



# MEETING SUMMARY

**Date:** Thursday, June 23, 2022

**Time of Meeting:** 4:00 – 5:30 PM

**Subject:** Steering Committee Virtual Meeting #5

**Project:** Reconnect Jackson Ward Feasibility Study

**Project UPC:** 114874

**Contract Number:** 49401-009

## MEETING ATTENDEES:

Name	Affiliation/Role	Email
<b>Reconnect Jackson Ward Steering Committee</b>		
<b>Anebra Bourne</b>	Venture Richmond	<a href="mailto:abourne@venturerichmond.com">abourne@venturerichmond.com</a>
<b>Billy McMullen</b>	Community Member	<a href="mailto:billymacspeaks@gmail.com">billymacspeaks@gmail.com</a>
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<b>David Lambert</b>	Eye Que Optical	<a href="mailto:eyequeoptical@gmail.com">eyequeoptical@gmail.com</a>
<b>Desi Wynter</b>	Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority	<a href="mailto:desi.wynter@rrha.com">desi.wynter@rrha.com</a>
<b>Donté McCutchen</b>	Moriah Baptist Church	<a href="mailto:donte.mccutchen@gmail.com">donte.mccutchen@gmail.com</a>
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<b>Jerome Legions</b>	Carver Area Civic League	<a href="mailto:jeromelegions1@gmail.com">jeromelegions1@gmail.com</a>
<b>Jim Hill</b>	Carver Area Civic League	<a href="mailto:jaschrhill@gmail.com">jaschrhill@gmail.com</a>
<b>Leighton Powell</b>	Community Member	<a href="mailto:leighton.powell@scenicvirginia.org">leighton.powell@scenicvirginia.org</a>
<b>Nate Goodenow</b>	Walter Parks	<a href="mailto:nate@wparks.com">nate@wparks.com</a>
<b>Virginia Department of Transportation</b>		
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<b>City of Richmond</b>		
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<b>Whitman, Requardt and Associates, LLP</b>		
<b>Caleb Parks</b>	Project Manager	<a href="mailto:cparks@wrallp.com">cparks@wrallp.com</a>
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<b>Ebony Walden Consulting/Storefront for Community Design</b>		
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<b>Tristan Cleveland</b>	Project Design	<a href="mailto:tristan@lpda.net">tristan@lpda.net</a>
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*Note: A list of additional attendees is enclosed with this meeting summary*

## 1. Introductions/Roll Call

- Overview of Meeting Orientation/Ground Rules and Agenda was given to Panelists and Attendees to start the meeting off.
- Re- Introduction of study team was given,
- Roll Call of Steering Committee attendance was recorded.

## 2. Overview of Study Process

- Review Vision Statement
- What we heard from Community Visioning process
  - “Keeping black history alive”
  - “Fade the freeway from the foreground to the background”
  - “Encouraging cultural growth and discovery”

- **Summary of Engineering Considerations & Structural Assessment Areas**

(Caleb Parks): The team has worked to identify what is physically feasible within the project area and any existent constraints. The first restraint is vertical clearance to accommodate the interstate traffic flow. As we start thinking about what we would incorporate, that aspect becomes important in identifying the structural support needed. The second super important consideration is that we maintain adequate horizontal clearance needed to accommodate future improvements

(Caleb Parks): As it relates to the super structure, most of the engineering considerations are informed by the weight and the load of what we’re carrying, with a focus on ensuring that the areas we use are structurally feasible to hold the amenities and elements that have been included in this project.

- Open space
- Vehicular/human traffic

(Caleb Parks): Generally, what we follow is based off the weight and the structural possibilities. The project area is located between Chamberlayne Avenue and First Street Bridge, and the study found where a feasible connection area could be located in Jackson Ward.

(Caleb Parks): One thing in our evaluation with grade differences is there has only been one spot where the grade difference is not significant, and within that area could be roadway connection on St James Street. Our ability to transition from one side of the interstate to the other gets more challenging, so it must include vertical separation. We’re pretty constrained grade wise within the middle of our project area, but we do believe it would be feasible to create some type of vertical transition within those spaces. Now further to the left there is not the ability to have vehicular traffic, but the St Peter Street connection could be created. The yellow lines show the actual bridge connections. On the other side, there is the opportunity for heavier buildings, new buildings, new construction, etc. This is something we’re discussing and trying to figure out. The project is just under 6 acres in total, but we may have to look at the implementation of this project into phases.

- Summary of Community Meeting:
  - A summary of the April 28<sup>th</sup> community meeting which included:
    - Attendance of about 50 people

- Attendees included a mix of people who had attended before as well as new attendees.
- A Midway report:
  - Reconfirm the vision and what people think.
  - Present different options for connections and grade/constraints.
  - Provide community members the opportunity to walk through project aspects with the study team and ask questions about the project.
- The purpose of this meeting:
  - Educate audiences on the Reconnect Jackson Ward Feasibility Study: its purpose, process, and desired outcomes.
  - Share results of community feedback from the study's "Community Visioning" phase.
  - Engage the community on conceptual options to "reconnect" the north and south portions of Jackson Ward.
  - Request initial feedback on potential amenities as well as identify interested participants for focus groups to advance the design process.
- Results of Community Meeting #2: The biggest take away from this meeting out was the need for history, arts, and culture to exist no matter what.
- Summary of the Focus Groups:
  - A summary of the May 25-26 focus group meeting which included:
    - Attendance of a variety of different stakeholders – 6<sup>th</sup> Mount Zion, Gilpin, business owners.
    - Introductions included: Tell the study team in 1-2 words what reconnecting Jackson Ward means to you?
    - Review of Study Scope and Vision.
    - Break Out Sessions: Design Charette
      - 4 – 6 participants with design facilitator at each table
      - Desired result: Bubble diagrams and concepts identified by community.
    - Open Group Discussion: Review Designs
      - Present Design Ideas and Concepts
      - Identify Trends, Similarities, and Unique Ideas that they would like to be included in the different themes and amenities.
- Purpose of the Meeting:
  - Collect input from residents and stakeholders to identify components of the reconnecting Jackson Ward effort that can demonstrate and promote a positive impact on the community.
  - Engage these residents and stakeholders in discussions about what it means to reconnect Jackson Ward, to meet the ideals of inclusion, unification, and access to everyone while "keeping black history alive".
  - Request feedback on prospective facilities and a conceptual alternative for displaying what history, arts, and culture mean to Jackson Ward residents in a way that is both practical and appropriate for the neighborhood.
- Results from the Focus Groups:
  - The main theme was about the importance of mixed-use spaces that allow for commercial and housing opportunities to stimulate economic growth and development.

- Additional theme of ensuring that history, arts, and culture are included in all aspects of the project.
- There was an emphasis on breaking the sight up and making it reflective of the themes in Jackson ward. Recommendations were also given for naming of the site and included:
  - Right area = The Harlem of the South
  - Center area = A contemplative, reconciliation space identified as Apostle Town
  - Left area = Commerce space that was reflective of the business of Jackson Ward
- The four main themes that came out in discussion were centered around the ideas of building on the foundation of Black excellence, inclusiveness, and future connections.
  - Youth engagement
  - Marketplace & Innovation
  - Art & Entertainment
  - Faith & Contemplative

(Ebony Walden): History should be reflected throughout this entire design, but it should also serve as a link to the contemporary Jackson Ward and our goals for future prosperity. We truly want this area to be a community place that is accessible to everyone and connects the north and south sides of Jackson Ward and Richmond. It should represent the rich Black history that Richmond has to offer. Black history must be relatable, accessible, and readily available. Not simply having a space but having a real community hub where Black businesses and trades can be highlighted.

(Ebony Walden): But I will say this as one last thought: this is only a framework, and the actual design work will be completed in the following stage. The broad themes that you can currently see are those that we found and intend to employ going forward to direct the project.

### 3. Questions and Answers

*Time was given before moving forward with presenting potential framework plan for answer and questions. Here is what was gathered:*

**Q** (Jerome Legions): One important theme that was discussed in conversation was the inclusion of housing (Noted from previous discussion on what could possibly go in the space). If we don't include that and have that as a project theme, then it has the possibility to be forgotten. It should be a part of this process; mixed-use development could support this.

**A** (Caleb Parks): *Thank you Jerome, that is something we are taking into account. However, there is a larger redevelopment in Jackson Ward; that study will address the housing concern.*

*(Maritza Pechin): Just to be clear you believe that one of the houses that is adjacent to this project should be for housing?*

**Q** (Jerome Legions): We identified areas outside of the project area that could be used for mixed use development.

**A** (Maritza Pechin): *So, I think the program of the buildings is something that we can add as a potential and include mixed use spaces.*

**Q** (Jerome Legions): I really think you need to include mixed use, people in Jackson Ward didn't lose parks they lost their houses. As we make this reconnection, we need to look at this and

how we can rectify how things transpired. I also think the themes identified should include housing in marketplace & innovation.

*A (Maritiza Pechin): We are a little bit constrained on how many buildings and where they can go. I think that point is very well taken which is why we want to show you this preview before we move it to the next step and present it to the public.*

**Q** (Janis Allen): Jerome really landed on where I was going. I think Anedra's letter was very important and we need to include Anedra's input.

*A (Ebony Walden): This works like a hole in a larger project. This is a project that is existent within the frame of a bigger project and is working in conjunction with the greater Community Plan.*

#### **4. Review of Design Framework Plan**

*At this stage, a framework introduction was given, followed by a review of the framework plan and project theme diagrams that were developed in response to feedback from the public in order to take into account what people desire from structures that are remembered and connected to the location.*

(Tristan Cleveland): As much as we can, the old street layout is being restored. We also heard is that circulation needs to be approved both in and around Jackson Ward. More walking paths, biking, and connection with other areas are key to include in the project design. The next area was the marketplace and innovation space, and this space is very important. There needs to be opportunities for the development of buildings and commercial spaces on the site. So, first we are creating this marketplace framework and then establishing what could potentially be put in place there. The next layer we look at is history, arts, and culture which will exist throughout the space, as well as creating space for future programming and sites focused on history, arts, and culture. There could be a circulation history walk that guides people through the history of Jackson Ward, but there are areas throughout the sight available for this theme. This area, as well as districts of marketplace innovation and neighborhood housing, will include programmatic elements such as Farmers markets, community gardens, or other community development elements.

(Tristan Cleveland): This layer we heard that people want more space, shade, and areas where they can go for development, as well as opportunities for entertainment and relaxation. This space should be very activated, to ensure that this is a safe space that is supposed to be used for the community. These spaces are flexible with the programming, but it needs to be a space that people want to come to. Remember that this is a framework plan and is not stuck but is a general plan to guide development and implementation. The intention is that these spaces should be layered to be active, useful spaces for residents and visitors. The themes and amenities are consistent with focus group feedback, and we'll be working with the City to identify where we lay these themes out. The themes can be incorporated anywhere throughout the space.

(Tristan Cleveland): One focus group had a really unique idea of names for the spaces. We've identified near 6<sup>th</sup> Mount Zion Church of more contemplative and faith spaces in this section. On St James Street we've identified a vehicular connection that connects the two sides. To the east, adjacent to first street, we identified primary elements of themes of arts and culture.

**5. Questions and Answers** – Time was given before moving forward with presenting potential framework plan for answer and questions. Here is what was gathered:

**Q** (David Lambert): What capacity does the Harlem of the South have to actually draw people to the area? Is it physically big enough to allow for bringing the people that should be brought in.

**A** (Caleb Parks) *The project team identified the feasible developable areas within the project location, with respect given to what programmatic elements and design features could be included. The space itself covers roughly almost 6 acres, which provides a significant amount of space for people to visit and come to the space.*

**Q** (Janis Allen): Really put emphasis on the 2<sup>nd</sup> street corridor, 2<sup>nd</sup> street used to be referred to as the deuce and I think it's important to include those.

**A** (Maritza Pechin): *I agree Janis, but unfortunately some of that stuff is what needs to be pulled into the Jackson Ward Community Plan. And one important location is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Duval turn, so that it is a lot better. People need to want to travel down 2<sup>nd</sup> street.*

**Q** (Jerome Legions): My suggestion as far as naming what you have done so far, it pretty much looks like you're doing a comparison of black neighborhoods in America. Let's find something that speaks to what Jackson Ward was, not just naming black neighborhoods after a prosperous white neighborhood. See if we can't find something that speaks to the different districts that existed in Jackson Ward.

**A** (Ebony Walden): *There are not set in stone, but purely thematic, but noted – good perspective.*

**A** (Caleb Parks): *I appreciate that Jerome, we should draw attention to what made Jackson Ward what it was.*

**Q** (Jerome Legions): Caleb I have one other question and I guess it is the preservation of this district, how will that be handled? If its city owned, then that's one thing, but if its publicly owned then people could destroy it. What is ownership of the site to ensure protection?

**A** (Caleb Parks): *What we've identified as the project area is within the Right-of-Way for the State of VA. Some spaces outside are included, but these specifics are something that are considered along the way. The city is working on this project with VDOT and OIPI, so there is an interest in pursuing this project.*

*(Maritza Pechin): Historic preservation laws relate to old places, so I don't think we could include this, I'd have to do more research. But I hear what you're saying, to go through all this and have someone come in and destroy it would be horrible. There is an ordinance Katherine Jordan proposed to extend the city's old and historic districts.*

**Q** (Jim Hill): I love the shade canopy trees on the flat lid over the highway but I'm skeptical we can deliver on that with only 5' depth, how are those feasible?

**A** (Caleb Parks): *There are some projects throughout the country with innovative design themes.*

**Q** (Jim Hill): It would be a lot more interesting to be in there if it were a curving path rather than just a flat, straight area. It also would be interesting to see rise and falls of level within the flat development, maybe seeing this within the walking trail.

**A** (Tristan Cleveland): *As Caleb said we're able to put the soil into the girders, so then additional things will be added so that it is as accessible as possible.*

*(Caleb Parks): We do have another view of what this framework could look like. Specifics will be done as the project continues, but this is the overall general framework plan.*

**Q** (Jim Hill): Will public restrooms be provided?

**A** *(Caleb Parks): That's a good question. I think those specific features are things that need to be worked out, but we are showing the opportunity for adjacent structures to incorporate the public restrooms and shade structures.*

**Q** (Janis Allen): I know you had a meeting with 6<sup>th</sup> Mt Zion, is there anything that could be shared with the steering committee?

**A** *(Maritza Pechin): I, Caleb, Yessenia, and Tristan were there. Pastor Nelson knew of the plan, and they were all generally receptive to it, but had the same concerns as you all do in terms of what consequences and effects this could have on the outer community. That's an important consideration that we want to keep in mind as we continue with the project. We decided to do a meeting in July with the leadership of the church, and they are looking forward to having more specifics for them. One thing they mentioned is a lot of them don't live in the community, they are an important voice, but they are not the most important voices. I responded with just because they don't live here doesn't mean they don't trace their history to Jackson Ward.*

(Jim Hill) This will need noise attention/analysis.

**Q** (Jerome Legions): Will this go through the Special use Permit process?

**A** *(Maritza Pechin): No because its public right of way. It will probably go through the Urban Design Committee (UDC), its still being decided if the state or the city is going to be responsible for building. If it's the city, it would have to go through the UDC but state it would not.*

*(Caleb Parks): One to identify that we do have the opportunities for connecting the above space with the highway below to ensure that it meets VDOT design requirements.*

*(Maritza Pechin): We can't create a tunnel because the cost is raised more than VDOT wants because of safety considerations.*

## **6. Potential Phasing for Framework Plan:**

*At this stage, potential phasing considerations were provided to the community.*

(Caleb Parks): It's a fairly large undertaking that could occupy up to six acres of newly created space. As we look to identify funding and the project, we're looking at ways that we could phase the plan.

(Caleb Parks): The first phase would reestablish the connection of St. James Street across the highway. The design could point to some of the thematic elements of the connection that include:

- | <b>Phase 1A</b>   | <b>Phase 1B</b>  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two 10-11' Traffic Lanes</li> <li>• 10' Shared-Use Path</li> <li>• 5' Sidewalks</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two 10-11' Traffic Lanes</li> <li>• Shared-Use Paths</li> <li>• Sidewalks</li> <li>• Amenities</li> <li>• Building/Commerce Space</li> <li>• Event Space</li> </ul> |

(Caleb Parks): As a second phase, we could look to implement the larger open space area where there is the potential for new development and event space. We're looking at this area adjacent to first street because it is the most feasible. Elements include:

**Phase 2**

- Shared-Use Paths
- Sidewalks
- Amenities
- Building/Commerce Space
- Event Space

**Phase 2**

- Two 10-11' Traffic Lanes
- Shared-Use Paths
- Sidewalks
- Amenities
- Building/Commerce Space
- Event Space

(Caleb Parks): The third phase would be incorporating the area adjacent to Chamberlayne Ave, part of that is related to cost as well as the current and planned projects that will occur in that area. It would be the final phase and would cover the middle section. Elements include:

**Phase 3**

- Two 10-11' Traffic Lanes
- Shared-Use Paths
- Sidewalks
- Amenities
- Building/Commerce Space
- Event Space

(Maritza Pechin): Just to clarify, the reason we're discussing phasing is cause funding comes from a limited amount and could make it difficult to be able to complete this project all at once. Federal money gives money to Transportation Planning Organizations, and they have a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) that they use to allocate money. We have submitted a request to include the RJW project in the LRTP. It looks like this will be favorable, but they don't vote until July, so we don't know yet.

(Maritza Pechin): The Federal government has allocated \$1B to be dispersed over 5 years. The first amount to be dispersed is approx. \$200M. We want a project that will be competitive to achieve the funding. You have to match it, with the requirement that 20% must be funded by local-regional-state sources, and the money must be spent within 5 years. So, we're thinking about breaking it into smaller pieces to fund over different years.

**A** (Yessenia Revilla): (Posted in Chat) The RRTPO is in person at:  
 PlanRVA  
 9211 Forest Hill Avenue  
 Richmond, VA 23235  
 July 7 @ 9:30am

For support you can send in written public comments before the meeting to Janice Firestone ([jfirestone@planrva.org](mailto:jfirestone@planrva.org)) and Chet Parsons ([CParsons@planrva.org](mailto:CParsons@planrva.org)) and ask for your comments to be read at the meeting as public comments for agenda item: ConnectRVA 2045 Amendments.



## 7. Recommendations and Next Steps

*It is here where we discussed Key Considerations for the feasibility including topics of Anti-Gentrification.*

(Ebony Walden): Both our concern as planners and community concern is how are we going to address gentrification in this project? Because we have another planning process adjacent, we are going to recommend policy and program recommendations that the Jackson Ward Community Plan could implement. How do we embed them into the community and into the larger community plan?

(Ebony Walden): We are recommending under the community plan housing plan and analysis. We need to look at the current state of housing and what exists currently, and how policy could be used to change that. We need to actively look at the situation and decide where things need to be. In addition, we are recommending a small business preservation plan and how to incorporate and ensure protection of small businesses and more specifically Black-owned businesses. There are already several arts, culture, and history institutions in the area but this project has the opportunity to bring those together and tell the whole story.

**Q** (Janis Allen): I hear soundbites that I want to include here – affordable home ownership and mixed income housing. We need to emphasize the ownership of housing not just affordable housing, and not just separate housing by income, actually allow mixed income buildings. I need the words we're saying to actually match what is on the screen.

**A** (Ebony Walden): *The Jackson Ward Community Plan should explore what would be the right numbers, the right income levels, and what are affordable rentals and affordable home ownership.*

(Jerome Legions): You're spot on. We have got to make sure that we are not setting people up for purchasing houses and then renting them out. We've had that before and we need to ensure that it does not happen again.

(Janis Allen): Re-phrase the messaging "Engage a black design professional" to state "Engage a professional experienced in designing black spaces."

## 8. Next Steps and Next Meeting

- Study team will take the feedback from this meeting and alter presentation as it relates, for the upcoming preparation of community event #3 at the Hippodrome, June 29, 2022, 6-8 pm.
- Please attend; tell your friends to attend.
- Final Note: We will look to re-engage with the Steering Committee as we get notice of funding opportunities and are pulling together grant applications.

## 9. Questions and Answers

For the sake of time, this set of Q & A was limited.

## 10. 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.*

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