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12.02(7): Public Improvements

Introduction

A number of proposed public improvements are included in the redevelopment recommendations presented previously in Section 3, *Project Objectives* of this URP report. These improvements focus on roadways, open space, infrastructure, transportation, parking, and associated improvements intended to support or enhance private redevelopment initiatives or recommendations, as well as enhance the Project Area as a place to live, work and invest. These improvements are described in more detail below.

Roadway Improvements

A number of roadway improvements are proposed. Some are a matter of improving the roadway pavement, but many are being proposed to provide a comprehensive downtown streetscape improvement program to connect the four neighborhoods through “complete street” design solution. Complete streets accommodate multi-modes of transportation, such as vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and public transit. Complete streets also incorporate green infrastructure, pedestrian accommodations, wayfinding signage, smart technology, and other elements to develop a fully integrated transportation network. Specific improvements include reconstructed sidewalks, improved pedestrian crossings which may include bulb-outs to reduce the length to cross the street, traffic calming to reduce speeds of vehicles, street trees, ornamental lighting, and street furniture that will complete an enhancement to the environment and encourage pedestrian and bicycle activities.

The first complete street project is in design currently utilizing City and CDBG funding and is known as the Transportation Connections Corridor. This Corridor will include the connection between the Municipal Node and Transit-Oriented Development Node along Dwight Street.



The streets being recommended for complete streetscape enhancements include:

- Cabot Street from Beech Street to North/South Canal Street,
- Appleton Street from Chestnut to Main Street,
- Dwight Street from Beech to High Street,
- Main Street from Lyman to Cabot Street,
- Maple Street from Cabot to Dwight Street,
- North Canal Street from Bridge Street to Cabot Street,
- South East Street from Sargeant to Cabot Street
- Clemente Street from Sargeant to Cabot Street,
- South Bridge Street from Sargeant to Cabot Street,

Some of these streets are being recommended for enhanced treatments as described as follows.

Dwight Street Transit Connections Corridor: Transportation connections play an important role in planning improvements in the City of Holyoke. A significant number of residents do not have vehicles and therefore rely on public transportation, bicycling and walking for their mode of transportation. With the recent completion of the Intermodal Transportation Center and the near future construction of a passenger rail platform in Holyoke, there is a great need to connect those features. The two features will be connected along Dwight Street from High Street to Main Street, Heritage Street, and Front Street. The City has begun the design of these improvements to the pedestrian and vehicular environment.

Maple Street Green Streets Corridor: The project area includes Maple Street between Hampden Street and Cabot Street, and is anchored by the new Holyoke Transportation Center on one end and the Library on the other. It serves as a public service corridor with the War Memorial facility, Holyoke Health Center adaptive reuse project recently completed, and the future renovated Victory Theater between the two anchors. It connects two nodes of the downtown transportation network that were developed through the community Vision Plan process. This project will support the city, state, and private investments planned in the corridor. This project serves as the connection between the Learning Node and the Municipal Node.

Specific proposed improvements include:

- Pedestrian safety and crossing upgrades (particularly at the intersection of Dwight and Maple Streets);
- Traffic signal upgrades to improve safety for pedestrians and vehicles alike; Bicycle lanes/accommodations;
- Bus shelter improvements;
- Addition of street trees;
- Low Impact Development (LID) improvements that meet Green Streets Designation; and
- Energy-efficient LED traffic and street light conversions.
- Bike accommodations plan to establish the most appropriate areas and methods of accommodations.



The City also would like to make stormwater management improvements to the existing streetscape to be able to qualify for the DOT's Green Streets designation. Holyoke received the Green Communities designation from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in May 2010 by which the City committed to improve the environment and reduce the consumption of energy within the community in compliance with the City's Energy Reduction Plan.

Bicycle Accommodation

Where existing streets are being upgraded, modifications will be made for improved bicycle accommodation. Since the Project Area is in an older urban environment, roadway widths are narrow and thus the ability to add dedicated bicycle lanes is limited. Therefore, in most cases, roadways will be improved to provide bicycle accommodation through the shared use of shared travel lanes indicated by MUTCD Shared Lane Markings, also known as "sharrows". The Shared Lane Markings highlight that travel lanes are to be shared by both vehicles and bicyclists.

Canalwalk Improvements

The Holyoke Canalwalk is multimodal transportation system that is being created along the canals which were built in the late 19th century to divert water from the Connecticut River to provide hydropower to the mills. Today the mills have great architectural interest for both historians and casual strollers which will be interpreted along the Canalwalk network.

The plan for the Canalwalk network includes a wide promenade along the 1st and 2nd Level Canals, and includes decorative paving, lighting, landscaping, railings, and benches to enhance and encourage pedestrian and bicycle activity along the canals to bring life back to the underutilized and sometimes vacant mill district. This URP expands the original Canalwalk Phases to extend the Canalwalk along the lower Second Level and the Third Level Canal also.

Phase I of the Canalwalk project has been completed and has already shown an increase in activity and an interest in economic development in the area. Phase II is in the design process now and its construction is expected in 2013. This URP includes the design and construction of all future Canalwalk phases. The Canalwalk is also a link in the regional Connecticut River Greenway project that will connect the Pioneer Valley along the Connecticut River to provide a recreation and commuter system for alternative transportation such as walking and biking.

Parks

A number of park and open space improvements are being recommended to enhance quality of life elements within downtown. In addition, some of these park improvements will enhance adjacent development proposals. In addition to the Canalwalk improvements described above, some specific park improvements include:

Veterans Park:

- The City will utilize the state's Gateway City Park Program to rehabilitate key park elements. Such improvements will enhance this park as a major open space element within downtown, and also enhance private development plans for more housing on adjacent parcels.

City Hall/Heritage State Park Area:

- The City has plans to demolish the existing parking structure behind City Hall making way for construction of a new smaller parking area and a new park that will abut City Hall and provide space for a potential farmer's market as well as expand Heritage State Park across Heritage Street. This URP has included this project as an action item.

Parking Improvements

The City has plans to improve the Dwight Street parking garage and reconstruct the Suffolk Street parking deck. Both projects will improve the parking supply in the Project Area, supporting existing and future uses. Both projects are included as URP actions. In addition, the URP proposes the development of a parking area along North Canal Street and Water Street to support the revitalization of vacant and underutilized mill buildings in that area.

Infrastructure Improvements

In addition to the improvements described above, a number of general infrastructure improvements have been included in the URP. These include such things as waterline upgrades, the removal of concrete bases along some roadway areas, and stormwater management improvements through the elimination of a combined sewer system in South Holyoke. Some of these costs have been factored into the roadway improvement costs, some are shown as stand-alone costs.

Other proposed infrastructure improvements will require additional study to quantify the extent and cost of the proposed work. For example, many railroad bridges do not provide sufficient clearance for truck movement through the area.

Additional study is needed to determine if the best solution is to increase clearance or implement measures to divert truck traffic through other routes. The URP budget includes funding to study these areas to determine the best solution(s). In addition, some of the bridges that cross the lower Second Level Canal and Third Level Canal have been closed and need to be upgraded or replaced to accommodate vehicular traffic. The City needs to study which bridges should be reopened and then determine the cost of bridge rehabilitation or replacement.