

PLACE Design Task Force Minutes
July 18, 2019 - 12:00- 2:00 p.m.
Neighborhood Development Services
Conference Room, 2nd Floor City Hall

Members Present: Mike Stoneking, Navarre Bartz, Mark Rylander, Andrea Trimble, and Emily Wright

Staff Present: Carrie Rainey, Alex Ikefuna, Jeff Werner, Kyle Kling, Brenda Kelley, Chris Gensic, and Rick Siebert

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Stoneking called the PLACE Design Task Force Meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

1. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC (5 minutes)

None.

2. FONTAINE AVENUE STREETScape PRESENTATION (50 minutes)

Owen Peery: We had conversations about speed at our last meeting with PLACE and we collected data to show you today. We also had another public workshop in June and would like to share feedback we received from that. The project map starts at the City limit near Fontaine Research Park and goes to JPA.

Amy Nelson: For reference, the Fry's Springs neighborhood is south of the railroad tracks and JPA neighborhood is north of the tracks. The Fontaine Research Park is on the west side of the project and the JPA intersection is towards the east. The project is fully funded through Smart Scale and right now we are working in the conceptual preliminary design phase. We are preparing the 30% completion plans to be shared sometime late summer/early fall. We are aiming for advertising and bidding to happen in fall of 2021 with the construction phase to begin in the winter of 2021. Since we last met with PLACE, we had a 3rd Steering Committee meeting, a 2nd Public Open House, a Technical Committee Meeting, and on Tuesday we will join the Planning Commission during a work session.

Owen Peery: Regarding the speed data, 35 mph is the posted speed in the area. We found that the eastbound speed was 28 mph and westbound was 27 mph. We usually see a spike in the off-peak hours that indicates a speed problem on the corridor, but we don't see that here. They do shift slightly higher, but we are still at or below 35 mph. Some of that may be contributed by the nature of the roadway, the vertical curves, lack of site distance, number of driveways and impediments, etc.

Mike Stoneking: Didn't we want to look into that to decide whether or not removing parallel parking would increase the tendency to drive faster?

Owen Peery: It came up in the discussion, but what came up more was that the speed should be reduced. City staff stated that would take an act by City Council and a speed study to change and that it wasn't in the scope of this project. We wanted to first see if we had a problem or not. It primarily came up as a speed problem on the corridor, which we aren't seeing.

Mike Stoneking: We don't have a speeding problem in the sense that people are going over the posted limit, but that doesn't answer the question of whether the posted limit is too high. This project won't be answering that question either.

Amy Nelson: PLACE stated that there should be more outreach to different groups and we stepped that up for the next Public Meeting in April. We sent out flyers to about 150 businesses on the corridor and 200 flyers to UVA housing dormitories in areas that are close to the project, bus advertisements on UVA buses, had a message board in front of the fire station for about a week and a half, direct mailings, email, and social media posts to make people aware of the meeting. We made the notices more global friendly to the general population. About 43 people showed up, which is about 8-10 more than last time. Unfortunately no UVA students attended. Of the people that attended, many had a primary residence in the area or were rental property owners. There were also several employees, 14 of which were UVA employees, and some of the businesses came as well. We asked these people how they use the corridor and found that most people were crossing Fontaine at least once a week and the overwhelming majority were not using the on-street parking or public transit at all. There is no stop directly in the area, which could impact that number. We asked the importance of different elements we're hoping to incorporate into the project and people felt that bike lanes were extremely important, as well as emergency vehicle access and wider sidewalks. Of all the options, they felt that on-street parking was the least important. From this, we started evolving the preliminary concepts and design development. During this workshop we also looked at different options in the corridor that would impact the right of way. In the section from City limits to Summit Street, we gave them the option to have a landscape buffer or not. The buffer was 67 ft., which is a little bit of right of way that would be required. Without it, it could be built within the right of way, but you wouldn't have the tree buffer that was important to many people.

Mark Rylander: Does the addition of trees require right of way acquisition? Why were the trees carrying that burden as opposed to anything else that takes up width?

Amy Nelson: That's correct. In order to get significant street trees that provide shade, you need the 6 ft. buffer zone for each, which is a fairly significant amount.

Mike Stoneking: Isn't the 2 ft. buffer quite big for 35 mph?

Owen Peery: That is the standard that we found. There are several streets in Charlottesville that don't have a buffer at all. It wasn't really a battle of trees vs. buffers. It was more about what was important to them and trying to show the public what the impacts are. We are probably going to need right of way all the way through this project to get most of the things we want on the corridor.

Navarre Bartz: How much space would you need if you move the tree buffer between traffic and bikes and pedestrians?

Amy Nelson: The reason we aren't really exploring that is to maintain the emergency vehicle access. Since the Public Meeting, we took the feedback and evolved the concepts further. We removed the curbed gutter and 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. Temporary easements will be needed as well, which is something to consider.

Mike Stoneking: It's great that you took out the curbed gutter. The curb to curb dimension will be a little smaller, which will convince cars to be a little slower. It also keeps the 2 ft. buffer for the bikes, which is a big win.

Amy Nelson: The second section is from Summit to Lewis. We presented an option with no landscape buffer or parking, one with landscaping and no parking, and one that gave the landscaping buffer and parking. When you add these elements, you need right of way either significantly in one direction or a little in both directions. The section we evolved is similar to the last one with the introduction of a 6 ft. landscape buffer on both sides, which

was very important to the Tree Commission. We chose 6 ft. because it was big enough to provide shade for everyone. One difference here is we have variable slopes on the two sides because we will be tying into existing driveways and lawns so we want to make sure we don't do something that is detrimental to their property.

Owen Nelson: This is the section of the street today that has on-street parking and we've heard from the Steering Committee and the public that it isn't as important as the other issues. There have been a few people who are vocal about absolutely needing the parking, but they have been in the minority of what we've heard. If we went with parking, something more than just a buffer strip would have to give, but right now we are showing this section without parking. Most of the utilities are in the street today so when we talk about where the buffer is, we are mainly only talking about where the power poles are, which we will be moving anyway.

Mike Stoneking: How frequent are the trees going to be?

Owen Peery: It is undetermined at this time, but keep in mind that we have a lot of entrances and driveways so spacing things in between those things and making sure you can see to pull out of the side streets will be tricky. We will play around with it once we get the street set.

Mike Stoneking: That strip could be a multipurpose area over time if the area becomes urbanized. Perhaps some of the trees would give way to parallel parking and we could compensate that by planting trees on the off section. I won't contest the results of the parallel parking, but the City as a whole underestimates the value because there is no less expensive parking space.

Emily Wright: It seems like the people who would be interested in coming to the meeting are people that want changes like bike lanes and wider sidewalks. People who already have parking probably aren't going to be as compelled to come.

Owen Peery: In the previous meeting we did drill down on who is using the parking by doing some parking studies. Parking was heavily 100% utilized in the daytime and it dropped well down into the 50% area at night. Some days it was even down to 20%. We also saw construction workers leaving their cars and being vanned over to a site. Business owners say they get no business from people parking on the street. Residents say they barely use it, so it appears to be either students or people trying not to pay for parking in pay lots. We were there when it was snowing and there were cars who had clearly not moved in over two weeks that had parked there.

Mark Rylander: It would be interesting to see if the City changed the spaces to two hour spaces if they would sit empty or not.

Owen Peery: There are a lot of blind site lines out there today and you wouldn't have as much on-street parking as there is now when we're done.

Jeff Werner: Does some amount of on-street parking provide a little bit of traffic calming that would keep this from turning into 45 mph?

Owen Peery: I'm sure it would. By removing the parking and having the bike lane, we will have to use other methods to visually make the drivers feel like they aren't comfortable driving fast. We haven't figured out how we do that yet, but there are several options that we can use and we'll bring those options back later.

Mike Stoneking: Since this is going to be an urbanized area, overtime the parking lots will have such great value to be buildings and the surface lots that everyone relies on now will start to disappear, which means we will

want to then put parallel parking in. Can we get the right of way at the dimension to allow parallel parking as far as possible?

Owen Peery: The issue with that is we have to demonstrate a need. To demonstrate eminent domain, we have to have a project need to take private property. It can't be a future idea. It would be difficult to demonstrate that need when we are trying to take people's entire front yards for a future purpose.

Mike Stoneking: It would be a political decision, not an engineering one. The City Council has to decide if these things are important to them.

Amy Nelson: The last piece is from Lewis to the intersection of JPA, which is a more urbanized block. We presented two options, with the landscape buffer and no landscape buffer. When we started laying it out and showing where the right of way was, it pushed into the businesses and everyone agreed that this section isn't the best for street trees. We moved forward with no parking and on-street trees. There are a lot of parking lot entrances and it would be hard to fit the trees in and it would take away parking from several businesses. There were also modifications that we had to fit in like a 10 ft. turn lane going both left and right, a 5 ft. bike lane without a buffer, an 11 ft. through lane, 11 ft. turn lane, a 12 ft. shared lane, and the sidewalk. We've given up a few things to make sure we have a bike lane on one side and keep the turn lanes so traffic flows through the intersection.

Owen Peery: We plan to have the bike lane go across the main intersection and tie into the bike lane on JPA heading towards the City. Without the shared lane, we are probably severely impacting the parking at Dirty Nelly's and taking a gas station pump, which I don't think we have the budget for in this project.

Mike Stoneking: How important is the turn lane on JPA? It makes the crosswalk at the intersection less walkable and the opposite of what we're going for. Perhaps they go that way just because there is a turn lane.

Owen Peery: It's essential. We can recheck it, but we have queues all the way back to 29 today and we won't be able to do too much with the intersection anyway. It is in our scope to look at the pedestrian crossings in the whole intersection and it is on the table. We won't be adding lanes, but we are going to try to help through signal timing.

Mark Rylander: Can the City prohibit left turns out of these businesses? Does anything get affected besides the right of way acquisition in terms of what is allowed for those businesses?

Owen Peery: I don't think a right in, right out is a change in access so I'm not sure that is considered damage but we'd have to check on that. Regarding the design criteria, the City sidewalk width recommendation is 5-6 ft. and we are using 6 ft. We are just using curb rather than curb and gutter in effort to give more priority to bikes and pedestrians. The design speed and posted speed will be 35 mph. There are also other technical things that will be controlling our design as we move forward like site distances. The Technical Committee is okay with us going as steep as 2 to 1 slopes. The steepest terrain we are dealing with is at the City limits and the existing condition is pretty steep. You don't notice it because of the trees and overgrowth but it's a severe drop off. The project goes to the City limits and it doesn't get you to Fontaine, as it's about 200 ft. off. It doesn't make sense to stop our trails and bike lanes in the middle of nowhere. There is someone on the Steering Committee that is County staff and we are working with them, as well as VDOT. We think the right decision is to pretend we are going all the way to Fontaine and we'll figure it out, and we were directed by City staff on this.

Amy Nelson: The next steps are to have a Planning Commission work session next Tuesday. We plan on taking the findings from today and that session to the Steering Committee in the late summer or fall.

Mike Stoneking: This has come a long way and everyone is working hard on this.

3. POLLOCKS BRANCH PRESENTATION (40 minutes)

Brenda Kelley: This project began as a request from VDOT because they were removing an old bridge in the County and asked if the City wanted it. Since we were looking at a pedestrian connection we stated we were very interested in it. However, it was difficult to coordinate it and now we are looking at a new bridge. A lot of the area is Housing Authority property so we also had to coordinate very closely with them. While it isn't an immediate project identified in the SIA plan, it's in the Parks and Recreation plan and connectivity is a key element in the SIA plan so we grasped this project and kept working on it. A community group has been involved in the process with Ridge Street Neighborhood Association members, Rockland Avenue folks, the Housing Authority, residents from South 1st Street, Parks and Rec, Public Works, and Utilities. This project combines pedestrian, bicycle and trail improvements with a neighborhood need, as well as a walkable watershed concept plan with new infrastructure, and a UVA design camp for resident youth. The project is currently budgeted.

Chris Gensic: Because CHRA isn't fully public property, we are working with them on a long range plan. They've allowed us to cut a trail from Elliot Avenue down parallel to the back sides of the 1st Street housing projects. This trail would tie into the cross trail that the bridge would support. The residents of both 6th and South 1st Street have long been walking down this hill and crossing the creek on some stones. We are working with landowners and the long range is that this gets you potentially from the Downtown Mall to the Moore's Creek trail system. As part of this, CHRA will grant a permanent easement for this trail, knowing that the long term redevelopment may then improve it even more to more of our multiuse standards. We are in an in-between zone and the bridge is going to be all set up to accept larger trails in the future. Those trails may not show up in a paved, multiuse fashion for a number of years until we have the redevelopment of South 1st Street, but for now they will be well-built nature trails you can use for public access. The thought is that when the redevelopment is done, the creek valley itself will become City parkland because technically you are trespassing on that property if you aren't a resident of the housing.

Brenda Kelley: Dan Frisbee is part of the walkable watershed part of this and he's using some grant funding to coordinate their project into the whole. He said that as part of the Pollock's Branch walkable watershed concept plan and process, the need for a pedestrian crossing of Pollock's Branch was identified as a high priority by community stakeholders. The bridge, which will be situated at the bottom of Rockland Avenue to the Pollocks Branch Greenway and CRHA South 1st Street property has received funding and is in final design. In concert with the bridge installation, a natural plant community based native landscape installation is being designed by the Center for Urban Habitats. The native landscape installation is designed to cover nearly 15,000 sq. ft. and includes 5 district planting zones, each with a unique set of locally native flora tailored to site-specific conditions. The ecological restoration will also include swales to slow down, filter, absorb, and treat storm water runoff from Rockland Avenue before it enters Pollock's Branch. This zone 2 is the highest priority of the 5 zones and should be completed in conjunction with the bridge construction. Zone 3, the floodplain area, is the next highest priority and could be completed in early 2020. The remaining 3 zones will need additional funding to be realized. The watershed funding will likely be paying for the landscaping. Right now it's about a \$75,000 cost estimate.

Mike Stoneking: How is the Housing Authority viewing the public park nature of some of this?

Brenda Kelley: We've gotten the easements from them now. The easement for the trails changes as the trails may change, so the easement is a moving one. The easements are granted by CRHA and it was approved at a public meeting.

Chris Gensic: Residents have also been helping build the trails. One thing we agree on is greenspace in the stream valley to activate the space and cleaning it up.

Brenda Kelley: There are houses on Rockland and we've done door to door with all the property owners early on. We actually get requests asking when it will be done and why it isn't moving quicker.

Mike Stoneking: Is the bridge bikeable?

Brenda Kelley: It will be, yes.

Chris Gensic: Getting there, Rockland is a paved street and going up the hill would be a dirt surface. I'm not intending to surface them for about 4 years until we determine what the long term will be so we can lock in the final location and grading. They are wide, but they are dirt.

Brenda Kelley: The proposed bridge design is a 50x80 ft. prefabricated black bridge that was picked by the community.

Mike Stoneking: What are the abutments made of?

Chris Gensic: Concrete.

Mark Rylander: The first step of putting in a garden like this is removing the invasive species and funds are limited for invasive removal. What do you do after this is planted in terms of operations? Does Parks and Recreation end up having to make sure it's not quickly overtaken?

Brenda Kelley: There has been a lot of discussion about maintenance and I think the Public Works folks may be looking at volunteer work directed by Center for Urban Habitats for a while to monitor that. It's ongoing.

Chris Gensic: We can't touch it until it's a park and we have hundreds of acres that look just like this that we're working on now.

4. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE/ HOUSING STRATEGY/ ZONING ORDINANCE REWRITE RFP DISCUSSION (20 minutes)

Mike Stoneking: We don't have enough people to discuss this, but we can provide an update for now. They are working on hiring the consultant now to write an affordable housing strategy, complete the code rewrite, and the final chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. We may want to talk about how the affordable housing aspect of the plan is the dominant feature in the RFP and the other two are less emphasized. It takes a lot of time and hard work to get to the finish line and we don't want to disrupt anything, but the Subcommittee was wondering if the RFP could be improved by talking about those two things, emphasizing their importance.

Alex Ikefuna: The RFP is already issued. The emphasis seems to be geared toward the affordable housing strategy. The affordable housing strategy is an element in the Comprehensive Plan and it is designed to inform the housing element. One way to address that is before the agreement is written, we can have itemized items that we want. However, there are other things in addition to what you have there.

Mike Stoneking: At some point we should make those things clear that they are important and point at examples where the work has already been done. We have a form based code written for the SIA and small area plans that are in the works or have been completed. Streets That Work is important and the resolution that called for this RFP talks a lot about walkability and green infrastructure. It would be nice if the agreement could emphasize that those are key points as well. Maybe it's worth saying that we don't mean to imply that the code audit piece of this is simply in service of an affordable housing strategy because it might limit someone's thinking to the R-1 discussion. We have hundreds of other things in the code that need auditing that don't have any relationship to housing and we want all of those done.

Alex Ikefuna: For the community engagement process to be good, effective, and responsive when it comes to the decision-making process, it has to have a beginning, a "how" and "who" to engage, and it has to have an end. The plan doesn't provide me that option because if a developer submits an application to amend the Comprehensive Plan, zoning ordinance, etc. I'd like to provide them a good opportunity to do that and when it gets to the end, there is a decision.

Mike Stoneking: I'm interested to know how holistic the assignment is. You can have community engagement with issues that have nothing to do with housing, buildings, or developers. We will write something up and circulate it so we get more of a majority of PLACE looking at it. Perhaps within a week or so we can share something with you so it fits into your 3 week schedule.

Alex Ikefuna: If you send me something we will review it and see if it will be possible issue some kind of addendum.

5. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC (5 minutes)

None.