

Scranton takes next step toward making downtown more walkable



A man crosses North Washington Avenue near Linden Street on Monday in Scranton. JAKE DANNA STEVENS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



BY JIM LOCKWOOD, STAFF WRITER / PUBLISHED: MARCH 27, 2019

SCRANTON — The city's downtown is one step closer to becoming more walkable.

City officials seek a firm to help devise an improvement plan to make Scranton more pedestrian-friendly.

The initiative stems from a lecture in December at the University of Scranton by urban design expert Jeff Speck on how to

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improve the walkability in downtowns, including Scranton's.

A proponent of the effort, Councilman Wayne Evans, is encouraged by Mayor Bill Courtright's administration now formally seeking "qualifications/proposals" from firms interested in devising a plan.

Evans calls the effort significant in that it's all-encompassing and will look at issues involving pedestrians, bicyclists, businesses, traffic flow and parking, to name a few.

"It's walkability, it's pedestrian safety, it's on-street parking, it's bike lanes, it's a little bit of everything," Evans said. "I'm not saying we're not a good walkable city — we are, better than most — but there's room for improvements."

Speck, a city planner, consultant and author of the 2012 book "Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time," in his lecture made several suggestions, including:

- Re-stripping roads to create narrower vehicle travel lanes.
- Eliminate push-button signals for crosswalks and instead have them automatically timed to coordinate with green lights or timed to give pedestrians a head start to cross while all traffic is stopped.
- Eliminate one lane of multilane, one-way streets to slow down and curb jockeying of vehicles among lanes.
- Convert some one-way streets to two-way streets.
- Create four-way stops at two-way intersections.
- Add bicycle lanes in streets, for bikes and to narrow vehicle travel lanes.
- Reduce overall widths of some wider streets, and reduce four-lane areas of Mulberry Street and Wyoming Avenue to three vehicle lanes and a bicycle lane.

"The Jeff Speck lecture really created a lot of positive momentum to take us to this next step" of seeking qualifications/proposals from firms, Evans said.

The city recently issued public notices in The Times-Tribune for a "request for qualifications proposal" for a three-year "connectivity plan" for the downtown, for May 31, 2019, through April 30, 2022.

The deadline for submitting qualifications/proposals is April 24.





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Scranton police arrested Eugene Ballor of Raymond Court for the theft of a considerable amount of women’s lingerie from the home of Mrs. William Brookins, also of Raymond Court. (read more)



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“Like many similar cities, Scranton has been witnessing new investment and growth in its downtown core, particularly as millennials and empty-nesters opt into more urban, walkable lifestyles,” the city’s RFQ says. “Experience in other cities suggests that this investment and its positive outcomes will increase as the downtown becomes more accessible and appealing to people walking and biking, and better connected to other activity centers by means other than just driving.”

The city seeks a “full range of solutions” to contemplate, likely involving:

- Changes to the street network, including reconsideration of one-way streets.
- Changes to the number and width of lanes on certain streets.
- Changes to provision and design of turning lanes.
- Changes to signals at intersections.
- Introduction of better and more inviting bicycle lanes.
- Changes to on-street and off-street parking provisions and strategies.
- Changes to parking pricing, policy and management.
- Strategies for connecting key activity centers with multimodal transportation.
- Improving traffic signs.
- Identification of key redevelopment parcels and strategies for their prioritization.
- Identification of other city policies for encouraging downtown growth.
- Incorporating the historic Iron District along Cedar Avenue into the downtown.
- Creating connectivity to the University of Scranton’s sports complex in South Scranton.

Evans does not want a plan to sit on a shelf and gather dust.

After the city receives proposals and selects a firm, and it submits a plan, “the next part is implementation,” Evans said.

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