

Casselberry to focus on bikes and pedestrians to improve connectivity



Bicyclists enjoy a Central Florida bike path. (Sentinel file photo)



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Known for its quiet residential neighborhoods and city-owned golf course, Casselberry is moving forward with long-range plans to transform city streets into friendlier avenues for bicyclists and pedestrians.

In the coming years, the city plans to add wider sidewalks, crosswalks, shared bike lanes and shade trees.

“We’re trying to improve our community by having much more connectivity,” City Commissioner Anthony Aramendia said. “We have a golf course that meanders through several neighborhoods, we have a chain of lakes and we have two schools. So we have to make our streets more comfortable to use for bicyclists and pedestrians. It’s a quality of life issue and for the safety of our children.”

As part of the effort, Casselberry recently completed a mile-long recreational trail from busy U.S. Highway 17-92, just north of State Road 436, east to Oxford Road. That new pathway helps residents travel safely from the city’s mostly residential east side to the shops and restaurants along the highway.

Casselberry also upgraded a stretch of Oxford Road near the Seminole County Library by adding bicycle lanes, improving the crosswalks and widening sidewalks.

At a workshop this month, commissioners reviewed plans to improve the residential streets of Quail Pond Circle, Southcot Drive and Queens Mirror Circle that wind through several neighborhoods and connect with Casselberry Elementary and South Seminole Middle schools.

Designing and upgrading streets to accommodate various forms of transportation — such as bicycles, cars, pedestrians and bus transit riders — is a concept called “complete streets” that is becoming increasingly popular in Central Florida and across the country.

“I think it’s fair to say that the experts in transportation are concluding today that the earlier forms of planning were too shortsighted,” City Manager Randy Newlon said. “Everybody is now moving in this direction... And it’s healthy and it improves the quality of life.”

Orlando, for example, recently completed a study on how to improve Virginia Drive, between the Lake Formosa and Park Lake/Highland neighborhoods and connects with the Ivanhoe Village and Mills 50 districts, to make it easier for people to walk, ride a bicycle or hop on a bus.

Orlando also completed its Orlando Urban Trail and is currently constructing a pedestrian overpass over Colonial Drive just west of Orange Avenue and east of Interstate 4, that will connect with that trail.

Since Casselberry recently added wider sidewalks along Lake Triplet Drive, a long residential street that wraps around three lakes, Aramendia said he’s noticed more people jogging or taking strolls.

Casselberry also has started planting dozens of shade trees — including oaks — along residential streets to provide shade and encourage residents in this city of nearly 30,000 residents to join their friends for conversational walks together as a group, rather than being forced to walk single file along the old-fashioned narrow sidewalks, Aramendia said.

Casselberry also added sharrows — a combination of the words “share” and “arrow” — along Lake Triplet Drive, a main residential thoroughfare that leads to City Hall, to make motorists aware of bicyclists. Sharrows are markings placed in the center of a roadway’s lanes depicting a bicyclist under two arrows. Sharrows remind motorists that the road is also for those pedaling two wheelers.

The city is considering building a pedestrian bridge over U.S. 17-92 just north of S.R. 436. And plans are in place to add sidewalks and a pedestrian path along Quail Pond Circle from the Casselberry Art House east to Sunset Drive.

Rodrigo Moura, 27, who recently moved to Casselberry from his native Brazil, lives near the new recreational path running between U.S. 17-92 and Oxford Road. But he has seen few people use it.

“I think many people don’t know it’s here,” Moura said while his dog. “But it takes time.”

Still, Moura hopes Casselberry’s plans will encourage people to rely on other forms of transportation rather than their cars.

“The reality is that our society is so dependent on the automobile,” he said. “It’s easier for people to go to the store or other places by driving their cars, for example.”

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