



December 10, 2025

Fort Lauderdale Mayor Dean J. Trantalis and Members of the City Commission
City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida
Via email

Subject: DDA Feedback on Las Olas Mobility Plan Concepts

On behalf of the Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority (DDA), we appreciate the City of Fort Lauderdale's continued investment in the Las Olas Mobility Project and the broader vision of strengthening downtown as a vibrant, walkable, and economically resilient urban center. Las Olas Boulevard is not only one of the city's most iconic corridors, but also a nationally recognized, pedestrian-oriented office, shopping, and dining destination serving residents, visitors, and businesses alike. Improvements to this corridor are long overdue and need to be implemented without further delay. From a funding standpoint, the estimated \$12.5 million investment in the Downtown and Shops section is a mere increment of the long term value that will be created for the entire city.

After careful review of the proposed streetscape elements associated with the Las Olas Mobility Plan, the DDA offers the following comments and recommendations for your consideration in advance of the planned discussion of this item at the December 16 Commission Conference meeting.

Downtown Section

This section of Las Olas Boulevard is the closest to optimal design of the corridor, reflecting substantial commercial investment over the past 25 years that has established a comfortable and engaging pedestrian environment. As such, only minor and necessary improvements should be considered for the Downtown section. Wholesale changes to pavement, street furniture, or lighting are not supported. The DDA recommends the following targeted modifications:

1. Andrews Avenue to SE 1 Avenue

Proceed with the concept as proposed but reduce the eastbound travel lanes to one. Convert the outside eastbound lane adjacent to Huizenga Park to limited on-street parking, rideshare pick-up and drop-off, and temporary loading or delivery. Traffic volumes in this segment can support this change, which would provide a functional alternative for vehicles currently using the SE 1 Avenue cul-de-sac for these activities.

2. Las Olas Boulevard and SE 1 Avenue Intersection

Request implementation of a permanent four-way stop.

3. SE 2 Avenue to SE 3 Avenue

Eliminate one eastbound through lane and shift the curb adjacent to 200 East Las Olas north to increase sidewalk width and allow for shade trees on the south side of the street.

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The revised eastbound cross-section should include one left-turn lane, one through lane, and one right-turn lane. This adjustment would also reduce the curb radius at the southwest corner, shortening pedestrian crossing distances to the north and east.

4. SE 3 Avenue to Tunnel Top

Introduce new or replacement Live Oak trees to create a continuous shade canopy on both sides of the street. Relocate the proposed pedestrian crossing to align with the west side of the SE 5 Avenue corner at Lobster Bar.

5. Recognition of Existing Conditions

The 30 percent concept plans should reflect all recently completed streetscape improvements (including The Main Las Olas and Hyatt Centric) as well as approved or planned developments (including Andare). Proposed changes should not negatively impact these investments.

Shops Section

The DDA strongly supports removal of the existing narrow medians in the Shops section, expansion of sidewalks with curbside planters for shade trees, and the addition of permanent on-street parking on both sides of the street. This recommendation reflects both local experience and established urban design precedent, with a focus on pedestrian safety, comfort, and circulation.

In high-activity retail environments, narrow medians do not function effectively as pedestrian refuges. Many cities—including Santa Monica along Third Street Promenade (outside the pedestrian-only zone) and Miami Beach along portions of Lincoln Road West—have removed or avoided narrow medians in favor of curb-adjacent pedestrian space with consistent sidewalk shade after encountering safety and operational challenges.

Arguments to keep the median have centered on preserving the Black Olive shade trees. However, the City's own arborist report indicates that the 16 existing Black Olive trees in the median are in poor-to-failing condition with limited remaining lifespan. Black Olives are generally considered a nuisance tree, causing significant staining of the pavement below. The City's own code of ordinances does not allow Black Olive trees to be planted or replaced in public rights-of-way since 1999. Furthermore, the median's width is insufficient to accommodate large shade trees once the Black Olives decline, meaning the median would ultimately only support palms, providing little environmental or pedestrian benefit.

Precedent corridors such as Worth Avenue in Palm Beach, Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, and portions of Las Olas Boulevard itself, demonstrate that canopy trees aligned with buildings create cooler sidewalk microclimates and strengthen the pedestrian retail experience. Simply put, shade located closer to storefronts improves comfort, increases walk times, and supports longer retail dwell time.

Retaining the narrow medians also necessitates alternating on-street parking patterns, creating a confusing and non-intuitive system that encourages unnecessary circulation, illegal U-turns, and increased traffic on adjacent streets while drivers search for curbside parking spaces. Removing nearly 60% of the existing 86 parking spaces along the corridor will result in a significant reduction of parking revenue to the City when the Las Olas area generates close to 20% of the City's parking revenue.

Additionally, on-street parking creates a protective buffer between moving traffic and the sidewalk, which slows drivers, reduces speeding, and makes crossings safer and more comfortable. It also increases convenience for patrons and boosts foot traffic, helping retail streets feel more active, inviting, and walkable.

Finally, Las Olas Boulevard's role as a venue for parades, festivals, charitable runs, and cultural events requires operational flexibility. Narrow medians and inconsistent curb lines limit temporary lane shifts, loading access, emergency response, and event configuration. A simplified roadway cross-section with generous sidewalks and no median allows safer and more adaptable operations without diminishing the pedestrian environment.

The DDA offers the following specific comments regarding the **No Median** concept:

1. Tree Spacing and Quantity

Large shade trees should be spaced no more than 30 feet apart. The current plans show spacing of 50 to 60 feet or more, significantly undercounting the number of trees achievable under the No Median design. The comparison to the With Median option is also misleading, as the eventual loss of the Black Olive trees would result in palms rather than large canopy trees—yielding only seven new shade trees, not 23.

2. SE 12 Avenue to SE 15 Avenue

All trees should be located in curbside planters along the sidewalk. The plans should depict the existing mid-block pedestrian crossing at SE 13 Avenue and relocate the proposed crosswalk from the terminus of Tarpon Drive to SE 12 Avenue.

In summary, Las Olas Boulevard succeeds because it functions first as a place and second as a roadway. The DDA firmly believes that modest, focused improvements in the Downtown section—and removal of the narrow median in the Shops section in favor of consistent on-street parking and wider, shaded sidewalks closer to storefronts—will enhance pedestrian comfort, improve safety, strengthen retail performance, and preserve the Boulevard's iconic character for decades to come.

We respectfully request that these recommendations, as illustrated in the attached plan mark-ups, be incorporated into the Las Olas Mobility Plan concepts as they advance to 30 percent design. We look forward to continue collaborating with the City, local businesses, and residents to ensure the final plan reflects best practices for world-class, pedestrian-oriented main streets.

Thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to Downtown Fort Lauderdale.

Sincerely,



Fort Lauderdale Downtown Development Authority
Dev Motwani, Chairman, on behalf of the Board of Directors

cc: Rickelle Williams, City Manager
DDA Board of Directors

DDA General Counsel
DDA President & CEO



