

Keith Golden, P.E., Commissioner



GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

One Georgia Center, 600 West Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, Georgia 30308
Telephone: (404) 631-1000

July 2, 2014

Mr. Rick Stancil
City Manager
City of Hiawassee
50 River Street
Hiawassee, GA 30546

RE: Proposed Impacts to the City of Hiawassee at Town Square
Pedestrian Upgrades at 20 State Route (SR) Locations in District 1
Georgia Department of Transportation Project PI No.0007495
Towns County, GA

Dear Mr. Stancil:

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), has initiated a project to upgrade signal and pedestrian facilities along 20 State Route intersections in Lumpkin, Towns, Union, and White Counties. The scope of work varies at each intersection. Most intersections would receive upgrades and improvements that would consist of new span wires, back plates, quadropole or setback loops, overhead street signs, stop bar and crosswalk striping, new strain, pedestrian, or joint use poles, wheelchair ramps, and new cabinet and controller hardware. Additional right-of-way (ROW) would be required at several intersections.

At River Street and US 76/SR 2/SR 17/ North Main Street, the existing conditions at the proposed intersection include an outdated signal with limited street name signs, sidewalks that are not compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, intermittent curb and gutter, and faded striping. The proposed improvements would include installation of steel strain poles with mast arms connected to video detection systems, LED countdown pedestrian signals with push button stations, signal cabinet with conduit to signals, wheelchair ramps, and curb and gutter. The proposed improvements for this intersection would require 0.023 acre of ROW at three intersection quadrants.

Of the 0.023 acre of required ROW, the proposed improvements would require approximately 0.015 acre from the City of Hiawassee property at the Town Square, which would be converted from a recreational use to a transportation use (i.e. road and right-of-way). The proposed improvements would involve constructing ADA compliant wheelchair ramps and pedestrian poles. As a recreation facility owned by the City of Hiawassee, Hiawassee Town Square is afforded special protections under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act (recodified in 49 U.S.C. 303 and 23 U.S.C 138). Under the provisions of Section 4(f), if the proposed project would result in adverse effects to the park or recreation facility, the transportation agency must conduct an evaluation to demonstrate that there is no prudent and feasible alternative to the use of the 4(f) property. Because this evaluation can be expensive and potentially result in project delays, an exemption is provided in cases where the official with jurisdiction over the park or recreation area concurs in a determination that the impacts are not adverse. This concurrence enables FHWA to make a *de minimis* (minor impact) finding, which satisfies the requirements of Section 4(f) and precludes the need for a Section 4(f) Evaluation.

The purpose of this letter is to request your concurrence in the "no adverse effects" determination, thus allowing the FHWA to make the *de minimis* impact finding and allowing this project to proceed as planned.

A Summary of Project Impacts

As noted, the proposed project would require approximately 0.015 acre of ROW from Hiwassee Town Square. Approximately 0.015 acre of the Town Square would be permanently converted to a transportation use (see attached graphic and plan sheet). This project would not impact the gazebo, existing sidewalks within the park, or the "Hiwassee Town Square" sign. Construction would be limited to the eastern corner of the park and would modify the existing "No Parking" area to pedestrian use, and remove some of the existing landscaping. Access to Hiwassee Town Square would be maintained during construction.

Concurrence with the No Adverse Effects Determination

If you agree that the acquisition of ROW as shown on the attached plan sheet would not adversely affect the recreational activities, features, and attributes that qualify the Hiwassee Town Square for protection under Section 4(f), the Department requests that you sign and date this letter in the spaces below:

As the official with jurisdiction over Hiwassee Town Square, I concur in a determination that the proposed transportation project as described in this letter and shown on the accompanying attachment would not adversely affect the activities, features, and attributes that qualify the Hiwassee Town Square for protection under Section 4(f). I have also been informed that, based on my concurrence, the FHWA intends to make a de minimis finding regarding impacts to the Hiwassee Town Square, thus satisfying the requirements of Section 4(f).

Signature: _____

Date: 07/02/14

After signing and dating this letter, we ask that you return a copy to the attention of Iris Hernandez at GDOT. The Department appreciates your assistance in making this transportation project possible. Should you have any questions or concerns, please call Ms. Hernandez at 404-631-1190.

Sincerely,

Hiral Patel / mn

Hiral Patel, P.E.

State Environmental Administrator

cc: Sue Anne Decker, Georgia Department of Transportation