PLACE Design Task Force Minutes
March 14, 2019 - 12:00- 2:00 p.m.
Neighborhood Development Services
Conference Room, 2nd Floor City Hall

Members Present: Mike Stoneking, Lena Seville, Clarence Green, Mark Rylander, Serena Gruia, Chris Henry, Rachel Lloyd, Andrew Mondeschein, and Rory Stolzenberg

Staff Present: Carrie Rainey, Kari Spitler, Alex Ikefuna, Kyle Kling, and Jeff Werner

CALL TO ORDER
Chairman Stoneking called the PLACE Design Task Force Meeting to order at 12:05 p.m.

1. **MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC (5 minutes)**
None.

2. **FONTAINE AVENUE STREETSCAPE PROJECT PRESENTATION (50 minutes)**

Kyle Kling: Owen Peery and Amy Nelson with RK&K are here to discuss the updates and future plans for the Fontaine Avenue Streetscape project. So far there have been two steering committee meetings and one public workshop and we are now entering the concept development phase.

Owen Peery: This is a Smart Scale project and the funding came from VDOT. It begins at the West end City limits, which is just shy of the intersection at Fontaine, and it ends at the intersection at JPA at the East end. This corridor is a little less than a mile, but it is a major entryway into Charlottesville. The goal is to improve access and multimodal connections to existing bikeways. Right now it is difficult to walk the corridor, so we want to open it up and make it friendlier for all users.

Chris Henry: Why didn't the study go down to the intersection at 64? Was there an attempted collaboration with the County to make that happen?

Owen Peery: The County Engineer is on the steering committee and wants to find a way to tie it in. It was a City-only application so it can't extend beyond limits, but there may be a possibility to attach County funds to it. The total proposed project funding $11,700,000 and the project is totally funded through Smart Scale. Right now we are in the conceptual development phase and from spring 2019 – fall 2019 we hope to have concepts to put into plan. Fall 2019 – winter 2019 will be the design development phase, and clearing the right-of-way and doing utility relocation is slated for 2020. The utilities are not going to be undergrounded at this time, as it is not in the budget. The final design is planned for winter 2020 – fall 2021, followed by advertisement and bidding. Lastly, the construction phase is slated for winter of 2021. In terms of multi-modal transportation, there are about 13,000 vehicles per day and the bicycle trend gets heavier as you move towards JPA. There is on-street parking in the middle of the project that is 100% utilized from 7am-5pm, but the businesses don't benefit from this parking and they don't seem to be used as neighborhood commercial parking. In fact, trying to find a parking spot at noon for one of the restaurants that doesn't have ample parking is nearly impossible.

Mark Rylander: Is there any demand for commuter bicycle or pedestrian traffic to the Fontaine Research Park? How many people bike to that facility? Is there another way to get to Fontaine like a bike path or side street?

Owen Peery: Notes that it is undetermined how many people go there and there aren't any other ways to get there. There is a long range plan to create something in the future that would cut under the railroad tracks, but that is a long ways away from happening. There are 3 UVA members on the steering committee that can provide good feedback on how the facility will evolve over time.

Lena Seville: Parking is very tight in the area. Are there any alternatives for the parking issues? Could there be metered parking or create a two hour parking limit?

Owen Peery: The steering committee brought up several issues in the area and the parking seems to be intertwined with other things going on in this corridor. Amy will elaborate on the feedback that was collected from the public workshop for how to resolve the parking issues.

Amy Nelson: The public workshop was held at the Forest Service office and had about 35 attendees. They had the option to pick their favorite aesthetic for several different scenarios. Overall, the feedback was that people wanted safe pedestrian crossings at side streets, to add/widen the sidewalks, provide more green space, preserve trees, and have safe routes for bicycles. They liked having a buffer strip to provide protection on the sidewalk and there was a group of people who advocated for less parking.

Rory Stolzenberg: The neighborhood probably thinks that students park there and they don't like that.

Owen Nelson: This could be the case, but there are also a lot of UVA employees that might park there as well.

Mike Stoneking: Was the speed limit of the road discussed when conversations about bicycle accommodations came up?

Owen Peery: There were questions about it, but we do not have plans to change the speed limit. It is currently 35 mph. We've been asked about the speed limit and we'll do some speed monitoring to ascertain if there is a problem or not by using tubes to get an all-day count. Without changing the speed, the design should change the look of the road and how it feels driving on the street. With the architects on the team, we hope to give people a sense of speed reduction through traffic calming measures rather than posting a speed. Ultimately, people will drive the road the way it feels rather than what the actual speed limit is.

Rory Stolzenberg: That is true, but the only difference is that you're going to design it for 10 mph less if you go into it with the assumption that the speed limit will be even lower.

Owen Peery: Today's road out there doesn't meet the speed limit. It is insufficient in sight distance out of the side roads and in the vertical profile of the road. An insufficient roadway, no matter the speed, is not holding them back.

Mike Stoneking: Let's say you promote the edge friction maneuvers to subconsciously reduce speed. When you do the speed test, can you prototype the narrower conditions? In other words, can you test it as is and then with curb stops that narrow the traffic lane by 2 feet?

Owen Peery: We want to leave that chapter open until we actually get out there and test it to see if it's an issue.

Chris Henry: In any scenario, we aren't planning to change the speed at all thought, right?

Alex Ikefuna: If there is a need for speed limit reduction, the City's traffic engineer has to do a study and if it warrants a change it would go to City Council. It's not part of this project so we can't do one as part of it.

Mike Stoneking: It seems like the binary choice is whether the improvement is about getting everyone over to 250 at rush hour or if it is to create a walkable community between Fontaine and Durty Nelly's.

Owen Peery: From what we've seen it would be the latter. This project might improve the timing and how the two signals interact with each other at the peak periods, but it's not meant to increase the JPA intersection's number of lanes in order to reduce the delay. There will still be delay on this corridor at peak hour after the project is done, but the goal is to make it safer for pedestrians and for it to be better protected. There is no money to fix the JPA/Fontaine intersection or the Fontaine Research Park, other than looking at signal timing and providing suggestions to Albemarle County and VDOT for better solutions.

Rory Stolzenberg: Is there room for pedestrian improvements at the JPA intersection?

Owen Peery: Yes, we will look to see if there is anything we can do, but we just won't add more vehicle lanes.

Lena Seville. Notes that there are 6 options for bicycles, but there wasn't a board that asked what pedestrians want their space to look like. If you do another workshop it would be great to see something for pedestrians too.

Owen Peery: That's correct and it wasn't done on purpose. Some pedestrian facilities are blended with the buffers board. It is simply meant to spur conversation and there are other comments that are received as well, all which go to the steering committee where they do similar exercises.

Amy Nelson: Both boards at the public meeting had areas to add feedback, as well as the online form. Another activity involved allowing people to state what they liked and disliked about the corridor. Most commonly, people want safe pedestrian crossings at the side streets, to add/widen sidewalks, add more greenspace, preserve trees, and provide routes that are safe for bicycles. 1/3 of the attendees were residents on the corridor and there were many that were property owners. There was no overwhelming majority of people that attended.

Rory Stolzenberg: How many UVA students were at the meeting?

Amy Nelson: There weren't any students, although there was an effort to invite them to the meeting.

Kyle Kling: We did extensive outreach to UVA with the steering committee members and the office of communications, but we didn't get any response. We worked through the contacts at the Research Park, Office of the Architects contacts, and UVA transportation. It isn't feasible to send out an email to all students.

Rory Stolzenberg: This is about community engagement and we can't give up on the students because it's difficult to email them. There is a residential college nearby, were they contacted? The large graduate student and faculty housing complex could also be contacted.

Kyle Kling: We sent direct mailings to every property within 500 ft. of the corridor.

Lena Seville: Meeting descriptions are often not described to the average person. It's usually about what we are doing rather than why it's important. They should be described in a way so it's an educational opportunity to be involved in a community project.

Rachel Lloyd: Having done a lot of work at UVA with students, they are a very fickle population. It isn't necessarily bad that we get such different ideas from year to year and we should still engage them, but sometimes their engagement can shape a project and then a year later the direction can change 180 degrees.

Owen Peery: We have an opportunity to interact with UVA in April where we can set up a kiosk at a campus event, and there is another public outreach opportunity is planned in April a few days after the event. We also interacted with Mr. Mondeschein's class last semester and their ideas have been studied.

Amy Nelson: The comment form responses showed that 42% didn't travel by bike through the corridor, 32% used a bike on a weekly basis, and 19% on a monthly basis. As for local transit, 1/3 did not use it at all, 1/3 used it on a monthly basis, 10% weekly, and 22% once a year. The existing transit conditions were the most acceptable, followed by parking, bikes, and pedestrian accommodations coming in last. The feedback was that biking is dangerous and on-street parking isn't being used as a neighborhood benefit. Site distances were also an issue.

Rory Stolzenberg: The implication is that students are not part of the neighborhood, which is offensive. Notes that he questions the motives of those who say they want less parking. However, it's still a good idea to have less parking.

Rachel Lloyd: Notes that she took it to mean that people were driving in from town, parking and going to work. They don't live there, but they just park there during the day. They aren't discounting students as neighbors.

Owen Peery: The parking is way less utilized at night, which means that it's not necessarily people that live in those houses, but rather that they are commuter students or employees at the school.

Amy Nelson: As for future conditions, they want to see better sidewalks and crosswalks, safer bike lanes, and reduced vehicular speeds and traffic congestion. Bus stops, sense of place, trail connections, and providing additional parking were less important on the list. Pedestrians want to see safe crossings at Piedmont, Appletree and Mimosa. Other recommendations include to follow the Streets at Work guidelines, include protected bike lanes, consider how to best utilize the paper alleys, preserve trees, and include green infrastructure. At future meetings they want to see coordination with the County to include the Fontaine Research Park and the Route 29 ramps, to know if UVA is contributing to the solution, if environmental assessments will be completed, and to see a variety of different sections on the street for the production of sections.

Owen Peery: Notes that environmental assessments will be completed over the summer and will be in a more complete phase by fall. At the steering committee meeting, the goals were to provide safety for all users, alleviate congestion, and create a sense of place. There may be some opportunity for the paper streets and access management, and possibly with storm water management. In general, we heard that we need to account for trash and deliveries, and that on-street parking is not a priority by the businesses or residents. People on the corridor want to see 6 ft. sidewalks with both sides buffered, lighting, 11 ft. lanes, and bike lanes with a buffer. We are envisioning a painted stripe buffer rather than physical barriers due to safety concerns by fire and rescue.

Mike Stoneking: That would be a 19 ft. travel way in one direction. That doesn't sound like it would work well with maintaining a slower speed. The 3 ft. piece between the car and the bike might be better served as a 12 in. white stripe or rumble strips.

Owen Peery: There are visual things we can do along the corridor to help, but rumble strips would be very loud in this corridor. We could try to do something a little smaller and provide that space to other users.

Chris Henry: Why not combine the bike lane and sidewalk to create a shared use path that connects to the Rivanna trail?

Owen Peery: We've received feedback from commuters that the bicyclists would rather be in the street. This is a more rugged biking area.

Rachel Lloyd: As a pedestrian, multiuse trails are not ideal for this situation because bicyclists want to go faster without having to weave in and out between pedestrians.

Mike Stoneking: In the future, can we do a study to determine why people don't want more parking and determine how much of it involves rejection of the students?

Owen Peery: In future meetings we'll show a visual of what the road will look like with no parking, parking on one side, etc. and determine who needs it, who uses it, and the benefits it has.

Kyle Kling: There are about 25 spaces and all the houses in that stretch have dedicated off-street parking.

Andrew Mondeschein: Notes that UVA's goal is to have a massive parking lot at Fontaine and have a major transit system operating from Fontaine to inner UVA.

Lena Seville: We want to be sure to provide parking that is being used as much as possible and not put it onto these redevelopment sites.

Owen Peery: There's also a UVA facility at the corner of JPA with an unused parking garage as part of that site.

Mike Stoneking: There are a lot of advantages to have on-street civic parallel parking instead of surface lots. It creates a more public use of the thruway, creates a relationship between consumer and business, and it's a great buffer strip. It may not be the answer here because of the narrowness of the choices, but it's worth figuring out why people don't want it first. Designers have a responsibility to eclipse the input that is given and think more grandly about the best solutions.

Lena Seville: It's surprising to see 3 ft. buffer lanes for the bikes without parking because they are usually needed when there is parking.

Owen Peery: Some landlords are decoupling parking from rent, so some of the parking could be a result of that.

Rory Stolzenberg: The Research Park is more suburban, whereas despite its current form, this corner is envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan as moving towards a real neighborhood center.

Amy Nelson: The next steering committee meeting is planned for March 25 and the 2nd public workshop is scheduled for April 18 at the Fontaine Ave fire station at 5:30 pm. In the meantime, we are continuing to work on the conceptual design and will be presenting that soon.

Owen Peery: Right now there are three segments on this project and not one answer will fit the whole job.

Andrew Mondeschein: The problem is this project has Smart Scale funding and a transportation project that has nothing to do with land use. Until we have a small area plan at the same time as a streetscape project, nothing will ever be satisfying.

3. **LONG RANGE PLANNING POSITION DISCUSSION (30 minutes)**

Mike Stoneking: PLACE has written and endorsed many memos for the Planning Commission and the City Manager's office in the past two years to design the Long Range Planning position. City Council voted to approve it in February and all the PLACE memos were sent in, which included a draft job description. Councilor Walker sent a memo to Mike Murphy suggesting that our involvement was inappropriate and casted us in a light of trying to ensure that policies are favorable to the development community. However, PLACE has done a good job of not being allegiant to one factor or element of making buildings and places. It was an inaccurate characterization for which both he and Rachel Lloyd responded to the comment, but have not heard back. If we still collectively feel that the position is important and the goal is to do a certain thing with urban design and place making, maybe we can reiterate that. What can we do as this decision is being made to ensure success?

Chris Henry: What is the status of the position?

Mike Stoneking: Mike Murphy is currently writing the job description to likely be hired this year after a City Manager is selected. There is going to be pressure to make this position solve everything and be moved to an umbrella position to take on greater challenges like equity and community engagement. These are huge problems, but our recommendation was for it to be more in the form making and urban design category. It would be a shame to have this position re-described because then we would still need the original position.

Serena Gruia: There seems to be a lack of regard for this committee and the expertise and capacity that we can offer. The way people view this committee is a stumbling block to any recommendations that we can make.

Chris Henry: It was Kathy Galvin's idea to start the PLACE task force and it was endorsed by all of the Councilors at the time. It was motivated because there wasn't any planning happening inside City Hall.

Rachel Lloyd: If this position is filled, PLACE could theoretically go away.

Lena Seville: There were councilors who felt that PLACE was being involved with a lot of design decisions and Council was being presented with final decisions. They felt like they weren't as involved with the process as they'd like to have been.

Mark Rylander: The name "PLACE" even undermines the effort to make this a practical, code auditing position, which is the notion that the zoning rewrite provides a guide that resolves zoning issues to the extent that SUPs are anomalies. There's support at the Council level that the public process should always be a grassroots citizen fight over whatever the project is. There are two ways that development is guided – to have it so well defined through upfront citizen engagement that it's already agreed upon to allow things to get done, or to fight it tooth and nail to defeat it because they don't care what the zoning is anyway. The public political drift is towards wide open, constant opposition to development.

Mike Stoneking: That is why we were advocating for leadership in the visioning quadrant.

Rachel Lloyd: It's also about the way we make decisions about the built environment, which has been lacking.

Lena Seville: There are a lot of people that feel like they are left out of the process and the confrontational part is the only way for them to be involved. Some of the design decisions are being made by those in the field of design, but it is subjective. You don't have to be a professional to participate on that level and if you don't know the vocabulary your opinion isn't necessarily heard in the same way that a professional's might be. We need a way to have the community involved and that is what this position is designed to do.

Mark Rylander: Notes that he doesn't oppose that view, but at some point the talking has to come to an end.

Alex Ikefuna: A citizen engagement has to have a beginning and end. If it starts, at what point does it end so we can make a decision and move on. We currently have an endless community engagement process that costs the City a lot of money. Sometimes you don't get all of the feedback that you want but at what point do you stop so that a decision can be made? Every time you delay, it becomes a costly proposal for everyone.

Rachel Lloyd: Part of the intent was to create predictability in the system so citizens can provide input for the developers, which reduces the amount of arguing. This position is supposed to streamline decision making.

Serena Gruia: People are not connected to the Comprehensive Plan and don't see it as a visioning document or a guiding light for the City. We spend a lot of money on community engagement but we aren't getting to a holistic view of what the community wants and we don't put them together in a systemic way. We need a community envisioning process to get to an understanding that developers and planners can use as a reflection of what people want. The Comprehensive Planning process is useful but isn't reflective of our community.

Lena Seville: Good community engagement is not in the timeline. The problem is that the plan keeps going whether there was sufficient community engagement or not.

Mike Stoneking: If we communicated better within this group of 50,000 it would be a bigger, permanently ongoing conversation where we have a common shared understanding and value system. The Comprehensive Plan chapter on community engagement needs to be huge.

Rachel Lloyd: You can have a great engagement process but if Council decides to blow through it, it's all for nothing. Community engagement is a multi-step process from the very beginning all the way to a Council vote.

Jeff Werner: Notes that his previous job involved community engagement and achieving 100% participation is nonexistent. There are many good ideas out there and the question is about how to implement them. PLACE provides a catalyst for thought and a crystallization of things that is critical.

Mike Stoneking: That's why we want a leadership position that takes the City on a journey to get things done so it doesn't fall to staff to do when they have time for it. We have a City Manager about to be hired, along with a Long Range Planner at some point. How do we help guide the correct choice in that?

Rachel Lloyd: We should be on an interview committee.

Chris Henry: We could request for Mike Murphy to come to a PLACE meeting or we could meet with him.

Mark Rylander: Leadership vs. long range planning suggest two different things. Hopefully the public understands that this person will be imminently practical, imbedded in the City, and here for the long hall.

Rachel Lloyd: This person will likely need staff and hopefully they will have the staff and budget that they need.

Rory Stolzenberg: Is NDS still buying a new content management system?

Alex Ikefuna: Yes, the business process mapping software, which has both internal and external software. The external software will be for developers and the public to observe the review process.

Chris Henry: it's great to make the process more efficient, but we're just making a flawed process more efficient.

Alex Ikefuna: We have the business process mapping first so you can see everything from intake to permit. The project's design isn't meant to address what developers have to comply with; that would need to be addressed with a zoning ordinance rewrite. Encourages PLACE members to participate in the zoning rewrite process.

Rory Stolzenberg: It is opaque for a random member of the public to know what's going on. Part of the software should have an easy way to view the process, photos of the development, etc.

Serena Gruia: The CCDC used to have a public space where people could come review the overview of different projects, which was direct community engagement for people.

Mike Stoneking: This position should be all about creating things like that.

3. **MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC (5 minutes)**

Cliff Fox: It is a pity that the City is not taking the accountability for doing its own affordable housing strategy and its own zoning ordinance because that's where you get the accountability and longevity. The Council doesn't want accountability.