

Planning Commission Work Session
July 23, 2019 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.
NDS Conference Room

Members Present: Chairman Lisa Green, Commissioners Jody Lahendro, Lyle Solla-Yates, Hosea Mitchell, Gary Heaton, and Mr. Bill Palmer

Members Absent: Commissioners Taneia Dowell, and Rory Stolzenberg

Staff Present: Kyle Kling, Alex Ikefuna, and Kari Spitler

Chairman Green called the meeting to order at 5:05 pm.

1. Fontaine Avenue Streetscape

Owen Peery, RK&K Engineers: We are here to answer questions and provide a nice dialogue as to where this project might be headed. We look forward to the Commission's input on the project. The project corridor starts right at Fontaine Research Park and goes to the intersection of Maury Avenue and Jefferson Park Avenue, which is just over a half a mile.

Chairman Green: Does it end straight at the City/County line?

Mr. Peery: It's a bad spot to stop the project because it leaves about 200 ft. undone. We are currently receiving direction from the City to design it all the way to Fontaine right now and we need to figure out the funding with VDOT and others. It would be beyond the Smart Scale application limits and VDOT is very particular about those things. There is someone from Albemarle County on the Steering Committee and we will be talking with VDOT about how they feel about tacking it on to the project. Some things have changed since the Fontaine Ave study took place in 2005, namely new techniques that have come a long way. You've adapted several plans like the Transit Study in 2013, Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan in 2015, and the Streets That Work Plan in 2016, which changes what this street might look like and become. This will be a retrofit type of project out of the Streets That Work Guidelines and it is a Neighborhood A street. Some of the parameters we are trying to follow include sidewalks with a clear zone and on-street parking in areas without off-street parking. Some of the draft design principles that were also part of the Smart Scale application included creating a complete street, increasing safety and comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists, and to beautify the corridor as a gateway. We will improve pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities and accommodate the needs of all travel modes. There will be a buffer between the roadway and facilities and where feasible, provide a physical separation for facilities. This is a gateway into Charlottesville and there isn't a speed problem, but speeds are higher eastbound than they are westbound. We haven't conceptualized it yet, but we want to create a gateway here that tells people you are entering a different space. This is one of the major corridors into and out of the City, so it will improve access to US-29, UVA, and University Health System. We want to connect to the existing and proposed bicycle and pedestrian facilities to Fontaine Research Park and beyond. There is a UVA shuttle from the park to part of the hospital system, but there is no transit stop right on Fontaine.

Chairman Green: In the future, is this something that can be retrofitted to add in transit since there is so much development going out to Fontaine?

Mr. Peery: Yes. Right now the concepts don't have any physical barriers that would prevent a bus to use the bike lane for a few seconds. The concept will have room for bus facilities in the buffer strip and there

will be ways to retrofit. We have been in contact with CAT and they have no plans for bus service down this route and they said they would like to coordinate better with the University on it. UVA's route might be expanded to serve this route in the future.

Commissioner Mitchell: It's going to be very important to extend our bus capacity because we are about to lose 80 parking spots at the Research Park when they build the new building.

Mr. Palmer: In the Capital Plan the parking garage is either coming first or they are concurrent, but eventually there will be less parking because there will be more buildings there.

Chairman Green: There is a lot of stuff going out to the Research Park so there are concerns about transit.

Mr. Palmer: Did you have any conversations with UTS regarding if they could put a stop there, would they?

Mr. Kyle Kling: Rebecca White is on the Steering Committee and she has been privy to all the conversations with transit. Her and CAT have discussed this issue.

Chairman Green: We also have a new transit director coming on board as well.

Mr. Peery: The funding for this project is Smart Scale, so we are following federal regulations. The overall budget for the project is \$11,700,000. From spring-fall 2019 we are in preliminary design and we hope to be at 30% design later this year. After we hear feedback from the Commission we want to advance the work further and then get together with the Steering and Technical Committees to make sure we're headed in the right direction. There have been 3 Steering Committee meetings, 2 Technical Committee meetings, 2 Public Meetings, and 2 meetings with PLACE so far.

Ms. Amy Nelson RK&K Engineers: We have had two public meetings/workshops. One of the key feedback from PLACE after we held our first workshop was that we needed to have more engagement to get more people at the meeting, especially UVA students. We sent out flyers to businesses on the corridor and to UVA housing areas that are close to the project, had a message board in front of the fire station for about a week and a half, direct mailings, email, and social media. We found that email was the primary way that people were finding out about the meeting and this outreach generated about 10 more people at the second meeting. Unfortunately no UVA students attended. During the first Steering Committee meeting we asked people to identify opportunities, concerns, and goals for the corridor. The goals were to have safety for all users and create a sense of place. Concerns included how much right of way we might be taking and the gap between City limits and the Research Park. They found opportunities to improve access management, storm water management, and to beautify the gateway to Charlottesville. In general, on-street parking was not a priority, but there were concerns if we took away parking and limited the way of the road and how trash and deliveries would access the properties.

Commissioner Mitchell: Didn't the businesses in the area express more interest with on-street parking?

Ms. Nelson: We've heard from more businesses as we've gone on, especially at the last meeting, and we heard that they actually don't want more parking. They found that their needs are sufficient and they find the parking on the corridor to be more dangerous. For the most part the businesses have been pretty supportive of the plan we've shown them to date.

Commissioner Solla-Yates: My sense is that the on-street parking is used for storage for UVA undergrads. Is that correct?

Mr. Peery: We can't pin it exactly to them, but we can tell you what we've seen for the parking usage. Parking rates were greatly reduced at night, which tells us that the spaces are being used by someone during the day and they are underutilized in the evening. We also happened to be doing some parking assessments about two weeks after a snowfall and there was still some cars with snow on it that hadn't moved. We've also seen several contract workers get out of their cars and wait for someone from the job site to come pick them up. Some of it could also be daytime parking for the college because it's free.

Ms. Nelson: From there, we took the information from the Steering Committee to the first Public Information Meeting. We found that safe routes for pedestrians and bicycles were extremely important. People also wanted to make sure we were preserving trees and finding more greenspace, as well as adding more or widening the sidewalks.

Commissioner Mitchell: The lack of enthusiasm for crossing beacons was surprising. Was that just the intensity of the traffic or is that just the nature?

Mr. Peery: We did have a board or two about the crossings, but people seemed more focused on the longitudinal aspect. We need to work through how we are going to cross this street with no signals safely and to keep speeds down on the roadway. This is especially true midday and during off-peak hours because that is when we normally see speeds increase.

Chairman Green: How many parking spaces are there now?

Ms. Nelson: The spaces aren't marked, but it is roughly 25 spaces.

Mr. Peery: They are broken up by driveways and entrances to businesses. If on-street parking was very important, for us to give proper site distance to the side streets, you wouldn't be able to park right up to the corner of a street because we would prevent that from happening. It wouldn't end up being 25 spaces at the end of the design even if people said they needed on-street parking.

Ms. Nelson: At the same Public Meeting, people found having additional parking to be least important. Sidewalks and bike lanes were at the top.

Commissioner Mitchell: The driver of that is that most of the people have little driveways to park there.

Ms. Nelson: From there, we took this information and built it into the next Steering Committee meeting to determine what kind of streetscape people wanted to see. There was a general consensus that on-street parking was not a priority. It focused on a typical section with dedicated bicycle lanes with a buffer, a landscape buffer, and sidewalks on each side of those.

Commissioner Mitchell: How practical is the buffer with the amount of space it's going to eat up?

Mr. Peery: The Fire Chief stated he needed wiggle room on this street, so when we speak about a buffer for the bike lane we are talking about something painted, not physical, for most of the route. Some people discussed rumble strips, but they are in front of houses and they are noisy. They do make quiet rumble strips that have been tested by VDOT and aren't as noisy, but it's unclear if that would still be appropriate on a street like Fontaine.

Chairman Green: Is this the emergency access from 64 straight to the hospital?

Mr. Peery: Yes, it is one of the major routes to the hospital. VDOT has a project that will improve the off-ramp onto Fontaine from 64, although it won't do anything to the signals.

Commissioner Solla-Yates: Why do the firemen need wiggle room westbound? We received public comment about some protected bike lanes so if we could do something that would be good.

Mr. Peery: Perhaps if they are responding on 29 to another part of the City they would need it. It's a great question but we haven't drilled down into it yet.

Mr. Palmer: In other projects we talked about using protected bike lanes more. Did you get any direction from Pedestrian and Bike Coordinator?

Mr. Peery: They are on the Technical Committee and they are saying at 35 mph if they can get some protection it would be great.

Ms. Nelson: For the second Public Open House, there weren't any UVA students or commuters, but there were many employees and people who owned a primary residence in the area. We asked these people how they use the corridor and found that most people weren't biking along it because of the lack of bike lanes now. We found that they were crossing it fairly frequently and the overwhelming majority were not using the on-street parking or public transit at all. Again, there is no stop directly in the area, which probably impacts that number. Having bike lanes, emergency vehicle access, and wider sidewalks were the three most important things and again having on-street parking was at the bottom of the list.

Commissioner Solla-Yates: Do you have a sense of current transit ridership in the corridor?

Mr. Peery: It's unclear, but we know the shuttle is used.

Commissioner Mitchell: The future is going to have an increasing need to get people from central City up to the Fontaine area because of all the clinics we are building out there.

Mr. Palmer: If Fontaine Research Park grows in the future, which is anticipated, the UTS would probably end up going out there beyond the shuttle they have now. There would need to be a more critical mass of transit out there.

Ms. Nelson: During this workshop we also looked at different options in the corridor that would impact the right of way. It was broken into three parts with the first being from City limits to Summit Street. The middle part is from Summit to Lewis and the last piece is from Lewis to the intersection of JPA. As we start adding elements in, it comes at a cost to the people who live in the corridor in terms of right of way. We wanted everyone to be aware that as we look at these options, there are going to be impacts to different things and we need to make sure what we are doing is right for everyone in the corridor. In the first section, we've included a 6 ft. landscape buffer because we heard from various people that this was the number that you'd need to make sure you have trees that are big enough to provide shade. There are 6 ft. sidewalks, a 5 ft. bike lane, 2 ft. buffer strip, and 11 ft. lanes in each direction. Right now we are mirroring that on both sides but there might be some flexibility as we move forward.

Commissioner Mitchell: What do we lose when we do that?

Mr. Peery: There would be no parking so you aren't losing anything. You are gaining a buffer strip, sidewalks, and bike lanes.

Commissioner Lahendro: The reason they had to go beyond the right of way in the last concept is that there was a 4 ft. gutter and curb. By getting rid of that, they fit within the right of way now.

Mr. Peery: Actually, we are still just outside of the right of way. To do any of this, we are probably going to need right of way all the way down this corridor, but we are trying to do it and not be in the front door of people's houses. We want to impact the property as little as possible.

Chairman Green: Is there money in the Smart Scale budget to obtain right of way?

Mr. Peery: Yes and those numbers are fluid. If we spend a lot on right of way we have to take it out of our construction budget and you may not get all of the corridor niceties that you want. It's our job to manage and balance the right of way. The less we do, the more we have to spend on the gateway streetscape. To add parking, that takes up more right of way.

Ms. Nelson: As we move to the second section in the residential area with no parking or landscape buffer, we are pretty close to the existing right of way. When you add the landscape buffer, we go off the edge. These sections do have the gutter on it so it is a little skewed and it's still a work in progress.

Mr. Peery: We had many other options, but when we saw how high bike lanes were on the priority list, we didn't show the public anything with parking and no bike lanes. Bike lanes and wide sidewalks were on every option, so it came down to parking and the landscape buffer.

Mr. Palmer: In this section would you be able to keep any of what has been done in front of the fire house? It's a fairly new landscape.

Ms. Nelson: Their sidewalk is actually further back than our current proposed sidewalk so we are hoping to preserve that and not touch their storm water solution.

Commissioner Solla-Yates: There was public feedback about safe speeds in the area. Can you look at a 25 mph speed limit?

Mr. Peery: We've been asked that by PLACE and the speed limits are set by City Council for the streets. Right now it is not our project scope to visit the speed limit in the corridor. In the speed study we did, we found that vehicles off peak are traveling a little bit below the speed limit.

Ms. Nelson: Then we came up with a section from Summit to Lewis that looks very similar to the last section with the same dimensions everywhere. The difference is we are easing up the slopes as we get off of the roadway to ensure no one has a sharp hill leading into their property. We're going to work with them as we move forward and possibly use it as right of way negotiations.

Commissioner Lahendro: All of the bike lanes include a 2 ft. buffer. Isn't that something that is nice to have, but not an essential? We have plenty of bike lanes in the City that do not have 2 ft. buffers, so when you are making the decision between that and a landscape buffer, that's a choice to be made.

Mr. Peery: Right now our plans seem to be fitting. Whether or not we have the 2 ft. buffer or not we are outside the existing right of way anyway. We are trying to make it work with what everyone wants. In our minds, the buffer for the bike lanes would go before the buffer for landscaping based on the hierarchy of the comments we've received, paired with the fact that this project is supposed to be a streetscape project and a gateway.

Mr. Palmer: Everything I've heard recently from Amanda Poncy is that the buffers are nonnegotiable in a lot of projects.

Commissioner Lahendro: I never agreed to that in our Steering Committee. We never as a body voted to make a recommendation. It was always a conversation and when you have unlimited right of way, why would you have to make a choice?

Mr. Peery: The goal is to never have a vote with the Steering Committee. We process what we hear and try to give everyone their desires from the Steering Committee to the public. There will be compromises as we move forward but we want to have as few of them as possible.

Ms. Nelson: We also want to have another Steering Committee meeting after we've drilled down the concepts further and have another discussion.

Chairman Green: Is that 2 ft. buffer strip an industry standard or could it go down some?

Mr. Palmer: It is unclear if it is a recommendation or a necessity.

Mr. Peery: A 5 ft. bike lane is recommended when we have the curb next to the bike lane. If there is a gutter pan it can get into the 4 ft. area because the pedal isn't hitting directly into a curb. People compromise when doing retrofits, but on a rebuild like this we would strive to get the 5 ft. because it's recommended.

Ms. Nelson: For the buffer strip, we looked at City standards, VDOT standards and a few others and generally we found that the minimum one they recommended was 2 ft. That isn't to say we can't deviate from that, but that is where we are currently pulling our information from right now.

Commissioner Lahendro: To be clear, I will be advocating for tree buffers because not only do they look pretty, but they have impacts on how people drive on that street. It slows down traffic and it makes for a more pleasant experience to walk. It is more than a pretty landscape.

Commissioner Solla-Yates: Is there an engineering reason we can't flip the landscape buffers and the bike lanes and kill the buffer strips?

Ms. Nelson: The fire access management has said they want that extra room to maneuver their vehicles. If you have the landscape buffer there it prohibits them from having that flexibility that this concept does. The last corridor from Lewis Street to Jefferson Park Avenue is where we really get pinched with the existing right of way. Anything we had is pretty much going to be going one way or the other, or a combination of both. We have 6 ft. sidewalks and the curb, a 10 ft. turn lane going down towards the bridge, a 5 ft. bike lane, an 11 ft. lane and turning lane going up towards Maury, and a 12 ft. shared bike lane for this one block only. It is pretty much the same configuration that is currently out there, just with the addition of the bike lane heading towards the east.

Mr. Peery: That bike lane will make a connection to the bike lane on JPA directly across. On the other side coming from JPA, you lose the bike lane in the last block in front of the Fry's Spring Station, so bicycles are already in the street in a shared facility. In order to not take the first gas pump of the station and other damage, we felt that the shared lane could translate into our section for just the first block and get bikes back into the bike lane as soon as we get to Lewis Street.

Commissioner Lahendro: Is there a cross section option that would eliminate the turn lanes?

Mr. Peery: We are looking at the traffic a little more and the queues we see today. We were asked if we could make the turn lanes a little longer at the first Public Meeting, especially the right turn lane, because of the backups at that signal. Our project isn't going to make major intersection improvements

to either the Fontaine light or this signal. We do see some issues with signal timing that we can suggest to VDOT and with the City to make the traffic not queue back quite as far as it does in the morning. It hadn't been our plan to deteriorate the performance of the intersection, but we hear those concerns. After hearing comments from PLACE and those tonight, we are going back and making sure we can't do something a little different at this intersection. We will report back on it, but our gut is that it would be very detrimental to take one of the lanes away that is out there today.

Chairman Green: I don't know how you would work it without a turn lane.

Commissioner Lahendro: In the Steering Committee I thought we talked about having a 5 ft. understory tree buffer on one side of the street to give a little relief.

Mr. Peery: We could look at that but the 5 ft. bike lane would go away and we'd need a shared lane in both directions.

Mr. Palmer: You could look at a shared bike lane sidewalk instead of the bike lane in the street.

Chairman Green: While I don't like it, just that one block doesn't bother me as much.

Mr. Peery: There were comments about this block at the Steering Committee meeting to at least get trees on one side of the street. The other comment was that it is a busy area and if we could do a bang up job for the rest of the corridor it might be the right thing to do to have the bike lane. We will bring options back that show the tradeoffs. We are envisioning 2-3 different concepts for this one block that will be vetted with the Steering Committee.

Commissioner Solla-Yates: The East High streetscape did a wonderful job looking at left turn controls crossing the corridor and reducing curb cuts overall and I encourage you to consider that.

Mr. Peery: We would love to reduce the curb cuts and how we get pedestrians across the street will play into how we control speed. JPA is the only place where we see a need for any turn lanes at all. The rest of the corridor will be just like it is today with a two-way street.

Ms. Nelson: Regarding the Comprehensive Plan consistency, we used the 2013 plan since the 2018 plan is still in draft. For economic development we concentrated on creating a sense of place and encouraging mixed use, as well as regional cooperation. In community facilities, we are working with the fire department and emergency rescue. As for utility infrastructure, we are planning on maintaining existing services to everyone. We may have to move a few utilities with minimal impacts, but we aren't at that level yet. It is not in our budget at this time to bury the utilities. Additionally, we are working on connecting trails and access to parks and recreation. As for economic sustainability, we are engaging the businesses as best we can and encouraging them to participate and help us so we can help them. For the environment, we are looking into different green infrastructure practices that we can use for storm water management. We aren't at that phase yet, but it is in our minds to make the best choices we can for that. Being a roadway plan, transportation is where we hit most of the Comprehensive Plan. We are trying to follow the complete streets by putting in bike lanes, street trees within the buffers, providing safe crossing alternatives, and making sure we are using ADA throughout the corridor. We are also using land use and community design to encourage people to walk and bike in the area. We also have infrastructure funding that is fully funded through Smart Scale. As for historic preservation and urban design, we recognize that the neighborhood has a historic component to it and we are being cognizant of that. We have identified cultural and historic resources in the area and will hopefully not have any impacts to them. We have a comprehensive approach in consulting zoning maps and talking with Public

Works and Utilities to come together and make sure we are all in agreement. This is a primary entrance corridor into the City and we are making an effort to have a sense of place. We are going to refine the concepts based on the information we've received so far and we will be taking them to a Steering Committee meeting late this summer/early fall.

Commissioner Mitchell: We've given a lot of thought about getting folks up and down the street, but we haven't seen much thought given to getting people across the street. We should start thinking about that. During the first Steering Committee meeting we talked about all of the pedestrian accidents that have happened and it seems higher than we would have expected. Those accidents happen when people are trying to get across the street, not up and down the streets.

Commissioner Lahendro: There are a number of Comprehensive Plan objectives that are not listed that support trees. Under urban environmental sustainability, it says to "protect, increase, and provide an interconnected system of green space and buffers that support habitat for wildlife". In 1.6 it says to "include trees as practical in all City and priority streetscape plans." In Chapter 7, it says to encourage retaining and replenishing shade trees particularly large trees where possible in all neighborhoods", as well as "strive to make the City more walkable." There are additional objectives that can be cited for supporting the inclusion of trees.

Mr. Peery: We will make sure to highlight those in the future. With a corridor like this we would love to have a boulevard of trees, but there are a lot of driveways and curb openings that will interfere with having trees every X number of feet. It is going to be a challenge for us.

Commissioner Lahendro: The existing utility lines are going to be fighting against getting trees in here, especially canopy trees on the north side because they aren't going underground. There are a lot of hurdles that need to be jumped, but I will be pushing for trees every step of the way.

Mr. Palmer: Working on the crossings would be an important next step, especially from the UVA perspective with the Summit/Mimosa crossing. There are a fair number of students who live in the Jefferson Park neighborhood on the south side.

Mr. Peery: We've seen a couple of people leave the UVA bus stop and come across, even in the evening because the bus stop is right up the hill.

2. Public Comment

Jess Wenger: There were a lot of people at the Steering Committee meetings concerned about the bike lanes but they didn't allow a lot of opportunity for disagreement or have contrary opinions about the way the exercise was laid out. As someone who does bike, buffers are wonderful but I could do without them as long as I have a 5 ft. bike lane. I agree with the comments about transit needs. Although there isn't a huge usage of transit currently, it's because the infrastructure doesn't exist. People constantly say that they couldn't get to Fontaine via bike so they walked. There is a transit need out there and we need to be cognizant of it as we're designing because there will be an increasing transit need to get out there in the future. As for the turn lanes, if you try to take away the right turn lane into Fry's Springs the entire neighborhood association will fight you on that one. The congestion is fairly constant and it would create a traffic nightmare if they were taken away. If we can get nice trees and beautification on the rest of the corridor, I'm willing to let the last block go.

Adjournment: 6:30 pm.