TO: City Council
FROM: Planning Commission
DATE: October 13th, 2014
SUBJECT: Highway 14/Downtown Traffic Issues

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

Trust us, we sympathize with you as you attempt to balance the various and competing needs of our community, and the discussion of options for the routing and control of traffic on First and Second streets is clearly one of those issues that brings different parts of the community's needs into conflict. We hesitate to add another voice to the cacophony, but the latest suggestions to remove the stop sign at First and Russell came up during our Commission's discussion period and we felt the need to express our disagreement with this option.

First Street is home to two of our emergency response agencies: the fire station to the east of the stop sign, and the ambulance hall to the west. We are concerned about safety of the emergency response vehicles as they leave these locations based on the already poor sight distance available for east- and westbound travelers of this corridor. The stop sign on First Street is the only thing keeping traffic in this area slow enough to ensure these vehicles don't become involved in their own accident as they head off to respond to another emergency.

During our discussions, we attempted, but struggled to provide corresponding solutions to the issue we brought up. As we discussed possible solutions we came to the conclusion that, like most of the community, many of our concerns were based on emotion and unfounded speculation, not fact, and staff support was unable to provide us with any facts to assist our recommendation. We don't believe solutions should stem from this place. Thankfully, we have come up with a solution to this second problem.

We recommend making a more holistic assessment of the traffic issues in these two street corridors before making any more decisions. Ideally, this assessment would include an analysis of any proposal's impact on local emergency service providers, and a factual basis for recommending the traffic levels that would justify/necessitate the switch-over to the one-way couplet. The Planning Commission is often in the position of requiring transportation-related improvements, and we can envision a large proposal triggering the need to for the switch. We would be grateful for an advanced study telling us how large such a prospective proposal would need to be.

Thank you for all that you do.

On behalf of the Planning Commission

Paul Hendricks
Acting Chair