility used the same contractor to do the utility construction work and the street construction work in the impacted area; 3. the mixed-use projects used the same contractor to do the street construction work where their projects adjoin; 4. a one-way pair adjoining the construction area was temporarily created to mitigate parking loss by creating diagonal parking spaces where parallel parking or no parking had previously existed; 5. the City resequenced its streetscape construction schedule to coincide with mixed-use project work and utility intersection work; 6. developer plan reviews and building permits were reviewed and approved and building permits were issued for the mixed-use projects with no delays because the City was able to anticipate the submissions because of schedules provided by the developers at the meetings; 7. the City funded a trolley operation and leased a private parking area to minimize the impact on businesses in the construction area; 8. the City entered into an agreement with one of the mixed-use developers to allow the use of the City property outside of the downtown area as a temporary parking area for construction workers so that they would not occupy on-street public parking spaces near the development projects; 9. construction access to the mixed-use projects was relocated so that access to both projects was aligned and shared; and 10. construction staging plans were continually modified and updated to allow the City to monitor activity to insure compliance.

There were six primary measurable results of the program. First, project construction schedules were met. This became more difficult than anticipated when the hurricanes of 2004 caused weather delays to all projects and the electric utility, in particular, had to reassign personnel from the Sarasota project to areas that had more critical needs. The utility, to their credit, worked overtime hours to catch up with their schedule and to maintain continuity with the other projects. The other projects, to a lesser extent, also had to work extra shifts to keep their schedules current. Second, traffic circulation was maintained. The key to traffic circulation was the temporary one-waying of two streets adjoining the mixed-use projects. The one-way flow was designed so that there were right turns only when circulating the one-way streets. Even with lane reductions from the construction, traffic circulation was smooth because of the one-way traffic. Third, loss of public parking spaces was minimized. Part of the area where one of the mixed-use projects

was built was a City-owned surface parking lot of approximately 114 spaces. Additionally, there were on-street parallel parking spaces on the streets affected by the construction. By one-waying and creating diagonal parking spaces on those streets, and by leasing a privately owned surface lot four blocks away, the loss was totally offset. Fourth, street closings were minimized and business access maintained. City staff continually reviewed and monitored construction staging and phasing plans to keep closures at a minimum and the circulation plan ensured that business access was maintained. Fifth, the collaborative approach of the program eliminated the possibility of blaming others for construction related problems. While difficult to quantify, the desire of all parties to work together resulted in project schedules being met. Accommodations were made regularly so that the big picture was the focus. All parties, at one time or another, made adjustments that were not required and that kept the needs of the other projects in focus and on track. Sixth, participation occurred by all parties throughout the program. Since this was a totally voluntary program, one measure of its effectiveness was to see if project participants continued to attend the weekly meetings. Not only did representatives of each project attend regularly, but it grew to where multiple representatives of each project attended because they felt it was beneficial for them and their project to hear what was discussed at the meeting, both as it affected their project and the other projects. The greatest testimonial to the success of this program is that developers of three other mixed use projects in downtown Sarasota have requested that this same program be established for their project.

The lessons learned from this program are that there is a need to plan for projects and events that involve multiple parties and have the potential for major disruption of an area of the City or County, that there is a community benefit to creating an environment that encourages dialogue, is participative in nature, and mutually beneficial to the participating parties, and that by demonstrating to private developers that the City is a cooperating partner in the process will, in turn, result in the developers making accommodations that are not required and, most likely, would not have been made otherwise.