

Plan Lee Highway (PLH) Working Group (WG) Meeting Summary

March 21, 2019; 8:30 – 10:30 am

2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Room 311

Subject: Community Forum and Community Kick Off Debrief and Phase 1 Schedule

WG Members in attendance: Paul Holland (Chair), Sandra Chesrown, Jim Lantelme, Richard Price, Scott Pedowitz, Ginger Brown, Erik Berkey

Staff Team Members in attendance: Heidi Mitter, Jill Hunger, Joel Franklin, Zach Larnard, Tim Murphy, Naudy Martinez, Serena Bollinger, Leon Vignes, Kellie Brown, Jennifer Smith and Natasha Alfonso-Ahmed

Meeting Overview

- Agenda
- Welcome and opening remarks provided by WG Chair.
- Staff shared information on the PLH process, community engagement strategy and schedule for [Phase 1](#). Staff also communicated key findings from the [Summary Report](#) which details community input received at the Kick Off events held in January (first Community Forum (CF) meeting) and February (Community Kick Off meeting), and preliminary questions that would be used during follow-up community discussions based on this input.

Discussion Topics

The WG held a discussion on several topics including the role of the CF and WG in the PLH process, the community engagement strategy and schedule (including key milestones, deliverables and events) for Phase 1, the draft Summary Report of the Kick Off events and meeting times for future WG meetings. The following comments and questions were raised:

Community Engagement Strategy

- The CF Chair and Vice-Chair look forward to continuing to meet with CF members, particularly those that are new to the planning process in Arlington.
- In terms of broad community engagement, WG members suggested further outreach to parent groups. Strategies suggested included PTA engagement, material distribution through School Talk, and talking to principals.
- The WG requested that staff provide the CAs short and periodic study updates that can be used easily inserted into CA newsletters. Staff is working on a periodic PLH newsletter. The material from the newsletter should be easy to read and can be the basis for what is used in CA newsletters.
- The WG suggested that follow up focus groups include a diverse mix of participants representing both residents, property owners, and business owners. Staff indicated this approach is already underway, and further steps will be taken to reach wider audiences.

Schedule for Phase 1

- There were questions about the meeting dates for the schedule moving forward, which staff clarified will be added to the website as locations and specific times are confirmed. Staff explained that the main purpose of the schedule is to provide a general sense of the steps in the process (for Phase 1), expected outcomes and deliverables, and when events will be held to provide opportunities for various groups (WG, CF, focus groups, public) to engage in the planning process. Staff further explained that many events are planned around the expected completion date for the main deliverables in Phase 1, which are subject to change. If there is a shift in the completion date for a deliverable, the event dates may change as well. As the process is realized and meeting venues are secured, the specific meeting/event date will be posted on the project web site, and communicated in other multiple ways (i.e., email, NextDoor for large events, etc.). Meeting materials will be posted once available.
- Overall there were no issues raised with the proposed sequence of events on the schedule for Phase 1.

Phase 1 Existing Conditions Analysis

- Several specific questions were raised about issues to be addressed in the Existing Conditions Analysis report, including whether detailed demographic data would be included for specific sub-areas within the planning boundary to further explain the differences between subareas, as well as information about schools within, and in close proximity to, the planning boundary. Staff confirmed that demographic data and school data will be provided and noted that staff will inquire about the level of demographic detail that can be provided on a sub-area basis.

Draft Summary Report of Community Input (Received at Kick Off Events)

General Comments and Questions

- There was agreement that the draft Summary Report of Community Input (received at the Kick Off events) accurately captured the range of perspectives, issues, questions, and comments shared by participants at the Kick Off events.
- Some WG members noted that the public comments are very wide ranging and that it may be a daunting task to reach agreement on several issues.
- A question was raised about how many non-residents participated in the Community kick off meeting and if the perspectives of non-residents were noted in any of the comments about the role of the corridor for commuting. Staff noted sign-in sheets did not request address information, however, this can be a consideration moving forward. Some indicated that business and commercial property owners may have been in attendance, who may not reside within Arlington. Staff also noted that there is interest in conducting an on-line survey for issues needing further understanding, in which the participant neighborhood/County of residence would be requested to aid in interpreting results. This would likely be an optional response in a survey.

Specific Comments on Material Contained in the Kick Off Summary: Key takeaways and potential questions for future community discussions on the 9 Key Planning Elements

Land Use

- What does the comment “site consolidation limits development potential” imply? Staff will review original comment to see if any additional clarification can be offered. Staff mentioned an existing Land Use policy that restricts consolidation of properties in neighborhoods for sale to developers.
- The WG acknowledged that there did not appear to be many comments on schools within the context of land use, which prompted a question if parents of school age children were well represented at the kick off meeting. Staff noted that there were several comments about schools dispersed amongst the different Planning Elements.

Housing

- What is limiting housing from a construction perspective? The WG stated this would be another good topic for an educational forum and some suggested that developers and builders should be invited to speak. It was noted that the LHA held an educational forum on this topic in the past and it was well attended.

Economic Vitality

- There was discussion about the definition of “affordable retail”. The term “affordable” can signify County subsidy for retail, which is not something that the County supports. Staff noted that the County’s role in supporting retail is through training and skill building. One of the main challenges for many small businesses is having poor or no credit history and/or track record which can be a barrier to finding retail space.
- Staff also noted that the key to making retail affordable is not by adjusting the price per square foot, but rather providing a range of sites and size of spaces to support small, local retailers that do not need as much square footage as larger, chain retailers.
- A WG member commented that large format retailers are now expanding their portfolio by creating smaller footprint stores that “fit” into more urban locations, and suggested this trend be considered as part of the study.
- It was acknowledged that people are very worried about losing small businesses and having a diversity of retail is critical to planning success.

Transportation

- Some WG members noted that it is important to be mindful that we do not stigmatize driving because some people will still rely on driving as a primary, and in some circumstances, singular, mode of transportation.
- It was also noted that driving is important for businesses and that removing the opportunity for people to drive to a business and park can impact the success of businesses. The WG stated that, regardless, it is important to continue to promote the principles of sound planning associated with “smart growth”.
- It was noted that there are different perspectives on what the preferred modes of travel are and that it will depend on whether residents live further west or further east. It was also noted that this will be important to evaluate moving forward.

- It was mentioned that we need to be mindful that there is a tradeoff between bus frequency and coverage.
- It was stressed that north-south connections are also important to connect people to/from Lee Highway.
- Within the context of educational forums, there was discussion about the improvements to I-66 and that it is unclear whether this has negatively impacted the corridor. It was suggested that future educational forums on transportation be about more than just I-66. Staff noted that this is part of the existing conditions analysis. Several questions were also raised to understand the allocation and outcomes of recent rounds of funding, for projects resulting from the I-66 toll money and if future funding will be allocated for improvements along Lee Highway. Staff noted that a list of the projects previously funded and those recommended for funding in the next cycle will be provided.

Public Spaces

- There was a discussion about how public spaces will be addressed in the planning process. Staff noted that public spaces will be planned for as a network-wide element, looking comprehensively at where spaces are needed and where opportunities exist within the context of the entire corridor.
- The WG asked specifically, if areas outside of the core study area (including Cherrydale and East Falls Church) will be evaluated to identify opportunities for open space. Staff commented that those areas will be evaluated to provide a comprehensive review of public spaces that are important for the overall network to function.
- The WG acknowledged that there did not appear to be many public comments on art in this category. It was noted, however, a few comments on art were within the creative economy category.

Building Form, Height and Urban Design

- WG members noted that it will be important to ask the community questions about building form and height that help identify specifically what and where the concerns for height and density are and why.
- It was also noted that it is very important to post questions in a way that elicit information about what the goals for each area are (i.e. walkability, small business preservation, more affordable housing) and *then* determine how we can achieve those goals through building form and height.

History and Culture

- WG members noted the importance of historically and culturally significant neighborhoods, how they are recognized, and careful planning is needed to ensure their identity is preserved. It was also noted that it is important to understand why and how certain neighborhoods have changed over the years and identify ways to respond to those conditions and circumstances appropriately.

Sustainability – Environment

- It was noted that the scope for this element should be broadened, so that it is not only about “greening” Lee Highway but also about resiliency, such as storm water management issues. The question of climate change and how to plan for major weather events presents a major opportunity to explore new and innovative ideas.
- It was also noted that developing a plan for trees will be a very important aspect of this plan, including how to address the need to reforest areas where the natural lifespan of trees is coming to an end.

Public Facilities

- APS staff suggested to hold an educational forum on schools to understand, among other issues, the existing conditions of the facilities in the planning area, which schools are overcrowded, birth and enrollment trends (and how it’s changed over time) and how student generation is calculated (methodology for forecasting school enrollment), which the WG strongly supported.
- There was a suggestion to add the word “Schools” to the “Public Facilities” category, to make it explicit that schools will be analyzed as part of the planning element.

Scheduling of Future WG Meetings

- The group agreed that first thing in the morning, from 8:30 to 10:30 am, and late afternoon/early evening meetings (i.e., from 4 to 6 or 5 to 7 pm) were the preferred times to meet. It was suggested to alternate between morning and afternoon/evening meeting times.
- The next WG meeting is tentatively scheduled for 5/8/19 from 5 to 7 pm to review the Existing Conditions analysis. This will be confirmed.