



MEETING SUMMARY

Date: Thursday, April 21, 2022

Time of Meeting: 4:00 – 5:30 PM

Subject: Steering Committee Virtual Meeting #4

Project: Reconnect Jackson Ward Feasibility Study

Project UPC: 114874

Contract Number: 49401-009

MEETING ATTENDEES:

Name	Affiliation/Role	Email
Reconnect Jackson Ward Steering Committee		
Adam Bond	Ebenezer Baptist Church	adam.bond@ebenezerrva.org
Desi Wynter	Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority	desi.wynter@rrha.com
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Janis Allen	Historic Jackson Ward Civic Association	janisaa55@yahoo.com
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Jim Hill	Carver Area Civic League	jaschrhill@gmail.com
Leighton Powell	Community Member	leighton.powell@scenicvirginia.org
Mecca Harris	ART 180	mecca@art180.org
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Office of the Secretary of Transportation – Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment		
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Virginia Department of Transportation		
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City of Richmond		
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Whitman, Requardt and Associates, LLP (WRA)		
Caleb Parks	Project Manager	cparks@wrallp.com
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Ebony Walden	Community Engagement and Coordination	ebony@ebonywalden.com
Shawn Balon	Community Engagement and Coordination	shawn@storefrontrichmond.org
Land Planning and Design Associates (LPDA)		
Tristan Cleveland	Project Design	tristan@lpda.net
OnPoint Transportation Public Relations		
Mike Carosi	Community Engagement and Coordination	mike@communicateonpoint.com

1. Introductions/Roll Call

- Overview of Agenda, Ground Rules, Introductions
 - Project Partners (City of Richmond, OIPI, VDOT)
 - Study Team
 - Steering Committee

2. Project Vision

- Public Survey closed 3/31; we had great feedback from that, and the first community event (March 3) asked what reconnecting means to you. Based on great feedback, we came up with a vision statement.
- We’re seeking the Steering Committee’s buy-in on vision statement to help inform continued evaluation. Vision statement will be included in study documentation.
- **Review Draft Vision Statement**
 - Study Scope – reconnecting over the highway, an opportunity to repair, rebuild, reknit the 2 sides of Jackson Ward. Looking at possible connections.
 - Reviewed possible vision statements.
- **Digital Poll:**
 - Asked Steering Committee for feedback on what vision statements may resonate with them, also suggested combinations. Keep this vision in mind as we look through evaluations and decisions we talk through.

What possible amenity themes would you like to see prioritized?	Votes
Connect	7
Celebrate	0
Socialize	3
Play	4
Arts and Culture	6

3. Overview of Developable Areas and Feasibility

- Engineering Considerations / Summary of Structural Assessment Areas
 Team has been looking at developable structural areas. Several important engineering considerations:
 - Meet the vertical clearance that’s required to maintain traffic flow on interstate. VDOT will require any new structure to maintain at least a 16-foot vertical clearance over interstate in order to allow traffic flow.
 - Horizontal clearance: Belvidere St. Interchange Improvements will be critical to consider as well as existing infrastructure
 - From the 351 respondents on the survey, the connection components considered to be important: 80% of survey respondents suggested sidewalks or paths are very important. 66% feel that Parks & Open Spaces are very important. Historic Markers & Murals also were identified as important components.
 - Make sure that any structural elements could support these types of facilities.
 - Weight, load levels informed the depth of the structural elements that would be required. 2 load levels:
 - Accommodate sidewalks and paths
 - Accommodate parks & open spaces
 - Transition areas between new structures could present opportunities for new development.

- The Study Team shared a new cut at where physically possible to connect a new structure from one side of interstate to the other. A block-by-block view of project area shows where we can incorporate a section. Showed vertical clearances required in each area. Show appropriate horizontal clearance to accommodate existing and future improvements (Belvidere Interchange Improvements, Chamberlayne Parkway, others). Need to make sure any structure can span or accommodate those improvements. Consider feasibility or practicality of implementing improvements.
 - **Area A:** Availability based on space to place new structure is limited, so here we identified minimal improvements, such as a bicycle or pedestrian crossing. Area A is problematic because it conflicts with the Belvidere St. improvements and will not allow for a community gathering space as aligned in the Project Vision. As a result, we are going to recommend that Area A is infeasible for any type of future connections.
 - **Areas B, C, D, E:** They do offer opportunities for development and types of uses. Areas D&E: We will need to take into consideration the adjacency of Sixth Mount Zion Church.
 - **Area F:** Vertical elevation required clearance. 16-foot vertical clearance and not a lot of area to transition back down. Limited area for transitioning and extensive grade separation – not a feasible area.
 - **Feasibility:** Areas between Chamberlayne Parkway to North 1st Street.

4. Questions and Answers

(Donté McCutchen): Bike lanes are a huge headache in Jackson Ward's one-way streets.

Q (Janis Allen): Is someone from Sixth Mt. Zion Baptist Church represented on the Steering Committee?
A (Caleb Parks): *We did reach out but based on schedules, we haven't been able to get participation there. We will continue to coordinate with the church should the project move forward. Focus group possibility, too.*

Q (Kelli Rowan): Will all the alternatives be assessed with metrics shown from the last meeting?
A (Caleb Parks): *Yes. We will talk soon about that.*

(Janis Allen): Vision Statement #5 makes it seem that Jackson Ward is not known historically as a black community. It's the history that we want to hold onto. The black history seems to have been lost.

Q (Leighton Powell): It's important to a lot of people to include Black History in the project scope
A (Caleb Parks): *We'll acknowledge the historical black history and economic vitality. It's an important piece that got dropped off.*

Q (Donté McCutchen): The adjacency to the church: Will it be connected to the church?
A (Caleb Parks): *We want to make sure that we're tracking the adjacency to the church and its historic properties. Could represent some constraints as the design develops, but there may be opportunities to incorporate elements. We'll make sure we're in close contact with Sixth Mt. Zion in the process.*

Q (Donté McCutchen): As we move forward, I would love to be a part of this conversation.
A (Caleb Parks): *We will talk about that in terms of phasing as the design advances and discussions with the church.*

(Ebony Walden): We have a number of focus groups. We can do one with Sixth Mt. Zion once we know where and what the specific connection will be. Church will be a major player in terms of where it can go.

Q (Kelli Rowan): Do we have an inventory of other historic properties and cultural sites? What's the process to define the vision?

A (Maritza Pechin): *We have the data; we shared it at first community event, and it can be provided.*

(Caleb Parks): COR has gone through a lot of effort to review historic maps and document the conditions that were existing prior to construction of interstate. We also want to look at opportunities to reconnect the street grid. There may be some opportunities for standard roadway bridges, or with a bike/pedestrian connection.

Q (Jerome Legions): With the height clearance, I'm concerned that the bridges will create places for homeless people. How do you take care of that potential issue it might create?

A (Caleb Parks): *This is helpful feedback. We'll take it into consideration as the design advances. Maintenance considerations need to be incorporated.*

5. Evaluation Considerations

- Weighting Evaluation Factors
 - Prioritization of Structural Assessment Areas
 - We've identified these feasible developable areas. Now we'll look to prioritize development and consider possible phasing of sections.

- Public Feedback on benefits of reconnecting Jackson Ward:
 - Reconnecting to the history of people and place
 - Support economy/growth.

- Digital Poll Question:

What are your initial thoughts on the evaluation criteria?	Votes
Looks good! I understand and agree with it.	6
It's okay. I am not sure I fully understand but it seems reasonable to me.	3
I am confused and would like to see more information.	3
I understand but do not agree with it.	2

- The 3 feasible concepts that we're looking to advance designs:
 - Chamberlayne to 1st Street: 5 acres of potential development
 - Blocks closest to Chamberlayne (B) and blocks closest to 1st Street (E): 2 ½ acres
 - Lean concept (area E) with a roadway pedestrian connection to St. James St.: 1 ½ acres

6. Questions and Answers

Q (Jerome Legions): Anything other than Concept 1 seems like a disservice. Let's see what you can do to make that work.

A (Caleb Parks): *We want to develop a number of levels of intervention. A lot will depend on funding opportunities. These concepts could be considered in phasing if we only have limited funds to start with.*

Q (Jerome Legions): I'd be concerned about doing Concept 3 first – that you'd never get back to Concepts 2 or 1. Especially with Gilpin Court, you should expand Concept 1 or 2 to go deeper into Gilpin Court? This could help to revitalize that neighborhood as well through RRHA.

A (Caleb Parks): *It's something to be aware of, and we're working with the City on the redevelopment efforts in Gilpin Court.*

A (Ebony Walden): *The difference in the concepts has to do with funding. Whatever concept comes up needs to be financially feasible.*

(Leighton Powell): The last poll: I voted for #1. I like it, but I think there's a lot more work to be done on the messaging. This is a real opportunity to talk about Jackson Ward, what it's been through, and it's a great opportunity to educate Richmonders on what this neighborhood means to the city.

Q (Kelli Rowan): Are segments C&D popular public choices?

A (Caleb Parks): *The feedback we got from the public was the same across the board, but areas C&D got the most votes from the public comments.*

(Maritza Pechin): *Are you saying we'll eliminate some of these concepts?*

(Caleb Parks): *We're not suggesting taking any area off the table, but of the feasible areas for development of a connection, we'll be looking to help prioritize them. Our initial recommendation: If we have to start lean, then we would start with E. Then with B and subsequently C and D. We are not looking to remove anything from the table, we're just looking at possible phasing opportunities.*

(Maritza Pechin): *Programming and how we design it will help the group understand the potential of these different areas.*

Q (Jerome Allen): What are the property owners around the areas saying? Homeowners? Landlords? Retailers? What kind of buy in do you have from them?

A (Maritza Pechin): *We want to invite more conversations with these individuals. Highlight the meeting next week among residents and business owners. Many of you on the steering committee are business owners or residents in Jackson Ward. Getting your thoughts, your neighbors and friends' thoughts, is really important.*

(Caleb Parks): *The April 28 community event will give additional feedback from community members. Also, we are planning future focus groups as we start looking at areas for program elements.*

(Ebony Walden): *If you know those folks, encourage them to come to our meetings. Steering Committee is our eyes and ears. Please continue to advertise these engagement opportunities.*

(Janis Allen): I am concerned that some key people invited to the Steering Committee table are dropping off.

(Jerome Legions): When people start seeing a true rendering of the project, you'll get more feedback.

Q (Jerome Legions): Is there a zoning change that's required for this?

A (Maritza Pechin): *No. This is public right of way. It's not zoned. It's a good question, TBD are approvals by VDOT, FHA, City. Building the deck, vs. building what's on top. Other cities have done it; we have to figure out how to do it in Richmond, and how to finance it. It would not be a zoning approval, however.*

Q (Jerome Legions): If I was a property owner, I might want to change what I have if I see a connection coming.

A (Maritza Pechin): *This is really good to determine now, before we jump into the bigger community plan for all of Jackson Ward. What is selected as the preferred alternative can help us define the future land use and zoning for all of Jackson Ward. Transportation improvements, park improvements, and land use are all closely related.*

(Caleb Parks): *There will be approvals from VDOT and FHA, but this is helpful feedback.*

7. Possible Program Elements

(Tristan Cleveland): Shared how we're developing program elements: the "What". We've developed some themes for possible programming and amenities based on public feedback from the survey and at events.

- 5 Themes: Connect. Celebrate. Socialize. Play. History Arts & Culture.
 - Connect: Transportation connection through bike lanes, multi-use trail, pedestrian bridge, vehicular bridge.
 - Celebrate: Larger spaces where we come together to celebrate – amphitheater, event plaza, vendor court, open lawns.
 - Socialize: Picnics areas, barbeque areas, seating areas, community gardens, reading gardens, shade structures. Opportunities for people to engage with each other.
 - Play: Recreational – playgrounds, outdoor exercise equipment, teen gathering, skate park, tennis-pickleball, basketball courts.
 - History Arts & Culture – these items are flexible and can fit in anywhere. Art installations, historic monuments, interpretative panels.
 - Shade trees, benches, landscaping were high priorities based on community feedback. Those items will be integrated into whatever the final amenities are.

(Tristan Cleveland): These will get us to start thinking about where these “what’s” can be placed. Engaging the steering committee to help us figure out the priorities for the What’s. Next public meeting, we will lay out specifically where they’ll be laid out.

- Digital Poll Question: What are your prioritized categories?

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- Helpful to have initial feedback from Steering Committee on this as we take this to the public.

8. Upcoming Community Events – April 28 from 6-8pm @ Ebenezer Baptist Church

- Overview and Format: Presentation w/ Q&A followed by Open House
- Important to spread the word to business and property owners.

9. Final Questions

(Janis Allen): When we talk about “connect”, it’s still missing something. Connect Jackson Ward implies something else.

Q (Janis Allen): Corrections need to be made to some of the boards at the Black History Museum. Have those corrections have been made?

A (Caleb Parks): *We will have different displays than what was presented at Black History Museum. If there are corrections or observations, please share that with the Study Team.*

(Ebony Walden): April 28 will be different boards. The boards will focus more on feedback and decisions this time.

(Jim Hill): Sixth Mount Zion’s participation will be vital. How permeable they allow their property will be will determine how good a connection from Duvall Street. Church runs across B C D E

Q (Jim Hill): Historic connections: Pedestrian/bike connections should be integrated with anything we do. Vehicular bridges need to be distinctly different than everything we have.

A (Caleb Parks): We are now looking at design elements. We’ve established the “where” and we’ll be looking at the “what” and looking forward to continuing these discussions next week.

ADJOURN.

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES:

The Reconnect Jackson Ward Feasibility Study Steering Committee meetings are open to the public and anyone interested in attending are permitted to register for the meeting. The list below represents additional attendees present at the meeting.

Name	Email
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