



MEETING MINUTES

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING NO. 15

Date: January 9, 2021

Time: 10:00 am – 12:22 pm

Location: I-526 Lowcountry Corridor Community Office, 5627 Rivers Avenue, N. Charleston, SC
Microsoft Teams (Virtual)

Project Name: I-526 Lowcountry Corridor WEST

Attendees

Larenda Baxley, Ferndale
Tina A. Baxley, Ferndale
Gilbert Reeves, Ferndale
Earl Muhammad, Ferndale
Angela Anderson, Russelldale
Tony Grasso, Russelldale
Jeanaris Bannister, Liberty Park
Doris Twiggs, Liberty Park
Joy Riley, SCDOT
Chad Long, SCDOT
Pamela Foster, FHWA
Yolonda Jordan, FHWA

Shane Belcher, FHWA
Maxine Smith, Maximum Consulting
Mattese Lecque, Maximum Consulting
Carolyn Lecque, Maximum Consulting
Gwen Boyd, Maximum Consulting
Janelle Ellis, Empowerment Strategies
Rick Day, Stantec
LaTonya Derrick, Stantec
Ryan White, Stantec
Hannah Clements, Stantec
Horrace Tobin, Stantec (Community Office)

Participant Summary:

Total participants: 23

Ferndale: 4	Adjacent/affected communities/agencies: 0	Stantec: 5
Highland Terrace/Joppa Way: 0	SCDOT: 2	Facilitator: 1
Liberty Park: 2	FHWA: 3	
Russelldale: 2	Community Liaisons: 4	

Meeting Summary:

Welcome and Introductions

- Roll call (in-person, online, and phone participants)

Administrative Items

- CAC Meeting 15 hosted using a hybrid approach with participants joining via the Microsoft Teams platform, by phone, and in person.
 - The meeting was recorded solely for accuracy of meeting minutes.
 - LaTonya will serve as the technical host for participants joining remotely.
 - Participants may raise their hands, virtually and in person, to ask questions.

- Meeting etiquette for call-in, in-person, and on-line participants was reviewed.
- CAC Meeting 15 packets were distributed to meeting participants prior to the meeting date, including minutes for CAC Meeting 14.
- CAC Meeting 14 recommended changes:
 - On page 11 where a CAC member is speaking, down below the middle of the page. It says, "Because if we have an ice storm, Liberty Hill doesn't have lights or electricity." It should probably be Liberty Park. (Lecque, C.)
 - And on page 17, where the Project Team member is speaking and indicates at the fourth bullet, "Next phase is the Private Oversight Committee," and I think that should be "project." Page 17. (Lecque, C.)
 - Edits were made and submitted to the project team immediately following Meeting 15.
- CAC Meeting 14 minutes were approved.

Safety briefing: In case of emergency, meeting participants will exit through the front door and meet in the parking lot at the median to the right (upon exiting). In the event the front door is blocked or inaccessible, Mr. Tobin will lead meeting participants through the back door, taking care to ensure everyone steps down safely from the building onto the surface below. LaTonya will be the last person to exit the building. (Ellis, J.)

Agenda Review

- Welcome and Administrative Items
- Neighborhood Update
- EJ Community Mitigation Plan Update
- Summary of Recent EJ Outreach Efforts/EJCMP Comment Review
- Update to the EJ Outreach Strategy
- On-going/Future Outreach Update
- Project Schedule and Milestone Review
- Summary and Next Steps

Neighborhood Update

- Attendees discussed increasing community interest and involvement through virtual town hall meetings with several CAC members serving on panel
- A recommendation was made to host telephone conference calls with community members in small groups. Some residents have already expressed an interest in participating.
- Community liaisons have contact information for residents in impacted neighborhoods.
- CAC members were encouraged to continue brainstorming effective community engagement practices.

EJ Community Mitigation Plan Update

Project Team Member:

- The public comment period ended on January 15, 2020. The project team is currently collecting final comments from the community. The EJ Community Mitigation Plan will be finalized January thru April 2021.
- The final Mitigation Plan will be incorporated into the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).
- The review process for the FEIS and the Mitigation Plan will be submitted for review by mid-April. The Mitigation Plan will continue to be refined until that time. We will continue to obtain input from the

CAC and community members until that portion of the EJ process is concluded. CAC project responsibilities will end in April. The CAC will begin transitioning responsibilities to the Project Oversight Committee, from May through October 2021, when approval of the final EIS is scheduled.

- The project team discussed training for residents and CAC members who want to participate in the Project Oversight Committee as well as for a community advocacy organization.
- The Community Infrastructure Enhancement Plan (CIEP) helps identify infrastructure improvements within the community, including sidewalks, street lighting, stormwater improvements, aesthetic enhancements, etc.
- We are hosting a CIEP workshop on March 6th at the Ferndale Community Center. Residents will be asked to review and comment on a number of improvement recommendations, including pedestrian and stormwater improvements, street lighting, aesthetics and landscaping and traffic calming.
- Stations will be set up for each type of infrastructure improvement with maps and images to help residents identify areas where improvements are needed.
- The goal of this meeting is for the project team to gain a better understanding of the infrastructure improvement priorities and to provide an opportunity for the CAC members to interact with residents from the impacted communities.
- The Ferndale Community Center was chosen as an outdoor meeting location in order to observe proper social distancing. The project team is considering having residents sign-up in blocks according to their respective neighborhoods in order to manage the number of attendees and movement between tables, while maximizing participation.
- The March 6th CIEP workshop will be one of the last opportunities for residents to provide feedback on components of the Mitigation Plan that have the most direct impacts on infrastructure in the affected neighborhoods.
- The project team requests support from the CAC in recruiting community members. The project team will also develop CIEP yard signs. Door-to-door canvassing, and contacting churches, schools and other local institutions will help to solicit residential participation in the CIEP workshop.
- CAC recommendations are needed to determine how to best encourage residents to participate in the workshop. What can the project team improve to get residents to participate in the CIEP workshop?

CAC Member:

Yard signs are effective for pedestrian or vehicular traffic. People pay attention to information on yard signs.

Community Liaison:

- Adding effective visuals to yard signs that indicate potential impact, such as flooded ditches, is recommended. Signs should also include contact information so residents can call the Community Office with questions or to schedule a meeting. Many residents have provided personal contact information to the liaisons to reach out to public works and other City agencies to address their concerns.
- Elected officials (e.g. the mayor, council members, state representatives, etc.) should be involved in order to increase interest and participation from the residents. We should also engage the City Ombudsman.

Project Team Member:

All points are acknowledged by the project team and will be followed up on by the project team.

CAC Member:

I posted project signs at the entrance of our neighborhood last year that I didn't think had a clear message, especially for someone unfamiliar with the project. It is difficult for drivers to read the signs while moving, so they are ineffective for anyone but pedestrians. The large signs currently installed at the off-ramp are more effective because they provide more information.

Project Team Member:

Those signs were for project awareness. They were intended to be placed in CAC members' yards, to inform the community about website access, to increase awareness of the project logo, and to encourage community engagement between residents. The purpose of the signs was different at that phase of the project. Currently, we have to develop new materials to market events, increase awareness, and encourage residents to come to the community office. The project team welcomes and encourages any insight CAC members can share on the content, format, and display of new signs.

CAC Member:

Drivers should be able to read and process signs in less than three seconds.

Project Team Member:

Your point is taken. As we did for the last round of project postcards, holiday cards, and New Years cards, the project team sends drafts of signs or advertising to the CAC for review and feedback prior to public distribution. As we begin planning workshops, it is important that we focus on content that is specific to the Mitigation Plan the CAC helped to develop. CAC members hear what is being discussed outside of their communities, and know the community needs. We need to determine how to better engage residents, so CAC feedback on improved wording on signs is important.

Community Liaison:

Is it possible to display the information on a small billboard?

Project Manager:

SCDOT can make the signs on the highway larger and install them. Billboards are a little more difficult because they require permits. SCDOT can do a larger roadway sign, but a billboard-sized sign will not be possible because it requires a permit accompanied by a significant amount of time and amount of paperwork.

Project Team Member:

For clarification, the roadway signs in discussion were for public information announcement meetings (white with blue letters).

CAC Member:

Some residents did not understand the previous I-526 Lowcountry Corridor signs. Using plain-stated language such as "I-526 Widening" would be more effective.

CAC Member:

Is the project team mailing the mitigation survey?

Project Team Member:

- Mailing a mitigation survey questionnaire that mimics the online version is an option.

- The project team is open to improving the way information is distributed if CAC members have recommendations for a more effective approach.
- The project team sent 1201 mail-outs. As of December 29th, roughly 116 were returned through mail, or dropped off at the Community Office or at community events.

CAC Member:

Providing residents with physical documents to read is more effective. The wording just needs to be more concise, as previously stated. Information should be distributed frequently. As a follow-up to getting them back, CAC members can divide them and do follow-up telephone calls or send a follow-up message.

Project Team Member:

For clarification, it was expressed that having something tangible in-hand that people can respond to at their leisure would be a better method of distributing information. Also, sending multiple and overlapping mail-outs rather than one comprehensive document would encourage more responses. CAC members could divide and conquer to follow-up, being creative to make sure (either by phone or in-person visits, whichever is appropriate and safe), to get people to follow-up with those documents.

Project Team Member:

CAC relationships and connections with their neighbors and the surrounding communities will be necessary in engaging them, following up, and encouraging them to participate.

CAC Member:

This is new information, so we need to send this information to residents frequently, until they are tired of hearing it. When you get to that point, then you know that you have done an excellent job on getting the message out.

CAC Member:

Since the pandemic, the Russelldale community center has been shut down. Maybe the Russelldale community center can be used for the workshop. Perhaps it could open for a day to have residents come by to drop off surveys. Let's find a way to use the center.

Project Team Member:

- In the past, the project team discussed stationing a project team member in the community center, one day a week. Since, for obvious reasons, the City is not using the community centers right now, it may be a good idea to make sure we have somebody to receive surveys and talk about the content.
- Revisiting the idea of having a physical presence on some frequency and providing the same information that we will be presenting at the workshop sessions is something that should be considered. Again, the idea is duplication and repetition in distributing information as opposed to sending significant amounts of information at one time, expecting that everybody is going to come in and give a response.
- We also have the Community Office, but the results that we get are better when we are in the community, not just here on Rivers Avenue. So we need to increase our presence in the community.

CAC Member:

The community center is available. There is no reason we can't use it. When is demolition planned for the Russelldale community center?

Project Team Member:

Referencing the project timeline in the CAC packet, mitigation occurs before construction.

Project Manager:

The existing community center would not be demolished until the new one is built.

CAC Member :

Although the community center has stopped operating due to COVID-19, we could still use it for a community drop-in.

CAC Member:

Do they have the manpower to operate the community center once a week?

Project Team Member:

We can talk about that and figure out how we can coordinate with the City to understand the liability concerns. If we are able to use the community center, it would be good to have a CAC member there as well to help residents who drop-in to understand the terminology associated with the project.

CAC Member:

How many people are currently visiting the Community Office who are unaware of this mitigation project?

Project Team Member: We get very few people that are unaware of the project.

Very few that aren't completely aware.

Most people who visit the office are looking for updates.

CAC Member: Could we maintain the same levels of communication with the community if we were to open the community centers to distribute information?

Project Team Member:

We currently have the flyer boxes and we can visit the whole concept of flyer boxes, its utility and how successful it is. But, manpower will have to be revisited and we need to look at what type of information will be shared. That is why we have the community liaisons. Can we start encouraging people to come to the Community Office? This office is an expense too and you've got people here who are communicating about the project but still hearing that being in the community is an important element.

Project Team Member:

- Another active component of the Mitigation Plan is the Community History Preservation Program. At Ferndale Community Center drop-in, many of you had the opportunity to meet Professor Fordham who will be our lead historian on this project. We have selected the team and we will be kicking off these efforts in March.
- The History Preservation Program kickoff will piggyback on the Community Infrastructure Enhancement Plan workshops. This will be an opportunity for our residents to sit down and meet the historian, meet the photographers and sign up for opportunities to get interviewed and to tell their stories. We are really excited about upcoming activities. We are finalizing our detailed work plan and that will be provided to you all before the kick off. This will ensure our approach is sufficient and to make sure we have not missed important elements. We would like for you to serve as a sounding

board to make sure the vision for this history program aligns with the flavor and the dynamics of your neighborhoods. This is about history, but there are also opportunities to tell the current story. We want to make sure that we are thorough in our approach and tell the complete story for all the residents of these neighborhoods.

- We will make a formal introduction of our team members. The kick off will be a part of the Community Infrastructure Enhancement Plan workshops as well. We are looking for your assistance with engagement and recruiting participants. Like utilizing a lot of the tools that we just mentioned for the Infrastructure Enhancement Plan, we will be using tools and resources to raise interest and awareness of this history program.

Project Team Member:

- As a reminder, Professor Fordham is a part-time professor at Citadel. He's done a lot of work on the history of South Carolina, particularly African American history in South Carolina. His roots run deep in Charleston. Mr. Coaxum is our photographer. He has already worked on this project. He has done some videography for the project. He is a public affairs officer in the Air Force Reserves. They both bring a wealth of perspective and experience when it comes to telling stories and this is where we're looking at a broad approach to how we tell these stories.
- We are still working on the work plan, but we will present it at the next Advisory Council meeting. We want to hear everybody's story, as these communities in North Charleston have a wide range of stories. We are asking you to consider telling your stories on video.
- We took some lessons learned from the history studies from the Liberty Park History Program that was part of the multimodal station. We are trying to build on that and do something that is going to add a different touch to the Mitigation Plan and help tell your stories.

Project Team Member:

Remember, these are things that are active components of the Mitigation Plan as well.

Community Liaison:

I want to suggest that we include the children in this program. If we get the kids interested, we get their parents interested. We have been in touch with the Cultural Arts Department at the City of North Charleston asking them to work with us on this project as it relates to the children. There may be a spring break camp at the end of March as well as a small camp this summer. We thought that would be a good way to embed ourselves in those situations. Asking the kids who have a piece of history or culture to share would be one way to attract parents and give the kids a piece of ownership.

Project Team Member:

- That is an incredible recommendation
- There is a first time home buyer financial literacy component of the Mitigation Plan as well. The Maximum team provided us a list of vendors and we are looking to partner with the Charleston Trident Urban League as the primary vendor for the initial training. We are updating our outreach strategy to inform residents of the training opportunity and really gauge interest.
- We are looking for your assistance to get the word out and get some excitement about this program, but also to help us target residents. We are looking to kick the training off this summer. We are looking for your assistance as we get closer to summer and start implementing this training.
- Finally, we have two sub-committees:

- College Aid Initiative - Mr. Reeves, Ms. Twigs Ms. Angela Anderson and Mr. Earl Muhammad have all volunteer for the College Aid Initiative.
- Organizational Training - Ms. Cynthia Anderson, Ms. Angela Anderson and Brother Earl Muhammad have volunteered to participate in the organizational training.
- We are still looking for participants for the College Aid Initiative and for the organizational training. We want to make sure that as that as the work continues to develop that training is made available to make sure you all are well equipped to move forward beyond the project and advocate for yourselves and meet the community goals that you desire ahead.
- Related to the organizational training, we have developed an original commitment that was included in the mitigation plan. The way that commitment was written, it tied the training specifically to the POC, the project oversight committee, which will be a smaller committee with stakeholders from the City and SCDOT. The POC will be strictly responsible for making sure that the components of the mitigation plan are implemented. That is separate from the community advocacy, the community advisory boards.
- We want to revisit those commitments and make sure that we separated the two so that the way these commitments were written was that SCDOT was committing to one, providing organizational training for CAC members and residents who wanted to be a part of creating a community advocacy organization. Again, in that scenario, a community advisory board similar to LAMC and the NAACP will be formed.
- There is also training that is specific to the project oversight committee which would be strictly responsible for overseeing the implementation of the components of the mitigation plan.
- So we wanted to make sure that there was a complete separation of ideas, noting that SCDOT is committing based on final approval of the components of the mitigation plan to provide training and support for a community advocacy organization, in addition to training and support for the project oversight committee.

CAC Member:

For clarification, the organizational training and project oversight committee are two separate committees, correct?

Project Team Member:

Yes. The project oversight committee that would include residents (CAC and non-CAC), as well as representation from government agencies that are responsible for implementing various components that have mitigation plans. For example, the POC would include SCDOT and the City of North Charleston's departments. Because there's a housing component of the mitigation plan, there would be representation from the housing authority. That is much more project-specific organization. The other opportunity would provide training for residents to be able to advocate for specific community goals beyond the project that you all want to be able to start pushing any initiatives.

CAC Member:

In the organizational training, can a person transition from that phase to the project oversight committee as well?

Project Team Member:

This is where you all have the opportunity to help guide what this looks like. This is your mitigation plan. We drafted the commitments, and we are working on developing some type of a framework for the POC, but this is where you all can help guide what this looks like. And if there's a desire for this community

organization or the POC to report to this community organization, then that is something that can be included as well as how the two groups will function together.

Project Team Member:

- The goal is to start finalizing components of the mitigation plan. We need to start fine tuning the language because once this goes into the review process and the mitigation plan, as components of the final environmental impact statement and the record of decision, these are legal documents.
- This is why we're encouraging you and your neighbors to be a part of these conversations because this is a legal official document. We want to make sure, as we close out this phase of the CAC and start transitioning to the project oversight committee, that what we've agreed upon on this phase. We won't necessarily have the opportunity to change it. Whatever is agreed upon in this phase of the CAC and the development of these commitments, they're going to be committed to, and then the POC has got to oversee them.

CAC Member: Will it start in April, June, May?

Project Team Member:

- Between now and April, we are working to revise and finalize every component of the mitigation plan, whether it is the education and workforce components, parks and recreation, or community infrastructure enhancement. All of those components are being refined over the next three months. We're going to submit the final environmental impact statement as well as the final version of the mitigation plan for agency review (that's SCDOT initially, then the federal highway and some of the other government organizations) starting around April 23rd. The goal again is to finalize these various components before then.
- After April, we are hoping that the CAC has made a determination that you want to move forward and create your own advocacy organization. If that is the case, after April, the training will begin. A lot of what we typically do is from CAC standpoint. So the focus on the mitigation plan will start transitioning to training you all. Training would ultimately start being initiated after April and last thru October. Based on our current schedule, the final EIS, environmental impact statement, and the record of decision are scheduled to be completed and approved, assigned, and official, by the end of October.
- The CAC's responsibilities officially end in October. And it is officially approved as part of the final environmental impact statement. After October, the project oversight committee will be responsible for seeing the implementation of the various components of the mitigation plan when design and development of community centers begin. The CAC will be briefed on the design process as we start implementing the components of the community infrastructure enhancement plan agreed upon between now and April. As design and construction and design begins, you will be briefed. The POC will also be briefed on the education and scholarship programs.
- Beginning in October, the POC will be the official organization responsible or involved in the project, and will be briefed quarterly by SCDOT and other government agencies on the various project components.

Project Team Member:

- CAC members who are still interested in participating in the College Aid Initiative and organizational training can still join those groups. I will send the invitation for those committee discussions first of next week.

Project Team Member:

- We are asking CAC members to recommend to the project team committee members who may be beneficial to the POC and would benefit from the training. We are depending on CAC members to help identify participants for the POC. We will contact them, educate them on the program and process, provide them with all relevant project materials, and make sure that they are incorporated into any future trainings.

Summary of Recent EJ Outreach Efforts/EJCMP Comment Review

Project Team Member:

- The next few pages of your packet are simply summaries of the information we've gotten back from the online and paper versions of the mitigation strategy and the mitigation plan. It seems that the responses we're getting are consistent with everything the CAC has shared in previous meetings.
- A significant statement from survey participants was that right-of-way specialists help them understand fair market value if they are going to lose their homes. Residents want to know if it is fair for them to make home improvements and see any greater return on my investment, if they are going to be displaced or relocated. They want to understand the benefit of the relocation package.
- We also received feedback from residents who will remain in place. They want to know what affordable housing looks like in my area. Sixty-four percent of residents who completed the survey live in the affected communities. Some very early on were giving us feedback online that if they visited the project website, they saw the online survey and they might not have necessarily lived in the impacted area, but they provided some feedback there as well. The parks and the community center is being replaced, the amenities and the housing option are still very important parts of the conversation that we're having.
- We are getting agreement from those who are completing the surveys with the CAC members.
- We heard you, and now we hear from the community when they say if their homes are going to be impacted, they do want to live as close to, within, or near the neighborhood from which they would be displaced. The preference is single family dwellings, but if multi-family dwellings had to be a replacement option, they wanted them to be within or near the community. We still hear that basketball courts are important. So that is an element that is included in the mock-up of the potential replacement community center as opposed to some of the other options that included tennis courts, volleyball courts, and other activities and outside activities.
- Survey participants prefer to receive project information by mail. Other options included text messaging, emails and phone calls. But the overwhelming response here was that they prefer to get information by mail.
- Sidewalks with curbs and gutters was the more important of the infrastructure improvements. Others included sidewalks, bike and pedestrian trails, and storm water management.
- We asked you to come to the meeting and be prepared to discuss if and how you would like to respond to the whole mitigation plan.

Facilitator:

- The question has been posed as to how we come together at the end of this process, the CAC members, and put your stamp of approval, so to speak on the mitigation document. The project team would like to ask whether or not the CAC would be interested in developing and presenting a formal response that comes from all of the CAC members that would be included in the mitigation plan, just to say that you have reviewed the process. You have represented the community and you have

provided feedback and that you believe South Carolina DOT has listened to and incorporated your advice, opinions, guidance in this document and in the plans for infrastructure improvement. So one of the things to remember is that you've met all of this time to provide your feedback.

- This is an opportunity for the CAC to use this as culminating act, that puts your stamp on the work that you've done over this time. I want to open the floor to see if CAC members are interested in developing a letter. It can be whatever format you all may think is necessary to include in the document that either you sign off on as a group or you can sign off individually. But I want to offer to help CAC members if you're interested in having a meeting to see how that type of letter would be worded, and to determine what you see or what you believe might be most acceptable to the CAC members and what you feel most comfortable with in presentation. We would also need to discuss how you present that document to the public, because this is a public document.
- We discussed earlier that by the end of April, the project team will be submitting a final mitigation plan to South Carolina DOT and FHWA. As CAC members, you have an opportunity to provide a written statement. It does not have to be a multi-page document. It can be something as simple as a letter to be included in that document to say the I-526 LCC West CAC has met for the past 14 months as a part of the process. You might give dates and outline some of the items that you have discussed. You can use the survey information, or you can talk about those things that have been most critical to this group such as the recreation center, programming, certainly infrastructure issues. By then, you will have gone through the CIEP. And you can address some of the highlights that you feel make this document a success or something acceptable for the community. That's just your way of perhaps, and I'm not telling you to do this, but just offering that as an option to put your stamp of approval on the mitigation plan, because this becomes a part of the formal document. And it's your way of saying, 'this is our contribution to the process that we have actually gone through this process. We've gone to the meetings. We've had conversations outside of the meetings. We've worked with Maximum Consulting on helping to develop new ways or create new ways of communicating with the larger community. We have given good feedback in helping SCDOT pull this mitigation plan together. It's just a letter that shows we did our part as the community, and we feel like this is a good document.'

Project Team Member:

And it might be good to describe what it's not. It's not a document that says you agree with everything. It doesn't mean that you have to say 'I'm giving a stamp of approval and everything in here reflects everything I want,' or anything like that. If you want to say whatever you want to say. I don't want to assume or put words in your mouth, but you definitely have an opportunity to indicate that either things were done in an acceptable fashion, what is presented as the final document is vetted through this group, or however you want to word it. But it's not that you're walking out the door saying that FHWA did everything we said, and we fully agree.

Facilitator: That's a great point. I would piggyback on that to say it more of a way of acknowledging the process more so than approving the document.

CAC Member:

You're saying all the pros but then I'm not hearing any cons that we've identified. If we do this, it should include the pros and the cons about what we have done for the past 14 months.

Project Team Member:

Right. I was calling it a bit of a preface for the actual EJ Mitigation Plan. That is when you get you read a book. It's got the little preface, but it's like a foreword. Because the mitigation plan is an appendix to a

larger document, but it is of all the other little chapters at the end of the whole document. The others are like technical documents, but this reflects the people, the heart of what you all have invested all of your time and energy in. And the opportunity is there for you to write that, or craft that narrative so that your presence is not negated by just a whole bunch of pages. You were here. You were working out and you have an opportunity to say we are the group that maybe laid some of the foundation for the community to come back and support or give feedback on.

Project Team Member:

- And let me just add in response to Ms. Anderson's comment about the 'bad.' The plan isn't official yet. We are looking for you all to continue to work toward April to help us still tweak the plan. If there are still areas that we need to focus on and help make adjustments, we need to identify those and make sure, if they can be addressed completely, to do that. If there's some form of middle ground that may need to be met based on the things you all feel like you still want to see versus what is in the legal framework for SC DOT and FHWA to do, then we need to have those discussions. Ideally, the way I would hope that this happens is that there continues to be dialogue about what needs to be tweaked through April.
- Make sure you are being participants in the community infrastructure enhancement plan. Making sure we're addressing those components as well, so that as we approach April, the advisory council is much more comfortable. Again, providing a response to a plan that they still have the opportunity to continue to provide feedback and work with their neighbors to tweak. Ideally, what would go in the final version of the mitigation plan, is that you're adding a preface to a document that you molded and continue to mold for the next three months. I'm not asking, or we're not asking for you all to approve it today.

Project Manager:

If the CAC is not comfortable with that yet, there should be an interim step. The comment period is not going to close until next Friday. And so after that comment period closes, we will assimilate all the comments that we received and present that to the CAC so they can see what their neighbors are saying in regards to the plan. If after we review that and we talk about any potential changes in the plan, there is something that if the CAC is not comfortable, what's in the plan and they want a change to the plan, then maybe a step before you advocate for the plan is to make that request to DOT as a group, as a body, that we feel like these are... or we don't feel the plan is there yet. We don't feel it's fair yet. And these are the changes that we would recommend or request as a council, based on the community's comments and our input. And let's not ask them to advocate for a plan that they're not comfortable with yet.

Facilitator:

And I have a question for Ms. Angela, too. When you say 'the good and the bad,' are you talking about the actual plan that will be submitted, or are you making reference to the process that we've gone through?

Project Team Member:

Just for clarification, she said 'pros and cons,' which is just a little bit different from 'good and bad.'

CAC Member:

In everything, there is a pro and there is a con. We can't say everything that's been done is 100% agreeable or good.

Project Team Member:

You know when to bend, you know when you had to compromise, is what you were saying earlier.

CAC Member:

We know that some things, we're going to have to compromise on. There's going to be some compromise in every part of this mitigation. So that's why I was saying 'pros and cons.' Everything is not going to go 100%. The highway is not going to be 100% straight. Somewhere, there's always going to be a counter. So, that's why I said 'pros and cons.'

Project Team Member: So, the cons would be where we would have to tweak.

Facilitator:

Based on the project team's feedback, if the comment period ends in the middle of January and the document is to be submitted to South Carolina DOT and FHWA near the end of April, what would the expectation be in terms of that timeline of providing feedback to CAC members and giving them an opportunity to review it and synthesize their comments? What would the expectation be for some sort of a reasonable timeline on them getting together, collectively, and if they so wish to do, to provide a formal response?

SCDOT Project Lead:

- I think we would need something in February. One of the goals of having a formal letter or formal document from the CAC at that point is really just to be able to document what the CAC's reaction is to the proposed mitigation plan. Right now, I think it's one of the challenges the project team kind of faces is being able to take all the meeting minutes and put that into a document to convey what the CAC's concerns are with the proposed mitigation plan. Given that the timeline and our current schedule, trying to package up everything, you're moving into later in the spring. I think the best step would be to provide information to the CAC in February. Let them know about all the comments that we have heard through the comment period from the community. Give the CAC an opportunity to absorb that information. And then, if the CAC is interested, provide your comments and concerns, including the pros and the cons.
- We definitely are not looking for an endorsement. We're kind of just looking for a more formal document that summarizes all of your concerns, good or bad associated with the proposed mitigation plan. And the reason I say February is that gives us an opportunity, the project team, to identify those areas where we can improve the plan based on your comments and concerns.

Facilitator:

The letter does not necessarily need to be included as a part of the final document? That is something that you all would like to receive earlier in the process? Are we looking at February, which is almost two months before or a little over two months, before that April deadline, so that you have time to respond to the comments? This is not necessarily a request that the CAC give you a final response that goes in the final document, is that correct?

SCDOT Project Lead:

One is prepared at this interim step. And then one that is kind of the final reaction to our final mitigation plan. So, that would occur later in the process.

Project Team Member:

He essentially sees two letters, one as an interim in response to what we get as feedback from the community and one that is the final reaction to the mitigation plan.

CAC Member:

Will there be one document coming from the CAC at the end or in the interim before this report is finalized?

Project Team Member:

What was described is what we will do in the public comment period. Keep in mind, we pushed a lot of information out to the community in October. So taking what we have collected as information from October to the end of next week, summarizing that, getting it back to you so you can see just how those comments impacted the actual documents, the mitigation plan and then you all responding to that. That was the interim letter that he referred to, just processing what you've done and how the community has responded, isolated to the mitigation plan work. And maybe some infrastructure related stuff that might be impacts to the neighborhood, because it might not solely be just the document itself. And then once we visit that information, visit your response to that information, react to it, make adjustments, make improvements to the mitigation plan and present it back to you. Then your final reaction. That will be your second letter.

CAC Member: So then, that's two letters?

Project Team Member: That's two letters.

CAC Member:

And so when I looked at it from that perspective, I don't have to have a black, white, yes, no or pro, con. I can come in consensus with you that we work as a team to facilitate what you brought to this community. And I don't mind doing that, but I was getting a little uneasy when you were presenting it. She'll ask us to come off with a forward or acknowledging whatever you want to say. Pro, con whatever about the process. But I can come to after reviewing at an interim point, I could come to a final forward of whatever you want to call the letter as agreeing on the consensus. Because even when we get to the final, when I look at it, I may not be ready to say, "Okay, you know what? I can put a stamp of approval and write this customer friendly comment to you." Maybe I won't be there then, but I can come to consensus that we work through the process and I can live with whatever, as a team, as a group that we came up with.

Project Team Member:

Did you all get that clearly?

Facilitator/Project Team Member:

Yes ma'am.

CAC Member:

I now see on the wall what appears to be the preferred? I see the other maps missing and it appears if I see correctly, at Rivers Avenue, we are now removing, or at least this is the preferred or removing the access ramps to I-26 from Rivers. Correct? Is that what I understand?

Project Team Member: Yes.

CAC Member:

So here's my next question. Does anybody remember Mall Drive before I-526 was constructed and connected to Rivers Avenue? At that time, in 1983, '84, '85, Mall Drive was a bottleneck before made changes to Remount Road. Remount Road now has an access. So this means thousands of cars will now they be diverting to Montague, which is awful, trying to get to Centre Point, Walmart, all of that community and Remount Road will also be diverted with thousands of cars from the Mount Pleasant side of I-26 to even access on major Centre Point. At the end of this project, when construction is complete, those two roads are going to be overwhelmed with additional traffic. Is there a contingency plan for this, after this is completed to relieve the traffic on those two roads?

Project Team Member:

Is there a contingency plan to relieve congestion on Montague and Mall Drive with the removal of Remount?

CAC Member:

The only two access roads have been on this side to get to the most major center we have - Mall Walmart, Sam's. That is going to be one cluster when they get done. And it will be regretted, guaranteed.

CAC Member:

According to the other ramp that was originally out there, when I first came in to check on the project, if you are coming from I-26, you weren't going to be able to come off of I-526 to get to where we live anyway. We were losing that. And we still have to come off of Mall Drive on Montague. So, that was already established when we first started. And my concern was the exit for coming out of Russelldale to get onto I-526.

CAC Member:

They took it out.

Project Manager:

The ramps are not being removed. You will still be able to access I-526. What you will not be able to do is get directly on I-26 at that I-526 interchange. So if you are going from Rivers to I-26, you will have to go up to Remount or go down to Montague.

CAC Member:

You can get on I-526, but you can't go to I-26, in either direction. In other words, you can't come from Ashley Phosphate to I-526 and get off at Rivers, any further from here. That means you have to go to Mall Drive to get to Rivers Avenue, or you have to come from Remount Road to get to Rivers and the same way back on I-26. You have to go to Remount Road. If I want to go from Rivers Avenue and get on I-26 and go to Ashley Phosphate, for example, I have to go Remount Road or backtrack to Mall Drive in order to do that. So what that means is you're going to have an excessive amount of cars that want to go the direction of I-26. You're going to have to get there via Mall Drive or Remount Road, or even go down to Aviation. And we have a lot of community on this side of that highway that will move towards those on and off ramps like it was back in the 1980s. We're returning back right now with that. With that map, we're going back to the early '80s. That will congest those two roads unmercifully.

Project Team Member:

That's an excellent comment for the public comment period, too.

Project Team Lead:

You can get on from Rivers to get on I-526, go to the mall that way via International. That is not being changed. So the issue about, 'can I get to Sam's and Walmart, that retail cluster via Rivers,' yes, you can. It's only the connection to I-26. The volume going directly from Rivers to I-26 really is not that huge at I-526, but it is a very difficult movement to allow and make the interchange work. It also eats into the neighborhood by a pretty good bit. And that's why the preferred design ended up the way it did. So we do have other ideas of how we can make modifications to the adjacent intersections up and down Rivers to allow that access to I-26. I would be happy to talk with you offline, if you'd like, specifically to share how that occurred. And also the number of volume, because we have the trips counted and we also have the forecasted trips identified that makes that movement. Does that make sense?

CAC Member: Are there other ideas for that on the other exchanges to take over that flow?

Project Team Lead: Yes, sir.

Project Team Member:

On the project website is a fly-over, and we can look at that here and then walk through the maps, too, as if we were literally driving it. But it's that kind of feedback that definitely is valuable in this public comment period. So it's noted in our meeting notes, but also be a very good idea to submit it during this next week. We have forms on site. We can provide, or I can show you how to do it online.

CAC Member:

As long as you are identifying the additional flow towards those two possible ways to get on I-26, going either direction.

Project Team Lead:

And I'd be happy to follow up with you, if that's okay.

CAC Member:

That would be fine. Yes, sir.

Facilitator:

Once they get all of the comments back after the comment period, and they've had an opportunity to review, is it then that they would like to make a decision about providing a response or are they committing today to an interim and final response?

Project Team Member:

So we've got an affirmative on our end.

Facilitator:

And I don't know who's on the call. Is that something that you might be able to follow up on and make sure that we've gotten feedback from everyone? I think from my end, I just want to make sure that if that is something that you're interested in that we are getting a good gauge on what type of support they might want or need in pulling the interim letter together.

Project Team Member: I can follow up.

Update to the EJ Outreach Strategy

Project Team Member:

- We are revisiting the outreach strategy. It is a living document because many of the initial ideas have been modified based on the CAC's feedback. We have even noted additional ideas during today's meeting. If there are other ideas that you all may have, we certainly appreciate those.
- Not only are we planning to have the discussed workshop sessions and we will follow up on the conversation of having people onsite routinely to discuss the elements of the community infrastructure enhancement plan commitment. Safety is first, but if there are ideas that we haven't visited, we welcome small group discussions. We don't want to miss an opportunity to be productive and get the feedback that we need on the elements of community improvements, parts of the mitigation plan, or the community history preservation study.
- Other ideas are greatly appreciated with regard to increasing our engagement with the residents. Some of the useful feedback the CAC has provided today was regarding use of visuals like billboards, yard signs, involving younger residents, more routinely engaging elected officials and faith-based and religious organizations.

On-going/Future Outreach Update

Project Team Member:

- Everyone should have received Happy New Year postcards, in the impacted communities and some just outside of the communities, based on the mail route. We hope to see some responses through online submissions of the mitigation plan survey, as well as the paper copies.
- The project team can provide paper copies of the survey or mail them to the residents individually. We don't want to lose the opportunity in the next seven days to get, as much feedback as we can. The online version will shut down by first thing Saturday morning.
- The project team has to begin processing and synthesizing the information to get it back to you so that you can visit the concept of an interim response to the feedback.
- Regarding the December Community Office statistics, we had 14 visitors to the office. We are still receiving incoming calls and making outgoing calls. The voicemail box received five messages, all of which were responded to. We also received three text messages with regard to the project. That component of the community office stats is tracked outside of the office because the text responses come through different teams.
- We had an online public hearing where we had two commenters. We are not being flooded, but there has been a good bit of feedback that we are tracking through the online option.
- We have a live chat session that's available every day through next Friday. If people visit the online hearing, they can look at the mitigation plan there, too, and have an opportunity to chat with someone on the project team, real-time. We encourage you to encourage your neighbors to engage.

CAC Member: You are still receiving any mail-outs and responses?

Project Team Meeting:

- Yes, through next Friday. We used Charleston County's GIS data and tax information to send the survey to property owners, not just the residents. We sent out the same packets to property owners.

The only thing that wasn't included was the magnet that you all got as resources in that October mailing. But, a cover letter from Joy, the infographic describing what the mitigation plan elements are, the actual paper survey and a self-addressed stamped envelope to return it to the office were included. We sent out just under 425 surveys to property owners that would not have received them as residents in the neighborhoods.

CAC Member: Does that include landlords?

Project Team Member: Yes, and in case you know of anyone that owns multiple properties, we only sent them one. So we didn't send one for every property they own. For the sake of cost and being responsible, we sent them one packet.

Project Team Member:

Dr. Smith, will you speak to the events that were held in November and December where Maximum Consulting also went to various events and supported other community resource agencies?

Community Liaison:

I believe you included our numbers in your last report. Gwen, Mattese, Carolyn, and Clay continue to work on identifying specific partnerships. We are available if you think of any resources that you would like to have identified for you as individuals or for your neighborhoods.

Project Schedule and Milestone Review

Project Team Member:

- The project team is finalizing the environmental justice community mitigation plan so it can be incorporated into the final Environmental Impact Statement, which will be submitted to SCDOT for review by April 23, 2021. The project team needs to determine a time when the CAC can meet and provide the initial response to the mitigation plan.
- The project team will continue to work on the mitigation plan, and revisit it with the CAC to make sure they are in agreement with the components by April 23rd. The final EIS approval date is scheduled for October 2021. October is when the official transition to the project oversight committee will take place.
- We are currently establishing the POC to oversee the design and construction of these various components in October. Construction is scheduled to start in 2027.
- Right-of-way acquisition will take place between 2023 and 2027.

Summary and Next Steps

Facilitator wrap-up: If CAC members are interested in participating on the POC or would like to sign up for organizational training, please let the project team know. The CAC will develop interim and final responses to the mitigation plan. Look for emails on the upcoming CIEP workshop. CAC recommends duplication and increased frequency of project material distribution.

CAC Meeting #16 is scheduled for February 6, 2021 at 10:00 AM. Location TBD.