



MEETING MINUTES

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING NO. 6

Date: March 7, 2020

Time: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Location: I-526 Lowcountry Corridor Community Office, 5627 Rivers Avenue, N. Charleston, SC

Project Name: I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST

Attendees:

Larenda Baxley, Ferndale
Tina A. Baxley, Ferndale
Charlynn Smith, Ferndale
Geneva Swett, Ferndale
Gilbert Reeves, Ferndale
David L. Johnson, Ferndale
Michael S. Halls, Sr., Ferndale
Ruth Mae Whitney, Highland Terrace
Jeanaris Bannister, Liberty Park
Carolyn Varner, Liberty Park
Doris Twiggs, Liberty Park
Prayonda Cooper, Joppa Way
Angela Anderson, Russelldale
Earl Muhammad, Muhammad Mosque
Rick Day, Stantec
Amy Sackaroff, Stantec

LaTonya Derrick, Stantec
Ryan White, Stantec
Hannah Clements, Stantec
Joy Riley, SCDOT (Project Manager)
Chad Long, SCDOT
David Kelly, SCDOT
Pamela Foster, FHWA
Annette McCrorey, THC
Willie Johnson, THC
Horrace Tobin, Community Office (Coordinator)
Maxine Smith, Maximum Consulting (Community Liaison)
Mattese Lecque, Maximum Consulting (Community Liaison)
Carolyn Lecque, Maximum Consulting (Community Liaison)
Jamelle Ellis, Empowerment Strategies (Facilitator)

Participant Summary:

Total participants: 30

Ferndale: 7

Highland Terrace: 1

Liberty Park: 3

Russelldale: 1

Adjacent/affected communities/agencies: 4

SCDOT: 3

FHWA: 1

Community Liaisons: 3

Community Office: 1

Stantec: 5

Facilitator: 1

Meeting Summary:**Welcome and Introductions**

- Roll call
- Safety reviews/emergency exits

Administrative Items

- CAC Meeting 4 minutes approved
- CAC Meeting 5 minutes distributed

Approach for Mitigation Work Session

- Review of the logistics of the work session and overview of the CAC Mitigation Work Session packet responses, including a detailed work session guide.
- Session was based on the four pillars of Community Impact Mitigation: Community Cohesion, Community Enhancement, Community Preservation, and Community Revitalization.
- A summary of key topics presented by the CAC during the work session is presented at the end of the meeting minutes.

Community Cohesion

- Direct and cumulative impacts from past and planned highway projects and other factors such as crime, high cost of living and home ownership trends that have reduced the amount of community locations in the affected environmental justice neighborhoods.
- Purpose: To gather the CAC's input on potential measures that can be evaluated to improve community cohesion.

What do you see as resources that are currently lacking that would improve community cohesion?

Review feedback on page 5.

What role could the community centers play after major storm events? Do you see any use for a community center to serve as a hub for the distribution of water or related activities?

Review feedback on page 5.

What measures can be taken to increase the number of “eyes” on the street to help minimize crime in these areas?

Review feedback on page 6.

What activities would you like to see in your neighborhood?

- Cross-cultural activities and educational workshops
- Health and wellness screening
- Historical programs, activities, and festivals that highlight and preserve history
- Impacts on children, leaving a legacy
- Harvest Church could be designated as a historical marker to capture the history, personal contributions, and changes in the landscape that have occurred.
- Jazz mobile to play music in the community during the summer.

- Neighborhood associations, such as block or tennis associations
- Cross-cultural cohesion
- National Night Out
- Community Yard Sale

What measures can be taken to show a sense of ownership (public or private)?

- Directional public and private signage, including “Dead End” and “No drive-thru” signs
- Shrubs/landscaping
- Common areas in neighborhoods (to meet, walk dogs, etc.) with attractive aesthetics
- Community gardens
- Monthly neighborhood clean-up days (Neighborhood Sweeps)
- Adopt-a-street
- Ask the City to pick up debris quarterly
- Request the County commit to one or two days per year for pick up of special materials/items being discarded.
- CAC and community members contact elected officials to leverage coordinated neighborhood cleanup activities.

Community Enhancement

What are your thoughts on having a single, larger, centrally located replacement facility versus two smaller facilities?

Review feedback on page 7.

Break

Community Preservation

Do you walk as a means of transportation or to access public transit? If not, why? What reasons are related to infrastructure needs?

Review feedback on page 9.

Is speeding a persistent issue anywhere in your neighborhood?

Review feedback on page 10.

Where is stormwater runoff or standing water a problem in your neighborhood?

Review feedback on page. 10.

What do you see as barrier(s) to “aging in place” in your neighborhood?

Review feedback on page 11.

Community Revitalization

What do you see as the top priority for revitalization in your neighborhood and why?

Review feedback on page 12.

What types of barriers need to be overcome to achieve revitalization without inducing gentrification?

Review feedback on page 12.

Summary and Next Steps

- The Project Team will compile feedback and present summary at CAC Meeting #7.
- The office is available for moderate-size group meetings.
- Flyers:
 - Please let the community office know if you would like more flyers.
 - Internal and external information box locations are being reviewed.

Upcoming meeting topics

- Update on the mitigation plan development
- Provide available details and gather additional information on potential housing

Informational Workshops: Saturday, March 21, 2020

CAC Meeting #7 scheduled for April 18, 2020, 10 AM – 1 PM, at the I-526 Lowcountry Corridor Community Office, 5627 Rivers Avenue, N. Charleston, SC.

“What do you see as resources that are currently lacking that would improve community cohesion?”

CAC Member Feedback:

- Residents are not allowed to use the Ferndale Community Center gym. Tournament schedules get priority over general use by neighborhood children. Russelldale experiences similar restrictions.
- The Ferndale Community Center does not have designated hours for general residents to have access to the gym and other activities. Currently, residents are not allowed access until after basketball season and tournaments end in March. Residents cannot use the gym during the summer months because of summer programs. General residential use is limited to March (after basketball season ends), April, and May.
- Community children are not allowed to go into the community center to play. The kids have no place to play during the summer months.
- **Recommendation:** Build another smaller facility near the back of the neighborhood. Previously, there was one on Iron Street. Many of the neighborhood children do not have close parental supervision. Parents do not want children walking to the other side of the neighborhood to be able to play.
- Neighbors want a nice community center to provide a place to host drives, meet City County representatives, the mayor, etc. Residents would like to meet and develop relationships with the police assigned to their communities.
- Additional feedback was provided regarding the community center:
 - It could provide employment opportunities to residents, especially adult residents.
 - It could be operated like the senior center.
 - It could be a place for people to congregate and learn about each other.
 - Expand community center programs to meet the needs of all members, including young children, teens, young adults, parents, and seniors.
 - Community centers should focus on children first.
 - It could serve as a location for workforce development.
 - The community center should primarily serve people who live in the communities in which they are located.

What role could the community centers play after major storm events? Do you see any use for a community center to serve as a hub for the distribution of water or related activities?

- When there is a hurricane or threat of a hurricane, everyone must evacuate. If there is a community-based center in place, water and blankets may be distributed from the center. Additionally, seniors, disabled residents and people who cannot evacuate during hurricanes, may use the center as shelter.
- Employing residents at the center will increase accountability in children.
- Community centers are not currently staffed by local residents, if at all, planned activities are not geared toward the community, and there is no place in the community for the children to participate (not child-centered).

- The model that is being used at the senior center needs to be used as a model for the community center. The bulk of the time should be allocated for community use and the other 25% for other (non-residential) events.
- Project Manager: SCDOT is actively looking for property for affordable housing and community centers. Identifying property to purchase is the first step. To accommodate a facility described by CAC members, a larger parcel of land that is accessible to all communities will be needed. SCDOT will also identify smaller parcels of land for pocket parks with features like basketball courts.
- Project Manager: Asked CAC members to let the project team know of any residents who may be willing to sell their property once they are fully informed of the intended uses of the land after sale. The money is available to make the enhancements in the community but acquiring the land is the first and most significant hurdle.

What measures can be taken to increase the number of “eyes” on the street to help minimize crime in these areas?

- Well-lit streets
- Well-defined private and public areas
- Areas that welcome people who are supposed to be there and deter people who are not supposed to be there
- Use of signage
- Defined boundaries with fencing and user-friendly landscaping
- Physical and law-enforcement boundaries with police officers. Officers should approach residents differently within neighborhoods as compared to main thoroughfares, such as Rivers Avenue
- Eliminating abandoned properties and overgrown lots
- Transparency of agreements with the community as they are being developed
- Identifying a courtesy officer that lives in apartment complexes or neighborhoods
- Street cameras
- The Project Manager emphasized that to ensure transparency, it is going to take a lot of participation by the community and community organizations. The more organized communities and community associations are, the more leverage and power communities have in ensuring terms of intergovernmental agreements are enforced. Some of the expectations addressed by the CAC will be addressed as part of the environmental document, which serves as an additional enforcement tool. But, the effectiveness of community groups is based on that groups’ ability to come together and hold government representatives accountable.
- Speed humps to deter speeding through neighborhoods.
 - It was reported that a previous study determined that there was not enough evidence of speeding to have speed bumps installed.
- Stop signs at Railroad Avenue and Piedmont Avenue have been requested and denied.
- There is a large, dark, empty lot at the end of Good Street in Highland Terrace where people meet for undesirable and potentially criminal activities. A light should be installed in that area.

- In Liberty Park and Highland Terrace, most lots are 50 feet wide with lighting placed every 300 feet, so their area is essentially “black.” The entire area needs to be revamped regarding the placement of lights.
- The Project Manager clarified the difference between pedestrian-scale lighting versus street lighting. Standard placement of streetlights placed much farther apart because it is based on visibility. Pedestrian-scale lighting is lower-level lighting that will light everything.

Community Enhancement

What are your thoughts on having a single, larger, centrally located replacement facility versus two smaller facilities?

- The Project Manager stated that SCDOT is considering a site that leverages several properties near Filbin Creek that are owned by the City of North Charleston. She is currently working to contact the owner of a piece of property in the middle of the area in consideration to determine their interest in selling the property to SCDOT. The property is located at Dorothy Williams and Elder Streets on property that extends back to the creek.
- The children from Russelldale should be able to safely walk from their home community to the proposed location for the new community center.
- Project Manager: If SCDOT builds a larger facility, a larger parcel of land will be required. If the main building was built in the highland area and other features such as picnic tables, walking trails, etc. were placed on some of the other parcels, such as the one on Rebecca Street to do outdoor parks, playgrounds, etc., SCDOT would have to build several of those features in the smaller communities. The Project Manager stressed that having a facility that is big enough to do everything in one location is not possible.
- Project Manager stated they would have to incorporate sidewalks and safe pedestrian access from other communities into the project plan. SCDOT cannot design sidewalks without addressing drainage.
- Since the large piece of property on Elder Street does not provide network connectivity from Russelldale Avenue to Elder, a recommendation was made to provide a pedestrian bridge at the end of April Avenue over Filbin Creek.
- Project Manager noted that some communities are affected due to the age of the community. There are challenges associated with sidewalks because then there is not enough room to maintain the lane widths. Drainage adds another layer of challenges. Funding, logistics (setbacks), and physical impacts and limitations (installing pipes) of installing sidewalks present significant challenges.
- In response to an inquiry “spacing,” placing pocket parks or amenities throughout smaller communities, the Project Manager stated that implementation will be determined by the land SCDOT is able to acquire. SCDOT does not know which parcels have homes that have been abandoned. Because abandoned lots are harder to identify, SCDOT needs assistance from CAC members and community members. It is important to note that SCDOT will not displace residents to build a park.
- Conversation about potential sidewalk placement
- Concern was expressed about parking on flat sidewalks on Taylor street. Many people park their cars on the flat sidewalks as if they are parking pads.

- There are no bike trails.
- April Avenue, Russelldale Avenue, and Dorothy Williams Boulevard do not have sidewalks and are dangerous areas. A safety or guard post is needed in those areas.
- Project Manager: SCDOT does not include sidewalks on a resurfacing job, but if there is a full reconstruction or reconfiguration, which is the case with some of the streets in this project, we would look at doing sidewalks as long as it makes sense. In this area, it would make sense because you have so many other sidewalks. If we are doing a project in an area where there are no sidewalks, SCDOT will not build a half mile of sidewalk. The bus rapid transit project is going to add numerous pedestrian accommodations, so some of the issues being discussed here will overlap and be addressed through that project. Realistically, SCDOT will not be able to put sidewalks on every street in all four neighborhoods, but they want safe connections to the community centers and to transit stops on Rivers Avenue.
- There are currently no proposed sidewalks in Russelldale.
- Project Team member summarized the high points with land limitations, larger facilities with smaller amenities (pocket parks) throughout communities, potentially building two larger, similar facilities on either side of I-526, and providing connectivity from the four communities to the community center.
- Project Manager asked the CAC to consider that staffing the facility or facilities is going to be another limitation (in addition to land acquisition). She urged the CAC to keep in mind the operating costs of the type of enhanced facility being discussed and the challenges that may be associated with building two of them. Two large facilities may be more difficult for the City to support. If you want it to be successful, it must be manageable long term.
 - Based on CAC concerns expressed regarding lack of access to the current community center parks and playgrounds, pocket parks would be an option that would be open to the community all the time.
- Project Manager: Certain stipulations may be included in an intergovernmental agreement to include issues such as prioritizing residential use of the facility, even for paid programs such as childcare. In the coming months, SCDOT will schedule a meeting with the CAC and the City to talk through the logistics of the agreement so that the CAC has an opportunity to voice their concerns directly to the City.
- The Project Manager stressed that the decision for the CAC to stay together long term will be entirely up to CAC members. At some point, there will be a mitigation plan, and the intention is for the CAC to remain intact and continue to work with SCDOT through the implementation phase of the plan to ensure the plan is carried out the way it is supposed to be carried out.
- Project Manager stressed that at some point, when SCDOT finishes the project (which could be 10 years from now), the County or the City will be required to implement a long term continuation of operation of these facilities and programs, and the CAC may choose to stay together to maintain oversight and feedback on how the facility is managed.
- CAC Member: To ensure that residents remain a part of the decisions, how would you ensure that the representatives from the neighborhood are heard from? Who will ensure, for instance, that center staff will be hired from the community?
- Project Manager stated that there will be an intergovernmental agreement, most likely with the City of North Charleston because this is their jurisdiction. The intergovernmental agreement will lay out the terms of how things will happen at the facility. SCDOT will build a specified list of structures, and at the

end of the project, turn over ownership to the City. She suggested the CAC or community organization be maintained that will hold the City accountable. At that point, SCDOT will have no mechanism to monitor how the City manages the community center after the intergovernmental agreement is final.

- Question: Can the community can come together and voice their opinions
- Project Manager: That is the purpose of the CAC. We will host open houses to invite the larger community of residents to see how the ideas the CAC have been included in the mitigation plan. The CAC will also have an opportunity to present requests for improvements to the City of North Charleston, and SCDOT will verify our part of the agreement in supporting CAC requests. It is very important that they hear from the CAC and the community.
- A meeting between the City and combined neighborhoods would better support community cohesion and consistent feedback from the City, than if the City were to meet with individual communities.
- Facilitator: It is important to understand the timeline, the process, and being involved in that process up front. If the CAC allows certain milestones to pass, it may be too late to revisit issues after the fact to modify the agreement. One of the benefits of this type of meeting is to organize ideas to better support long-term strategies. There are parts of the plan SCDOT will be able to manage, but there are some issues and projects the CAC will have to take the lead on, so understanding timing (the project schedule) is important.
- It was noted that while one person can staff each community center, volunteers are needed from the neighborhood to keep the key stakeholders involved.
- The term 'neighborhood center' is preferred compared to 'community center.' What may be common or accepted for one community may not be for another.
- Project Team member directed CAC members to the mitigation packet (under community enhancement) to example pictures of requested community center enhancements (such as computers and Internet access) based on CAC feedback. Feedback was requested specifically regarding outdoor athletic equipment and pocket parks.
- The Ferndale community has tried to get a picnic table and covered area (shelters) for cookouts, birthday parties, family reunions, etc.
- Additional amenities such as shaded playgrounds, special needs playground equipment, benches, bike racks, lockers, outdoor drinking water fountains have been and are recommended.
- There is a need for advocacy training ("Advocacy 101 Workshop") because people do not know how to advocate for themselves.

Break

Community Preservation

Do you walk as a means of transportation or to access public transit? If not, why? What reasons are related to infrastructure needs?

- There is concern for employees that walk to work because of the lack of streetlights and wooded areas. Some areas belong to the City and are not cleaned up, so there is trash and heavy debris.

- Project Team member asked for examples of commonly traveled paths taken by community members
 - Areas near Elder Avenue, James Bell, and Deacon. This is particularly an issue in the morning hours when it is dark.
- Other streets identified as having lighting issues are Target, April, and Russelldale.
- All lighting in Highland Terrace and Liberty Park is 300 feet apart.
- There is also a path that leads to *Life Changers Covenant Ministries* with a broken gate. Some residents use that pathway to get to Rivers Avenue, to go to the store, or to the bus stop as a common path.
- **Recommendation:** CARTA or a shuttlebus (with seats/not standing only) to transport neighborhood residents at least during the early morning and evening hours.
- **Recommendation:** Covered, accessible bus shelters needed at CARTA bus stops, for example at Russelldale and Target Avenues in Ferndale.
- There are no sidewalks on Railroad Avenue, and it is very dangerous for pedestrians.
- Railroad Avenue is a “drag strip.”
- Covered areas are needed for children waiting for school buses. Children do not have individual stops, so they congregate in large groups. They stand in the rain and cold.
- Project Manager: Several enhancements related to shelters will be addressed under the Bus Rapid Transit project, but SCDOT will try to connect to or enhance the work done on that project.
- Pedestrian accommodations across Rivers Avenue are an issue.
 - Many Patriots Villa residents cannot walk well and have difficulty crossing Rivers Avenue.
 - There was a pedestrian fatality last year. Another wheelchair-bound resident has been hit.
 - The back end of Ferndale beyond Jason Street does not have sidewalks.
 - Footpaths underneath I-526 – The city is planning a multi-use path along Filbin Creek.
 - There is no access to Rivers Avenue, from Fuller Street to the back of the neighborhood so residents must walk through unimproved and unsafe areas to get food and general shopping.
- CAC Member: Will there be an access street in the back, or would construction have to go through the neighborhood when the project starts? Concern about construction equipment in the neighborhood during the construction phase. Project Team member noted that the City will need to address concerns regarding the logistics of construction equipment in neighborhoods.
- Project Manager: Most of the time on interstate projects, construction crews access through the ramps. Oftentimes, they will fence off the construction zone and access the surface street from a ramp. SCDOT would never go through a neighborhood street unless it was absolutely necessary because construction equipment can tear up roads and they have to be repaired. SCDOT crews will likely access the site from Rivers Avenue or a ramp.

Is speeding a persistent issue anywhere in your neighborhood?

- Railroad & Piedmont
- Rebecca Street/Russelldale
- Taylor Street & Elder (4-way stop sign; CAC recommends speed humps)
- Willis Drive/Rebecca (children’s bus stop)

Where is stormwater runoff or standing water a problem in your neighborhood?

- There is flooding after rain in Russelldale at the corner of Rebecca Street and Rivers Avenue.

- Liberty Park at the corner of James Bell Drive and Taylor Street to Rivers Avenue.
- Yard flooding at first house on Taylor Street because the City changed the drainage system so that it runs alongside the fence. The drain is constantly overflowing whenever there is an extended period of rain.
- The Woodbine Avenue area, identified as Palmetto Heights, has built up the property higher near the train tracks which has changed the flow of water, increased water flow and flooding on Taylor Street (from Taylor up to Elder Avenue).
- Project Manager: Some streets are SCDOT streets, some are city streets. There is a maintenance request form on the SCDOT website (scdot.org) or you can call 855-GO-SCDOT. Do not call the local DOT office. The Department of Transportation does not know drains need cleaning unless residents inform them. Formal requests submitted online or through the telephone number provided are monitored by the Secretary and they have a designated turnaround time. Maintenance crews are graded on response times. Drainage issues get higher priority than signage issues.
- In Ferndale, between Graham and Emden Streets, there is a two-story brick house; large lot flanked by large ditch with poor drainage (marked on map).
- Harper Street and Railroad Avenue; On Harper Street, there is a lot of open space in front of the yards that is always muddy because of standing water.
- A parcel next to the L-shaped parcel that has been open for 20 years was identified.

What do you see as barrier(s) to “aging in place” in your neighborhood?

- Several landlords are taking their properties off Section 8 designation, so many residents have had to move out of the neighborhood.
- Home repairs, transportation (access to transit), meals, home health, expenses, lawn maintenance, and ramps. If the aging population is low-income, they cannot afford most of these items.
- Other issues include:
 - Sidewalk access
 - Inadequate services for seniors
 - Neighborhood centers
 - Meals on wheels (limited service)
 - Residents may not know the requirements to qualify for the program
 - More access to resources, including a Community/Senior Center
- Free health screenings
 - Community Liaison: Several local colleges(The Citadel, Charleston Southern, Trident Tech, and MUSC) have nursing schools. It may be beneficial to create an agreement with them in which some of the nursing students can come out and visit seniors to do blood pressure checks and conduct general wellness visits. They also have students who study nutrition and social studies. We should partner with local colleges to develop a program that will allow students to earn class credits to do senior health checks quarterly. This type program for senior/graduate students would benefit both students and seniors (elderly).
 - Block grants to assist with home repairs.
 - Community Liaison: The window of opportunity for grants is narrow. You must qualify for the grant and have all documentation in order to apply.

- Many Seniors do not have transportation and may not be able to/feel comfortable walking.
- Teleride charges for each trip.
- Community Liaison recommended that the project teamwork with a media partner.

Community Revitalization

What do you see as the top priority for revitalization in your neighborhood and why?

- Removing and renovating boarded homes.
- Limiting the amount of time boarded homes can remain intact. Currently, boarded homes can remain intact indefinitely, if they meet criteria. This is an issue particularly for residents that live next door to boarded homes.
- Providing single rental units opposed to multi-family dwellings like apartments or condos.
- In some parts of Columbia, SC there are developments in some communities where small business owners have a storefront on the bottom and their residence upstairs. Usually the owner may have a barber shop.
- Concern expressed about a business located at James Bell and Rivers. The owners do not live in the area, but their business traffic spills over into the streets.

What types of barriers need to be overcome to achieve revitalization without inducing gentrification?

- City plan to rezone Russelldale become light industrial as part of a 10-year plan.
- Community Liaison stressed that they have held five hearings and emphasized that is why the community office is here, so that people can ask questions.
- Community Liaison stressed the importance of residents attending and participating in City Hall meetings, planning meetings, and zoning meetings.
- Project Team member stated that support between neighborhoods and collected advocacy is important. Facilitator stressed how important it is to have cross-generational engagement. The CAC has to figure out which people in the community have time to commit to this project, at every generational stage, because that is the only to achieve sustainable advocacy. The CAC needs to have a succession plan in place which includes young people so the CAC can educate other age demographics on the plan and the process. It is up to the CAC to use information learned and discussed in CAC meetings, activities, and events to educate other residents on the issues and their roles in advocacy. The CAC must engage people across generations because some of the mitigation issues discussed in CAC meetings will extend far beyond the SCDOT mitigation project.