



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA  
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

JOSH STEIN  
GOVERNOR

J.R. "JOEY" HOPKINS  
SECRETARY

**January 30, 2025**

Town of Sunset Beach  
Lisa Anglin – Town Administrator  
700 Sunset Boulevard North  
Sunset Beach, NC 28468

Dear Ms. Anglin,

Thank you for your January 15, 2025, letter regarding the Town of Sunset Beach's updated parking plan for Main Street. I appreciate the work that you, the Town Council, and the Citizen Parking Committee have done to address the challenges associated with parking on Main Street while focusing on safety and accessibility.

After reviewing the proposal, I wanted to provide an initial response to the key points raised in your letter:

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### **Designation of Parking Spaces**

As per Division Standard Practice, we cannot permit the designation of parking areas on gravel or grass shoulders along state-maintained roadways. This policy is rooted in the following principles:

1. **Safety:** Parking on shoulders can obstruct sightlines, impede emergency vehicle access, and increase safety risks for pedestrians and cyclists, especially in a mixed-use environment like Main Street.
2. **Maintenance and Roadway Integrity:** Gravel and grass shoulders are prone to soil compaction, erosion, and drainage issues, making them unsuitable for regular vehicle use and increasing maintenance demands.

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3. **Design Standards:** Designated parking areas must meet the AASHTO Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities, which requires a clear, marked, and maintainable 3.5-foot door zone buffer between parking spaces and adjacent bike or travel lanes to enhance safety and visibility. Gravel or grass shoulders cannot meet this requirement due to their lack of stability and durability for proper marking and maintenance.
4. **Liability Concerns:** Implementing parking locations that do not comply with established design standards and best practices creates significant liability risks for both the Town and NCDOT. Noncompliant areas increase the likelihood of accidents, leading to potential legal and financial challenges.
5. **Compliance with Statutory Distance Requirements:** *Per § 20-162(a)*, parking is prohibited within 15 feet of a fire hydrant, 25 feet of curb line intersections (or 15 feet of property line intersections if no curbs exist), and in front of private driveways or fire station entrances. Adherence to these statutory requirements is critical to ensure roadway safety and emergency access.

These principles align with state statutes that prioritize unobstructed travel corridors and roadway integrity. Parking along state-maintained roadways is intended only for temporary and infrequent use. Regular or frequent parking conflicts with the Department's safety, accessibility, and functionality goals.

Designated parking is only permitted on paved areas to ensure compliance with design standards and to maintain safety and accessibility. Additionally, since Main Street includes a dedicated bike lane, any designated parking must maintain a sufficient buffer as required by the AASHTO Guidance.

It is also important to clarify that NCDOT is not encouraging or proposing the widening of Main Street to accommodate parking. Our comments were solely intended to outline the requirements for any *officially designated* parking to ensure compliance with safety and design standards.

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### **Comprehensive Parking Study**

Given the challenges of parking on Main Street, I encourage the Town to consider a comprehensive parking study to explore more sustainable and safety-focused solutions involving all stakeholders. Main Street, as the Town's primary corridor, presents significant limitations for on-street parking due to its high traffic volumes, existing bike lanes, numerous driveways, significant pedestrian activity, and relatively higher travel

speeds—factors that make it the least safe and least ideal location for parking compared to surrounding side streets.

Currently, parking is prohibited on most side streets along Main Street. This policy effectively pushes all parking demand onto Main Street, creating safety concerns and conflicts between parked vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.

To address these issues, the Town may wish to consider the following options:

- **Prohibiting Parking from Main Street entirely:** Removing parking from Main Street would eliminate conflicts between parked vehicles, cyclists, and motorists, significantly improving safety for all users of the corridor.
- **Side Street Parking Solutions:** Redesignating low-volume side streets to include properly marked parking areas on paved surfaces could redistribute parking demand from Main Street to safer, less trafficked streets, reducing safety risks and traffic disruption.
- **One-Way Street Conversion:** Strategically converting certain roads to one-way streets could free up existing pavement width for marked parking, providing safer and more efficient parking solutions.
- **Continue the Current Practice of Restricting Parking Using 'No Parking' Signs:** Maintaining the Town's practice of clearly marking areas where parking is not allowed can help manage behavior without significant policy or infrastructure changes.
- **Road Turnover to Town:** Transferring ownership of Main Street from NCDOT to the Town of Sunset Beach would allow the Town greater autonomy to implement customized parking and roadway solutions. This transition would enable the Town to make infrastructure adjustments, such as lane widths, pedestrian crossings, and designated parking areas, while also opening eligibility for Powell Bill funding to offset maintenance and improvement costs.

As a member of the Grand Strand Area Transportation Study (GSATS) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Town of Sunset Beach may have access to resources and funding to support a comprehensive parking study. Elizabeth Tucker, the new Assistant Executive Director of GSATS, can provide additional insight into how GSATS may be able to assist. Her contact information is [etucker@wrcog.org](mailto:etucker@wrcog.org), and we encourage the Town to explore this potential opportunity as part of its efforts to address parking challenges.

By pursuing a comprehensive parking study, the Town can develop a long-term parking strategy that balances safety, accessibility, and functionality for the community.

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### **Next Steps and Collaboration**

We value the Town's efforts to improve safety and traffic flow along Main Street and remain committed to collaborating on solutions that align with both the Town's needs and NCDOT policy and goals.

To ensure a holistic solution that addresses the diverse needs of the community, we encourage open dialogue and collaboration between NCDOT, the Town, and other relevant stakeholders. If the Town is interested, we would be happy to schedule a meeting to explore opportunities for partnership, identify available resources, and refine strategies for improving safety, accessibility, and functionality.

Thank you again for your attention to this matter and for your continued partnership in ensuring the safety, accessibility, and efficiency of our transportation network. Please do not hesitate to reach out with updates or to schedule a meeting to discuss these matters further.

Sincerely,



Benjamin Hughes  
District Engineer - Wilmington  
North Carolina Department of Transportation

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Trevor Carroll, NCDOT Division Engineer  
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