

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Wendy Rampson, Planning Manager

SUBJECT: Update on Re-imagine Washtenaw Corridor Improvement Study Resolution

DATE: April 20, 2015

On February 17, 2015, City Council tabled the resolution of support for the Re-imagine Washtenaw Corridor Improvement Study to provide staff with an opportunity to meet with businesses and residents in the corridor. On March 31, 2015 City staff hosted a public meeting with business owners and citizens to review the recommendations and the Study, answer questions and get feedback. The meeting summary is attached.

Responding to key issues raised at the public meeting, staff is providing additional information below.

Recent History of Corridor Improvements – Many of those attending the meeting were unaware of the work that had been done to date as part of Reimagine Washtenaw initiative. The following corridor improvements have taken place since the initiative began in 2009:

1. Construction of a .9 mile shared-use path on the north side of Washtenaw, west of Platt.
2. AAATA substantially increased weekday bus service for Route #4, stimulating a 40% increase in corridor transit ridership.
3. MDOT-funded the construction of a shared-use, non-motorized path from Yost/Arborland, under the US-23 interchange, to Hogback/Carpenter Road on both sides of Washtenaw Avenue.
4. Construction of Arbor Hills, which adhered to new City setback standards which included a 23 foot wide public access easement dedicated by the developer of Arbor Hills for transit and sidewalk improvements. This easement was dedicated without a cost to the City.
5. Installation of new traffic signal with pedestrian crossings at Platt Road as part of the Arbor Hills development project.
6. AAATA construction of enhanced transit stops at the Washtenaw/Pittsfield intersection (further enhancement currently proposed).

Phased Corridor Implementation – The Corridor Improvement Study provides a long term recommended cross-section for Washtenaw Avenue in the City of Ann Arbor (as well as other Re-imagine jurisdictions), that anticipates future transportation improvements such as a boulevard, bike lanes, and wider sidewalks. This proposed cross-section allows the City to make informed decisions as redevelopment proposals are presented over time. As with any long range plan, the study articulates an incremental approach to implement the plan.

Given the current lack of State funding, and the nature of the improvements called for, the Study recommends a phased approach to implementation. Most importantly, some improvements must occur prior to other improvements. For example, additional public right-of-way (ROW) must first be obtained from redeveloping properties before bicycle lanes and a median could be added. Additional transit enhancement, sidewalk gap closures, and possible mid-block crossings are also anticipated to take place well before a substantial change to the road cross section takes place. The acquisition of additional ROW is intended to give future decision makers more options.

Impact of Right-of-Way Dedication on Parcels – The City has historically requested dedication of ROW from developers on most major corridors in Ann Arbor. Developers have historically worked with the City to accommodate these requests which provide a public benefit of improved transportation and infrastructure systems. In the case of Arbor Hills Crossing, the City requested a total of 23' to be dedicated for public access, since the ROW of Washtenaw is narrow (mostly accommodates 5 travel lanes).

Additionally, the previous setback requirement of the C3 zoning district (zoning district for most parcels on this segment of Washtenaw Avenue) was 40 feet, which meant that after dedicating ROW, developers were not able to construct buildings or parking lots in the 40' front yard (the setback portion of the site). The current front setback requirement for parcels in the C3 district is 10' minimum and 25' maximum. Requesting that up to 25 feet of the front of a site be dedicated for ROW and requiring a minimum setback of 10' is actually a reduction of land that would have been previously requested prior to the reduction of required front setbacks.

Lane Width and Corridor Safety – The existing lane widths along the corridor are generally between 12 and 14 feet in width. The Corridor Improvement Study proposes 11 foot wide lanes, which MDOT has reviewed and accepted at this conceptual stage. MDOT recently approved 11 foot wide lanes along US-31 in Traverse City and US-31 in Grand Haven, both of which are comparable urban arterials in the State of Michigan. The conventional wisdom is that wider lanes must be safer. However, a prominent 2007 study by Potts, Harwood, and Richard entitled, "Relationship of Lane Width to Safety for Urban and Suburban Arterials," which included studies of over 1,000 roads with lanes widths between 9 and 13+ feet in both Minnesota and Michigan, states, "It is concluded from this research that there is no indication that crash frequencies increase as lane width decreases for arterial roadway segments or arterial intersection approaches."

Planned Short-Term Corridor Improvements in the City of Ann Arbor – A variety of improvements along the corridor are currently planned for near-term implementation. Those that pertain to the City of Ann Arbor, include:

1. Developer re-dedication of right-of-way as part of the Pittsfield Retail redevelopment (between Yost of Pittsfield, on the south side of Washtenaw), which will allow construction of an enhanced bus stop, or "Super Stop," by AAATA, as identified in the Corridor Improvement Study.
2. Evaluation of a non-motorized path along the south side of Washtenaw, east of Huron Parkway is currently in the scoping and planning phases as a way to improve transit

access and close the remaining sidewalk gap in this segment of the corridor. City Staff has analyzed the proposed long term cross section on this existing public parking lot and determined that the parking lot could be slightly reconfigured (reduced aisle width) and continue to function in a manner similar as it does today.

3. Closure of a small sidewalk gap on the south side of the corridor, immediately west of Huron Parkway.
4. Coordinate with the Project Management Services Unit to develop access management requirements for the corridor.
5. Coordination with MDOT on signal timing at the Pittsfield/Washtenaw intersection to facilitate pedestrian crossings between the eastbound and westbound AAATA stops.
6. Continue to periodically update signal progression timing throughout the corridor, in coordination with the Washtenaw County Road Commission and MDOT.
7. Work with AAATA in its on-going exploration to identify park and ride opportunities in the corridor, in partnership with the County and adjacent property owners.

Implications of Not Approving the Resolution of Support – MDOT concurs with the Study's findings and has indicated a desire for each of the four Reimagine Washtenaw communities to support the Study. MDOT places value on multi-jurisdictional planning efforts and encourages inter-jurisdictional cooperation. Declining to endorse the Study may reduce the likelihood of some future investments into Ann Arbor's portion of the corridor, or put at risk MDOT's future support for desired improvements within the other three partner jurisdictions.

Prepared by the City of Ann Arbor Planning & Development Services Unit and
Washtenaw County Office of Economic Development
April 16, 2015

Attachment: March 31 Meeting Summary

**Reimagine Washtenaw
Merchant Meeting Summary
March 31, 2015**

Jeff Kahan, Ann Arbor Planning, and Nathan Voght, Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development, provided background on the Reimagine Washtenaw initiative and the proposed Ann Arbor City Council resolution in support of the Corridor Improvement Study. Kari Martin and Andy Hodges from MDOT were also present to respond to questions.

Approximately 25 individuals were in attendance. The list of attendees is provided at the end of this summary. Questions and comments from the meeting are summarized below, grouped by issue.

Traffic signal priority for buses

Resident Comment: Allowing priority at signals for buses could delay movement on north-south streets.

Response: Signal priority would only be available for buses running behind schedule, so it shouldn't have a significant impact on north-south streets. However, some additional delay from north/south streets will likely occur in the long term, as a result of future implementation of the overall corridor plan, given the community's desire to reduce congestion on Washtenaw Ave.

Traffic signal coordination along the corridor

Merchant Question: Has coordination of signals along the entire Washtenaw corridor has been completed?

Response: The detailed transportation modeling in the Corridor Improvement Study suggested significant benefits can be derived from additional optimization. Traffic signal optimization will be implemented over time, as more detailed analysis is done. MDOT is also planning some signal modernization and optimization in the near-term, east of US-23.

Width of right-of-way in relation to existing buildings

Resident Comment: There is insufficient room along Arbor Hill Crossing to allow for a median. The sidewalk will be next to the building. It doesn't appear that everything planned can fit.

Response: The City obtained a public access easement as part of the site plan approval for Arbor Hills Crossing. Additional right-of-way will need to be obtained from the north side.

Resident Question: What is the width Washtenaw in the Arbor Hills Crossing segment?

Response: The right-of-way in this area currently is 80 feet, which falls roughly at the curb line on the south side (exclusive of the additional 23 ft. easement dedicated by Arbor Hills Crossing).

Councilmember Question: The drawing in the Appendix shows the Arbor Hills Crossing buildings in the proposed right-of-way.

Response: The drawing reflects the previous (now demolished) buildings because the drawing was developed before Arbor Hills Crossing was built.

Merchant Question: Isn't the building at Pittsfield Retail being moved forward?

Response: The developer is proposing to keep the existing buildings and construct additions to connect them all. The front part of site along Washtenaw will be dedicated to provide additional right-of-way. Having the Corridor Improvement Plan in place would help in future redevelopment projects, so new buildings can be placed far enough back to allow for later improvements to the road.

Bicycle Lanes

Resident Comment: There needs to be a perspective about where it's appropriate to have on-road bicycle lanes. Washtenaw should be like other areas of the city where there is a sidewalk bicycle path, especially if lanes on the road are being narrowed.

Merchant Comment: Ann Arbor doesn't have a climate that allows for bicycle travel throughout the year, and streets like Liberty are not getting a lot of bicycle use. What is driving the need to install bicycle lanes?

Response: City Council has adopted a "Complete Streets" policy, which calls for sidewalks and separate on-road bicycle lanes when streets are being reconstructed. Having bicycle lanes on the road improves safety because bikes are more visible to drivers than on sidewalks, where drivers are not expecting them. Also, many residents are demanding more choice in their mode of transportation.

Merchant Question: There is 16 feet of width in this plan for bicycles. They will be fighting with bus traffic and snow shoved into the bike lane. Are these things taken into consideration?

Response: Yes, this is why the proposal includes a buffered bike lane.

Merchant Question: When this goes back to Council, will the resolution be asking for the blessing of a Complete Street policy?

Response: Council has already adopted a Complete Street policy.

Reduction of Lane Width

Resident Question: The travel lanes are now 14 feet wide. How wide would they be under these recommendations? How does this compare with Washtenaw closer in to campus, which seems very narrow.

Response: 11 foot lanes are proposed, which is MDOT's minimum. The segment of Washtenaw west of the study area has 10.5 foot lanes. Jackson Road has 12 foot lanes.

Resident Comment: Making lanes narrower will not relieve congestion. It will make traffic on Washtenaw unbearable and unattractive to people to shop in this area.

Response: Narrowing the traffic lanes from 14 or 12 ft. to 11 ft. is not intended to relieve congestion, rather, it will be part of the overall cross-section that is intended to move vehicular traffic more efficiently, reduce accidents, and improve non-motorized facilities. Reducing travel lanes to 11 feet does not reduce vehicle capacity of the street.

Merchant Comment: The lanes will be too narrow at 11 feet.

Response: Studies show that 11ft lanes are no less safe than wider ones. In fact, one study suggests they may be safer.

Proposed transit changes

Resident Question: What is a Super Stop?

Response: It's a bus stop with improved amenities that make it easier for transit users, and include things such as a shelter, digital route information and a bus pullout.

Resident Question: Are express bus lanes still under discussion?

Response: AAATA is exploring express bus service, but at this point, a dedicated lane is not proposed.

Merchant Question: Will there be a westbound Super Stop in front of Whole Foods? By the Pittsfield intersection?

Response: The plan proposes Super Stops in both locations. The westbound Pittsfield location would be just east of the intersection.

Zoning changes

Resident Question: How will these recommendations be included in zoning?

Response: The zoning ordinance requires that front setbacks be measured to the edge of the right-of-way for development projects. The zoning ordinance will be revised to require that building setbacks be measure from the future right-of-way line.

Proposed median concept

Resident Comment: The median looks pretty, but it could be narrower.

Merchant Question: How will a median decrease congestion if you do away with left turns?

Response: By limiting direct turns, you increase the "green light" time for east/west traffic. One exception that was incorporated in the modeling was the dual left turns for Huron Parkway that are proposed to be maintained in both directions.

Merchant Question: What is the stacking distance needed for the Michigan lefts?

Response: It depends on where they are located, but these will be reviewed by MDOT at an engineering drawing stage to make sure there are sufficient stacking areas.

Resident Comment: The center turn lane now allows 15-20 cars to make turns. If you get rid of that, it will spill over into the thru lane and reduce use of center turn lane for staging.

Response: MDOT will review for sufficient stacking in a deceleration taper at an engineering detail stage.

Councilmember Question: What is MDOT's plan for maintaining medians? MDOT has never maintained the existing median islands.

Response: MDOT would address maintenance through discussion as the engineering plans are developed.

Councilmember Question: Are the proposed Michigan Left turn-around lane widths adequate for a commercial truck route?

Response: Part of an MDOT's responsibility for trunklines is to accommodate trucks and buses. From an operational standpoint, they prefer boulevards. A wide median is required to accommodate trucks.

Merchant Question: Would a boulevard reduce trips?

Response: No, but it would help with east/west traffic flow on the street.

Impact of additional right-of-way on parking

Resident Question: The presentation noted that approximately 25 feet extra feet are needed on each side, except the south? Why not the south?

Response: For the segment east of Huron Parkway, the City already has adequate public right-of-way on the south side.

Merchant Question: The right-of-way in this area is used by Arlington Square and other adjacent buildings for parking. When Huron Parkway was widened for the intersection improvements, Arlington Square lost parking. Would this plan result in more lost parking?

Response: This area currently has an over-wide aisle that can be narrowed, while keeping parking on both sides.

Merchant Comment: The employees of the collision shop across the street park on the south side and cross the street Employees park and cross street.

Councilmember Question: Can the recommendations of this plan be implemented when not adjacent property is not being redeveloped?

Response: Improvements like traffic signal timing, sidewalks, curb-cut consolidation, and others may be implementable prior to major redevelopment. A "do nothing" approach doesn't make sense along Washtenaw, given the increases in projected traffic. As pieces of the plan are implemented, the mosaic will slowly be pieced together. The plan will be phased over time, and major elements, such as bike lanes, would have to be towards the end. The point is to have a plan that all ReImagined stakeholders are working towards collaboratively. Obtaining right-of-way will give decision makers more options in the future.

General comments

Resident: I am not against the entire concept, but it seems so immutable and subject to change.

Resident: Reimagine Washtenaw was a staff driven process. When meetings were held, we were told what to do. There is a lack of data for these recommendations, and not enough time has been provided to review them. For instance, where are motorists on Washtenaw coming from and going to? We are not going to mitigate traffic unless the economy collapses. The recommendations are based on a fantasy that people are going to bike and walk to do errands. People don't do that in real world, they combine several trips. These changes will seriously inconvenience access. Michigan lefts work best on corridors that aren't congested. They will make it more difficult to get in and out of Merchants. The whole notion of prioritizing buses will deprioritize cars. This is an anti-auto plan. Why not work with MDOT to coordinate traffic lights? Let's give the community more time to review the data and have a discussion.

Resident: The problem is not the left hand lane, it's the right hand land, which is slowed by buses and right hand turns.

Merchant: Many of the improvements promoted by Reimagine Washtenaw are a good thing. There are many elements in the plan that business owners have supported since the beginning. Connecting sidewalks has resulted in more pedestrians in the area. With bike lanes, we don't want to put the cart before the horse. More commuter lots would help. Getting bikes off the sidewalk is important. We need a traffic plan for Arborland. Bus pull-offs are helpful. Arbor Hills works well, as will the proposed Pittsfield Retail. We should do the most cost effective improvements before investing \$3 million in other things. Redevelopment over a gradual period of time should add greenspace and bring buildings closer to the street. How do you acquire property to the north when there is parking? Slip lanes scare him to go south on Huron Parkway. More housing would be positive. I believe we can work together to make this a great plan.

Resident: I have grave concern about adding bicycle lanes on the street. The plan should consider shared bike lanes with sidewalks.

Merchant: The Corridor Study should put a priority on congestion. Why not add more lanes?

Resident: It's already difficult to get into businesses with two lanes. Adding a third lane seems very dangerous and would make it even harder to access the businesses.

MDOT Representative: MDOT has been a partner since the start of the project. They have asked for resolution of support to demonstrate that all of the communities are on board. Ultimately, to do something like a boulevard, it would take more study and process. The NEPA evaluation would need to take place to move this forward. This process is similar to what MDOT did on M-59 near Tanger Outlet Mall. The first step is ROW acquisition, as necessary, since this can be pretty expensive. There currently are no plans to do anything on Washtenaw. If funding becomes available, MDOT would look to this plan.

Attendance

Name	Representing
Bob + Nancy Meader	Owners of building in corridor
Bob Simdnl	Conlin travel
Ilize Meija-Ham	Owner of Zoey and Joey
Silva Butterer	Owner of 3380-3386 Washtenaw
Karmen Butterer Saran	Owner of 3380-3386 Washtenaw
Nadi Ajilouny	Owner of Arlington Square
Jim Walker	National Motorist Association
Tony Derezinski	Citizen
Julie Grand	City Council
Kirk Westphal	City Council
Jane Lumm	City Council
Michael Roddy	Paesano (3411 Washtenaw)
Michael Homel	Resident (Woodcreek)
Nina Homel	Resident (Woodcreek)
Jane Heineken	Resident (woodcreek)
Kym London	Woodcreek Homeowners president
Maryann Nielsen Nisley	Manager at Whole Foods Market
Don Salberg	Citizen
Eric Barnes	Owner of Ace-Barnes Hardware
DeWight Plotner	Owner of Wheels in Motion
Business Representative	New Pet Store