

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING NO. 7

Date: April 18, 2020

Time: 10:00 – 11:45 am

Location: Adobe Connect Virtual Meeting

Project Name: I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST

Attendees

Larenda Baxley, Ferndale
Tina A. Baxley, Ferndale
Gilbert Reeves, Ferndale
Rev. David L. Johnson, Ferndale
Michael S. Halls, Sr., Ferndale
Nathaniel Bryant, Highland Terrace
Jeanaris Bannister, Liberty Park
Carolyn Varner, Liberty Park
Doris Twiggs, Liberty Park
Prayonda Cooper, Joppa Way
Earl Muhammad, Muhammad Mosque
Rick Day, Stantec
Amy Sackaroff, Stantec
LaTonya Derrick, Stantec

Ryan White, Stantec
Hannah Clements, Stantec
Mollie Rhett, Stantec
Joy Riley, SCDOT (Project Manager)
Chad Long, SCDOT
David Kelly, SCDOT
Pamela Foster, FHWA
Yolonda Jordan, FHWA
Horrace Tobin, Community Office
Maxine Smith, Maximum Consulting
Mattese Lecque, Maximum Consulting
Carolyn Lecque, Maximum Consulting
Clay Middleton, Maximum Consulting
Janelle Ellis, Empowerment Strategies

Participant Summary:

Total participants: 28

Ferndale: 5

Highland Terrace: 1

Liberty Park: 3

Russelldale: 0

Adjacent/affected communities/agencies: 1

SCDOT: 3

FHWA: 2

Community Liaisons: 4

Community Office: 1

Stantec: 6

Facilitator: 1

Meeting Summary:

Welcome and Introductions

- Joy (Program Manager) welcomed and thanked the CAC members and participants for adapting to the circumstances and joining the meeting via Adobe Connect
- LaTonya Derrick served as the technical contact throughout the meeting
- Janelle provided overview of Adobe Connect features and logistics
 - Chat room (general and private discussions); chat dialogue will be saved
 - Raise hands

- All participants had access to Adobe Connect, paper copy of CAC Meeting #7 meeting packet, and phone connection
- Review of virtual meeting etiquette
- CAC Meeting #5 and #6 minutes approved
- An overview of the agenda was provided
 - Results from Mitigation Work Session: Review & Discussion
 - Replacement Recreational Facilities Discussion
 - Replacement Housing
 - Outreach Update
 - Summary and Next Steps

Adobe Connect Quick Start Guide:

- An Adobe Connect information page was provided in the CAC #7 meeting packet.
- Participants were advised to contact LaTonya with any technical questions throughout the meeting

Roll Call

Open Mic:

- Open Mic comments and questions were addressed within the results discussions related to the four pillars of the Mitigation Work Session (CAC Meeting #6) including:
 - Community Cohesion
 - Community Enhancement
 - Community Preservation
 - Community Revitalization

Results from Mitigation Work Session: Review and Discussion

Community Cohesion

- Focus Areas: Actions that strengthen neighborhood connections

What role could the community center play in fostering community cohesion?

- Short list of the overarching topics developed by CAC members (as discussed during Meeting #6) regarding community cohesion, which included:
 - Community centers should focus on community children to keep them "off the streets"
 - Development of an equitable schedule for the community center; the center should be used primarily by the community that it was intended to serve
 - Center should be staffed by community residents
 - Community residents should play a significant role in determining the uses of the community center (for example, meetings, programs, and activities that are unique to the community residents)
 - Crime prevention through environmental design
 - Landscaping and establishing common areas for community members to safely congregate and socialize

Community Enhancement

- Focus Areas: Community center and recreational facility replacement

What type of amenities could be incorporated into the design of the community center?

- Short list of the overarching topics developed by CAC members (as discussed during Meeting #6) regarding community enhancement, which included:
 - Ensuring walkability to the community center
 - Access to the community center for bike riders and pedestrians, particularly with regards to the safety of community children
 - Repairing uneven sidewalks or installing sidewalks where they do not currently exist, but are needed
 - Limitations associated with having one versus two community centers: Challenges associated with having two facilities include limited available land and potentially limited staffing
 - CAC members do not want the center to have a "box design" but rather a broad-scale, multi-use facility that will meet the needs of a diverse community; forward-thinking

Community Preservation

- Focus Areas: Infrastructure needs

What are the barriers related to biking and walking, sidewalk needs, streetlights, stormwater management, and speeding deterrents on streets with a high frequency of speeding?

- List of the overarching topics developed by CAC members (as discussed during Meeting #6) regarding community preservation, which included:
 - All feedback from the mitigation workshop community preservation discussion (CAC Meeting #6) was captured and put into the online GIS Viewer by topic and location
 - All information uploaded in the GIS Viewer will be used in communications with local governments
 - CAC members were encouraged to access the GIS Viewer to add comments related to infrastructure needs, directly
 - Instructions to add comments can be found on page 17 of CAC Meeting #7 packet
 - Please be certain to add your name to the comments so the project team can follow up as items are being addressed, appropriately
 - Ryan White sent an email on April 15th titled "I-526 Low Country Corridor (LCC) - West: Community Advisory Council Meeting #7 - Material Distribution" in which he provided the link, username, and password for access to the online GIS Viewer
- Concerns about speeding
 - Possible installation of speeding deterrents (such as speed humps)
- Need for covered bus shelters
- Resources that may make aging in place more feasible, including (but, not limited to)
 - Home repairs
 - Food security
 - Access to affordable transportation

Community Revitalization

- Focus Areas: Replacement housing and employment/economic opportunities

What are the top priorities for revitalization in your neighborhoods? What types of barriers need to be overcome to achieve revitalization without causing gentrification?

- List of the overarching topics developed by CAC members (as discussed during Meeting #6) regarding community revitalization, which included:
 - Improving neighborhood aesthetics (appearance/beautification)
 - Encouraging small businesses that reflect community values
 - Ensuring that mitigation does not foster gentrification
 - Incorporating local history in the community center
 - CAC serving as the advisory entity that will advocate on behalf of the whole community (including issues that affect individual neighborhoods)
- CAC Member Feedback
 - Clarification
 - Regarding "type of replacement housing," modular homes are acceptable in any neighborhood; manufactured homes are not preferred.
 - For the record, "modular" should be replaced with "manufactured" as a type of replacement housing that is not preferred by the CAC

Replacement Recreational Facilities Discussion

- SCDOT is diligently looking for potential replacement locations; seeking vacant or underdeveloped properties; mapped identified locations
- CAC members were asked to keep in mind the question of having a single larger community center versus two smaller centers as the group proceeded through the discussion
- The project team has initiated contact with some property owners (Phase 1)
- SCDOT sent letters to nine (9) property owners on March 19, 2020 inquiring about the possibility of purchasing properties for construction of the new community center as a part of the I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST project.
 - If the project team is not successful in acquiring properties in the "first round," a second round of letters will be sent to other property owners on the list
 - The project team is attempting to identify multiple parcels that would provide enough land to accommodate the community center project [Currently focused on the Liberty Park community]
 - Russelldale does not currently appear to have enough land available to support the projected size of the community center
- The project team is focusing on properties along Filbin Creek because the City of North Charleston is proposing construction of a greenway along Filbin Creek; the project team thinks that locating the community center near the proposed greenway may enhance community connectivity (easier/safer access)
- A smaller parcel in Russelldale (#34 on "Potential 6(f) Replacement Properties" map in the CAC Meeting #7 packet, pg. 21) is being considered for a pocket park, playground, or combined playground/open space area

- Multiple, conjoined parcels (#10-14) between Taylor Street and James Bell Drive are both publicly and privately owned, and are also being considered by SCDOT for a combined playground/open space recreational area
- CAC Member Feedback
 - What is the potential challenge associated with parcel #26 (1.85 acres, owned by the City of North Charleston)? Is there an access entrance to the property from Elder Avenue or would you have to go through another property to access it? Is there enough acreage to accommodate the project?
 - Project team member: Yes, the property can be accessed from Elder Avenue. In terms of the usability of the parcel, the project team is currently evaluating the parcel (for example, for flood plains and wetlands) to see if there is enough “upland” (usable land above the flood plains) to place the main structure of the community center. The parcel’s low-lying areas are also being evaluated for compatibility with features such as playgrounds, basketball courts, and picnic tables that, if impacted by flooding, would not present direct damage to the structural integrity of the main structure of the community center. Site visits are being scheduled to evaluate high and low-lying areas.
 - The project team is also considering the balance of land purchases for both replacement housing and for the new community center. If the nine parcels considered in Phase 1 are all used for the community center, less land will be available for replacement housing.
 - Project team member: Does the CAC approve of focusing on development of a single, larger facility as opposed to two smaller facilities given the limitations of available land?

Replacement Recreational Facilities Discussion

- Project team provided a brief overview of the sample letter to property owners
- The project footprint is generally bordered by Remount Road on the north boundary and Dorchester Road at the south boundary. This was done to keep the focus on the Ferndale, Highland Terrace, Liberty Park, and Russelldale communities while also considering Charleston Farms (a little north of these communities), as well as further south to the east side of Park Circle, and the area north of Dorchester Road
- The project team is also monitoring real estate listings to make inquiries as properties are placed on the market
- In the CAC #7 meeting packet, maps of inset 1.1 and 1.2 are representative of areas that include or are closer to the current Ferndale, Highland Terrace, Liberty Park, and Russelldale residences. Insets 1.3 and 1.4 present alternatives that are still within the area, but a little farther away from the original communities
- CAC Member Feedback
 - Since the project team is potentially considering areas closer to Dorchester Road for replacement housing, there is a property located just off the Dorchester Road exit that may be considered. There is currently an old, boarded hotel that could possibly be the site of a new apartment complex since it is already zoned for multi-use.

- Project team member acknowledged the suggestion and ensured the project team would add this parcel to the list of considerations. Some of the parcels outlined on inset 1.4 represent high density usage like apartments, and were selected for consideration based on proximity to public transportation and to potential employment centers
 - Review of vacant parcels shown in inset 1.1. CAC members were asked for feedback on or insights into any of the parcels highlighted that they may be familiar with or whose owners they may know.
 - The Project Manager asked CAC members to make SCDOT aware of potential locations for replacement housing that the CAC does not feel the community at-large would approve of. SCDOT does not want to present options to the community for replacement housing they feel is not comparable to the existing neighborhoods.
- CAC Member Feedback
 - Liberty Park and Highland Terrace have more single-family homes versus multi-use parcels. There are several available lots in the Liberty Park and Highland Terrace communities. Will each resident be relocated based on the characteristics of the community they are being relocated from? (Will efforts be made to relocate residents to comparable zoning areas?) And will the area maintain a predominately single-family home profile?
 - Project Manager: SCDOT has not begun purchasing single-family home lots; however, the plan is to purchase single-family lots in a stepped approach. The most immediate priority is to find land on which to build the new community center. Based on this goal, SCDOT is focusing on purchasing some of the bigger lots for the community center first. The project team is trying to secure a willing seller. The project team will try to secure lots on which townhomes for multi-family rentals or single-family homes could be constructed, but a variety of options must be provided. The project team is focusing on dense developments outside of the neighborhood because there are so many renters. While the project team will work with individuals that want to go into homeownership, there will be a large number of people that just need to get into a rental unit and are only comfortable with going into another rental unit. We want to make sure we have enough options for them.
 - SCDOT: [To the project team] I think it is important to contextualize what the impact is going to be on an individual basis. Impacts may vary by homeowner. (Based on previous comments made by CAC members) Some people may want to sell their property and take the money. So, we may need to contextualize in order to understand the true impact on the community
 - Project team member: Are there any other comments or anything that you would like to see at our next meeting related to housing?
- CAC Member Feedback
 - Regarding access of on- and off-ramps from I-526 at Rivers Avenue: Will the existing ramps remain in place or will SCDOT close access to Rivers Avenue?
 - Project Manager: We are currently refining the selection of preferred alternatives. Based on the comments and initial assessment of the impact studies, the preferred path forward is for the current ramp to remain intact. The new bridge will be built parallel to what is there now and fly over the existing Rivers Avenue interchange.

Vehicles will continue to have access onto and off of I-526 to Rivers Avenue, but they will not be able to access I-26 West directly from Rivers Avenue. If drivers want to access I-26, they will have to go to Remount Road at I-26 or down to Montague Road at I-26.

- CAC Member Feedback
 - Expressed concerns about this contributing to traffic congestion in all directions
 - Project Manager: SCDOT has not designed improvements at the Remount Road and Rivers Avenue intersection. The intersection currently experiences traffic that backs up onto the ramp and onto the main line of I-26. The proposed improvements are the same types of improvements the Bus Rapid Transit project is making at that intersection, so improvements may happen through either the Bus Rapid Transit project or through the I-526 LCC West project. Both groups will coordinate improvements in that area to help mitigate traffic flow.

- CAC Member Feedback
 - Regarding the Bus Rapid Transit plans, will we (the CAC) be able to review those plans or are they confidential?
 - Project Manager: The plan is being developed by the BCDCOG (Council of Governments) who will also manage the project. Since there are overlapping responsibilities, SCDOT will display an information board in the Community Office about the project. BCDCOG is in the very early stages of the environmental phase, so it will probably be the end of this year or early next year before they have a visual that they can share with SCDOT that we can then share through our office.

- CAC Member Feedback
 - Will CAC members be able to participate in any of the conversations with the BCDCOG, or should we wait?
 - Project Manager: The Bus Rapid Transit project will conduct public involvement sessions in an effort to reach out to the community, so the project team will make sure the CAC is made aware scheduled sessions. SCDOT will share any relevant project information the BCDCOG has available. There will be opportunities for the CAC to have a voice in that project as well.
 - The project team is working to ensure we are tracking opportunities for public input on any local plans and keeping the CAC informed

Outreach Update

- Office Data
 - The Community Office was open for 22 days during the month of March
 - Received 13 in-coming calls
 - Placed 10 out-going calls
 - Responded to 2 voice messages
 - Had 11 walk-in visits
 - Notification calls to CAC members to postpone the scheduled informational workshop

- COVID
 - The Community Office has been closed to visitors since March 17, 2020; Office Manager Horrace Tobin is onsite daily to address concerns and requests received by email, postal mail, and phone
 - Mr. Tobin has received calls from upset residents regarding misinformation that the I-526 LCC West project has been terminated. He assured them the project was still active and validated the appropriate steps they had taken in calling the Community Office to inquire about the misinformation. He also re-emphasized that only SCDOT, Right-of-Way officers, and the Community Office are authorized to provide feedback on logistical or technical questions to the public

- Community Liaisons

Clay Middleton was introduced as a new employee of Maximum Consulting, and an addition to the Community Liaison staff.
- Informational Workshop
 - The sessions planned for Saturday, March 21st will be rescheduled. The project team and CAC members will be notified when a new date has been set

- New Business

- CAC Member Feedback
 - Due to the Community Office being closed, will the telephone lines remain open to anyone who has questions? There have been communications from various entities to residents in the Liberty Park/Highland Terrace communities. Residents need to be able to reach someone at the Community Office if they need to have important questions answered.
 - Received a call from a resident who had questions and concerns about misinformation received. Community liaison committed to delivering maps that would provide clarification and a better visual of the placement of her property within the footprint of the project.
 - Both office numbers remain active and will be answered or available to leave a message
 - Project team member suggested the project team mail the requested maps to the concerned resident in order to avoid person-to-person contact
 - The Maximum Consulting team is planning to schedule community meetings. Maximum will coordinate with members of the CAC and SCDOT to determine when the staff can schedule respective community meetings in order to dispel some of the misinformation CAC members and residents have encountered.

Summary and Next Steps

- Poll conducted to determine if CAC members are available and willing to meet on May 2, 2020 at 10:00 AM for CAC Meeting #8
 - Separate links will be emailed for feedback on preferences for the duration of Adobe Connect meetings, post-COVID activities, etc. CAC members seem comfortable with the Google platform for polling as opposed to a more limited platform, like Survey Monkey

- Polling will also be sent to the CAC regarding potential dates for upcoming open house events
- SCDOT thanked the CAC again for their continued participation and flexibility in the midst of the pandemic.
- The project team reiterated the project team's commitment to assisting the CAC and Maximum Consulting with administrative tasks (phone calls, mailers) that will facilitate avoiding of person-to-person contact during the pandemic

CAC Meeting #8 is scheduled for May 2, 20220, 10:00 - 11:30 AM. We will use the same Adobe Connect link and phone number to access the meeting.