

From Routine Resurfacing to Complete Street in Longwood, Florida

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The [Church Avenue Complete Street](#) project started out as a simple resurfacing of a relatively small but critical street in the City of Longwood, Florida. When construction began in December 2016, it had become an exciting and transformative undertaking, helping to usher in a new era of transportation projects in the City of Longwood.

At 5.6 square miles and a population of approximately 15,000 people, Longwood is a small but nearly completely built-out community in the Metro Orlando area. The city is home to a station along the route of Central Florida's first commuter rail line, [SunRail](#), which has inspired significant new investment in the city's traditional downtown. SunRail has also led to a new local outlook on transportation, of which the Church Avenue Complete Street project is part.

The Longwood City Commission understood the promise of SunRail as an alternative mode of transportation and as an economic development engine early on in the project, adopting a form-based urban code for the area as well as a [Bicycle-Pedestrian Master Plan](#) prior to SunRail's start date in 2014. Even before the official adoption of the city's [Complete Streets Policy](#), Longwood had taken a Complete Streets approach to make the most of the SunRail station opportunity.

A form-based code is a land development regulation that fosters predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. A form-based code is a regulation, not a mere guideline, adopted into city, town, or county law. A form-based code offers a powerful alternative to conventional zoning regulation.. – [Form-Based Codes Institute](#)

The city's SunRail station is located on Church Avenue, a two-lane road that connects two of the city's major corridors (Ronald Reagan Boulevard and US Highway 17-92). Church Avenue also connects Longwood's Historic Downtown with an area of the city with most of the cul-de-sac style subdivisions built in a development boom in the 1970s. West of Ronald Reagan Boulevard, Church Avenue has been a constant concern for residents and a maintenance issue for the city, as potholes would seem to develop just as they were fixed.

In 2015, Church Avenue was scheduled for a long-planned resurfacing project to help address this issue. Rather than keep the project on the books as a simple resurfacing job, city staff reimagined the project as a Complete Street, in conjunction with the city's evolving approach to transportation.

Figure 2: Locations of Church Avenue improvements. (Image courtesy of City of Longwood)

The project required departmental coordination between Community Development, Public Works, and Leisure Services, and the full support of the City Manager. While Longwood is a small city with a small staff, projects historically were planned and sometimes executed within individual departments without much interaction. One hurdle the city had to overcome was the perspective that adding bicycle and pedestrian facilities "increased the cost" of the project from its original iteration as a routine maintenance project. While the total cost of the project did increase, the philosophy that eventually became the cornerstone of the city's Complete Streets Policy is that bicycle-pedestrian improvements should not be seen as "additional costs" but rather as integral elements of a road project, like asphalt.

Through this collaboration between city departments, the Church Avenue project was transformed from a routine resurfacing to a Complete Street, with elements including:

- Bicycle lanes allowing for safer travel from the city's more suburban-style subdivisions into the traditional downtown;
- New sidewalks;
- Underground utilities to help support pedestrian activity downtown; and
- On-street parking to help provide protection for pedestrians and to provide more parking for visitors to the city's Reiter Park, to which the city plans additional improvements.

The City Commission issued approval for the construction contract in November 2016 and the project, currently underway, is anticipated to be completed in summer 2017. The improvements will help provide safe, efficient transportation to and from the city's downtown and SunRail station. As a result of this work, new development opportunities have already been planned for the city's Heritage Village area. Building on the interdepartmental coordination of the Church Avenue project, the City Commission wanted to ensure that future projects also consider these types of enhancements. The City Commission adopted a Complete Streets Policy that enables Public Works and Community Development to collaborate at the start of any project. This partnership will support and improve the city's transportation network moving forward. In short, what started as a simple resurfacing project ended up transforming the city's outlook on transportation project planning.