

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

**June 19, 2019; 8:30 – 10:30 am**

2100 Clarendon Boulevard, Room 311

**Subject: Existing Conditions Analysis, Project Schedule Update, and Debrief on Land Use and Housing Conservation District (HCD) Educational Forum**

WG Members in attendance: Paul Holland (Chair), Sandra Chesrown, Richard Price, Ginger Brown, Sandra Green, Jim Lantelme, Danielle Quist

Staff Team Members in attendance: Rahul Trivedi, Joel Franklin, Zach Larnard, Gladis Bourdouane, Tim Murphy, Naudy Martinez, Leon Vignes, Kellie Brown, Natasha Alfonso-Ahmed, Jennifer Smith, Lorin Farris, Irena Lazic, Richard Best, Gideon Berger, Christine Sherman, Jill Hunger, Elizabeth Carriger, Joan Kelsch, Kris Krider

## **Meeting Overview**

- Agenda
- The Plan Lee Highway consultants (AECOM) presented and facilitated discussion on parts of the Existing Conditions analysis related to the Urban Design and Building Form; Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources; and Economic Vitality elements.
- Staff led a brief discussion of the June 8, 2019 Land Use and Housing Conservation District (HCD) Educational Forum.

## **Discussion Topics and Comments/Questions**

**Urban Design and Building Form:** The presentation on urban design and building form focused on providing observations on existing conditions, particularly how parcels are configured; how buildings relate to the street; commercial and residential streetscapes; typical building forms; and mass and scale. The presentation identified areas that have good and poor transitions in building scale between buildings of varying intensities and examples of sufficient and poor buffering between residential and non-residential uses. Lastly, the presentation provided an overview of the areas that have been previously identified by the Visioning Study and/or community as having the greatest opportunity for change to achieve the plan goals, as well as the next steps in the analysis.

- A variety of site configurations and building forms along Lee Highway can be attributed to parking. Development along the corridor evolved based on the relationship between buildings and the roadway, with cars serving as the intermediary between people and buildings.
- Lots with greater depth could present opportunities for changing the streetscape along Lee Highway and other streets.
- The presence (or lack thereof) of trees along Lee Highway is a characteristic that not only influences one's experience of the corridor, it also affects the identity and character of the neighborhood; a lack of trees discourages people from walking along the corridor.

- When thinking about the land use scenarios and future development, consideration needs to be made for using landscaping and topography to establish better transitions in building scale, mass, and activity. When thinking about streetscapes, consider the location and design of bicycle-sharing stations and bus stops, so they can generate activity and increase access. The design of the bicycle stations/bus stops should include street furniture and landscaping that create a sense of place and identity for the neighborhoods.
- Consider conducting an inventory of overhead utility lines and posts, which can be a barrier to pedestrians along the sidewalk.
- Consider solar orientation when thinking of building orientation, height and mass, and the potential for installing and accessing solar panels on the roofs of new buildings.
- Consider where the existing “third places” are along the corridor to address gaps in connectivity and whether these third places exist because of the use at the site or the design of the space.
- Consider infrastructure needs along the corridor, including needs related to storm water management, and how they can be incorporated into urban design.
- Consider opportunities to utilize public financing for infrastructure and streetscape improvements in redevelopment projects that support good urban design and implement the plan’s vision.
- Consider strategies to recapture wasted space in the street (i.e. excess pavement in the roadway) for non-vehicular use.

**Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources:** The presentation on historic preservation and cultural resources focused on providing an overview of the types/levels of historic designations (national, state, and local) and their requirement for preservation, as well as additional County efforts for identifying historic and cultural resources, including the Historic Resources Inventory (HRI), Legacy Businesses Study, and African American historic resource surveys, and the implications of being identified. The presentation also provided an overview of the Cultural Resources Survey, which will be conducted as part of the Lee Highway planning process, to understand the approach of the survey and criteria for selecting the resources to be surveyed. Lastly, the presentation provided examples of how public art has been used in the planning study area to mark and interpret certain historic events, people and stories, as well as next steps in the analysis.

- Feedback throughout the Lee Highway planning process thus far has highlighted the importance of considering the historic and cultural importance of individuals, places, stories, and events along the corridor, in addition to structures. Feedback has also highlighted the need to identify the best approach for preserving the buildings that contribute to neighborhood identity, noting however, that not all buildings are historic and the plan should make a clear distinction.
- The Cultural Resources Survey, which will begin in the next few months, will develop a list of 100 resources based on consultant and staff analysis, and an additional 20 resources based on community input. These 120 resources will then be reviewed as part of the survey, with 105 resources reviewed at a “reconnaissance level” and 15 resources reviewed in more detail.
- Consider the importance of certain historical sites along the corridor, including Fire Station No. 8 and the Stratford School site (now the future home of Dorothy Hamm Middle School).
- Consider more recent historic and cultural resources related to the civil rights movement.
- Consider examining the history related to housing segregation along the Lee Highway corridor, including ordinances and regulations that led to the segregation.

- Consider examining the history of African-American-founded and -owned businesses along the corridor.
- Consider whether the business or the building in which the business is located is the historic and/or cultural resource.
- Consider the historic and cultural significance of the development pattern of subdivisions over time, as well as the impact of individuals like Frank Lyon on the development of subdivisions along the corridor.
- Consider the history of the streetcar along Lee Highway and its importance to the development of the corridor.
- Consider the historic and/or cultural importance of art along the corridor and consider using art as a lens for the Cultural Resources Survey.
- Consider the significance of notable families or individuals that played a part in the development of Lee Highway.

**Economic Vitality:** The presentation on economic vitality focused on providing an overview of the local economy in the planning study area (including the types of businesses along Lee Highway, key real estate metrics, who the market for the businesses are, an analysis of how the market accesses the businesses, and what makes those businesses successful today); the area's competition with other businesses in Arlington County; perspectives of business and commercial property owners; national trends to consider that may affect the future of the local economy; and next steps in the analysis.

- Lee Highway business mix is diverse, including mostly neighborhood serving business types.
- Residents near the Lee Highway corridor have a higher household median income, higher median home value, higher owner-occupied housing rate, and larger average household size than Arlington County as a whole, and the corridor also has a higher share of families with children under the age of 18 than Arlington County as a whole, creating a local demand for businesses. There is a high percentage of car ownership in the study area.
- Businesses are located along two-thirds of the corridor.
- Approximately 50% of businesses along Lee Highway are located within 500 feet of a major north/south cross street, which leads to clustering of commercial activity near certain intersections.
- Lee Highway is the main neighborhood-serving commercial destination for residents in the northern part of the county; south and west of Lee Highway there is more competition from other neighborhood-serving commercial areas. There is great competition for regional-serving businesses.
- Businesses along the corridor that could be well-suited to the market of residents nearby include home improvement and décor, and family education and wellness.
- The success of Lee Highway as a commercial corridor with low vacancy and turnover could be attributed to its auto-oriented nature (high traffic counts, convenient and free parking), its mix of local-serving businesses and services, and moderate commercial rents.
- Recent discussions with business and commercial property owners indicate that maintaining visibility from the roadway and major cross streets, as well as having more residents, is important and benefits businesses along the corridor.

In addition, smaller lot sizes along the corridor limit redevelopment options and the ability to provide adequate and convenient parking on site.

- The rise in freelance jobs (fastest growing segment of the workforce) has resulted in the creation of co-working spaces, which has redefined how people work. These spaces provide a shared working environment for people not employed by the same organization to work independently.
- The advances in computers, automation, and artificial intelligence will continue to put jobs at risk. Automation, for example, has changed the way people buy products, and retail jobs are declining. There will also be less traditional retail centers (brick and mortar) in the future. Retail establishments will be dominated by eating and drinking establishments and other places that offer consumer experiences beyond simply buying a product.
- Not all improvements can be achieved through redevelopment. It is important to think about the types of improvements needed and which improvements will need to be achieved with public investments and which will result as part of new development projects.
- Consider examining the economic role the businesses along the Lee Highway corridor play in the County overall.
- Consider what types of businesses are not found along the Lee Highway corridor. We need to involve all the northern civic associations (not just the 14 civic associations within the planning study area) in discussions. They have buying power.
- Understanding that the planning study area is not the Rosslyn-Ballston Metro corridor, creating jobs here is critical and the plan shouldn't preclude it from happening.
- Consider the effects of regulations on business signage; regulations should encourage more creativity and be less restrictive; signage can be very important to performance of businesses.
- Highlighting the concentration of businesses near major north/south connections is important. Consider the potential effects of creating signage for branding commercial nodes along the corridor.

**Recap of the June 8, 2019 Land Use and Housing Conservation District (HCD) Educational Forum:** Staff provided a recap of the educational forum and sought feedback from the Working Group on other potential educational topics. Working Group members provided the following feedback:

- Consider creating brief videos about each section of the Land Use and HCD Education Forum.
- Consider having a panel discussion at an educational forum that focuses on a redevelopment case study with a developer.

### **Scheduling of Next Steps**

- The next WG meeting is planned for July to complete the review of the Existing Conditions analysis. This meeting date and time will be confirmed.