

Florence seeks traffic solutions

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Before the decorative street lamps, benches and other improvements come to North 30th Street in Florence, some area residents and business owners want something done about the street itself.

The four lanes of heavy traffic, including trucks that blow through the business district, threaten pedestrians and make parking difficult, residents told city officials at a meeting Wednesday. The thoroughfare makes the area known for its history and small-town roots feel anything but quaint, they said.

"One of our biggest obstacles is traffic — and the lack of parking," Tammy Eveleth, who owns the Wild Bird Haven shop on North 30th Street, complained to City Councilman Marc Kraft, city traffic engineer Charlie Krajcek, city economic devel-

opment manager Ken Johnson and Tim Weander, a Nebraska Department of Roads official.

The public officials met with about 50 area residents and business owners during a two-hour, town-hall-style brainstorming session about how to help Florence's historic business strip improve its look, add vitality to the area and increase tourism. The meeting was at the newly refurbished Florence City Hall.

Most questions concerned what to do about the busy street, which is also U.S. Highway 75. Residents wondered: Could it be changed to make the area more pedestrian- and business-friendly? Could the four lanes be shrunk to two in the heart of Florence? Could truck traffic be rerouted?

Krajcek and Weander said the street's heavy traffic flow — about 17,000 vehicles per day — makes it impossible to narrow the road. In fact, they said North 30th Street could be widened to

add a turning lane. They said the current set-up is the easiest way to accommodate traffic from the nearby Interstate.

Consultant Marty Shukert, who showed examples of streetscape projects his firm had done in Iowa and parts of Nebraska, told the audience that there were silver linings — design techniques would help reduce the risk to pedestrians, and the highway designation along North 30th Street could make it eligible for government funding.

Johnson offered concrete ways residents could take action, including forming a business improvement district and simply drafting a proposal.

He said the Dundee and Benson neighborhoods have thrived because of synergy between businesses and because of ample parking and pedestrian-friendly streets.

Like Dundee and Benson, Florence is a long-established neighborhood with deep roots.