

FSU students design options for the College Avenue area

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Democrat writer

College Avenue, which connects Florida State University's landmark Westcott Building and downtown Tallahassee, is a gateway that doesn't quite live up to its signature potential.

But some promising ideas are percolating for how to improve College Avenue and the surrounding area.

Eleven students from the Florida Planning and Development Laboratory in FSU's Department of Urban and Regional Planning have envisioned a way to make this area, known as College Park, more attractive and of better use to the community.

The College Park District Action Plan was created in Fall 2012 with the department's planner-in-residence Lindsay Stevens as lead faculty member on the project, and encompasses the area including Call, Gaines,

Copeland and Duval streets.

The studio team has proposed many changes to the area that aim to "enhance comfort and image, upgrade infrastructure, improve transportation facilities, and encourage infill development."

One recommendation made by the students is the development of the area surrounding the Civic Center, utilizing what is currently a parking lot for hotel space, classrooms, restaurants and retail, while building a garage to use for parking in order to maximize the available space.

"It would benefit visitors to the Civic Center," Stevens said. "Right now there's not really a place they can park their cars and get dinner or an ice cream cone before a basketball game."

The idea for redeveloping College Park was brought to the students by Jay Revell, executive director of Tallahassee

Downtown Improvement Authority.

"I started with College Park before getting the job, but now we're excited for the project," Revell said. "We see it as a natural extension of downtown and we want to do everything we can to see that area thrive."

Other suggestions made by the team include pedestrian safety measures, such as creating better walkways and bicycle routes, adding more street lighting, and taking steps to alleviate traffic on busy streets in the area, and increasing stormwater capacity.

"Better stormwater infrastructure is definitely needed for the redevelopment to take place," Stevens said.

While envisioning the changes to be made to College Park, the students did a variety of research including looking at other town and gown initiatives around the country, seeing what existing infrastructure systems need

improvements in the area, researching what historically the district looked like, and holding public meetings to discuss what the general public wanted to see happen in the district.

"One of the most important things mentioned at the public meeting was that people want to preserve the beautiful vista of Westcott," Stevens said.

This project will be funded by private investors, FSU, and the City of Tallahassee.

"We're working with the City of Tallahassee planning department to decide which small projects might be doable," Revell said. "We might see things like the lighting or extending Doug Burnette Park to the Chain of Parks within the next year."

The College Park District Action Plan was awarded the 2013 Florida Student Project Award by the American Planning Association.