



REPORT OF MEETING

Date and Time: Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 2 pm
Location: Parkville Senior Center, 11 New Park Avenue
Subject: Urban Design Working Group #7

1. Attendees

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EMAIL ADDRESS
Mark McGovern	Town of West Hartford	mark.mcgovern@westhartfordct.gov
Michael Aaron		
Jackie Mandyck	iQuilt	jackie@thequiltplan.org
Sara Bronin	City of Hartford Planning and Zoning Commission	
Dennis Goderre	City of Hartford	Dennis.goderre@hartford.gov
Rich Armstrong	Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT)	Richard.Armstrong@ct.gov
Kevin Burnham	CTDOT	Kevin.Burnham@ct.gov
Ted Aldieri	FHWA	
Christine Marques	State Office of Economic and Community Development	christine.marques@ct.gov
Dave Stahnke	TranSystems Corporation (TSC)	dkstahnke@transystems.com
Casey Hardin	TSC	crhardin@transystems.com
Mike Morehouse	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)	mmorehouse@fhiplan.com
Francisco Gomes	FHI	fgomes@fhiplan.com
Michael Coulom	FHI	mcoulom@fhiplan.com
Christine Tiernan	AECOM	Christine.Tiernan@aecom.com
Tom Herzog	AECOM	Tom.Herzog@aecom.com
Dave Derry	AECOM	Dave.Derry@aecom.com
Mitch Glass	Goody Clancy	mitch.glass@goodyclancy.com

2. Discussion

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation, welcomed everyone and explained that all were welcome to speak at the day's working session. He said that the Project Team is refining its design of the lowered highway, although there may be some changes to ramp configurations. He concluded that the project's extensive public outreach process has driven the public closer to consensus. He introduced Mitch Glass, of Goody Clancy, to discuss new concepts to minimize the visual and noise impacts of the highway.

M. Glass acknowledged the challenges of integrating the highway into the city, including neighborhood discontinuity, visual and noise impact mitigation, creating quality local streets for pedestrians and bicyclists, and developing attractive places. He presented several different strategies for achieving these goals, including freeway caps like the Hartford Mortensen

Riverfront Plaza and the Downtown Hartford Public Library, widened bridges at highway overpasses, landscaping berms, and the multi-use greenway.

Tom Herzog, of AECOM, said that vertical noise barriers, or walls, are the most affordable noise mitigation method. He said that the Project Team is examining other ways of mitigating noise that are more visually and aesthetically pleasing than traditional noise walls. He noted that a landscaped berm could be as effective as a vertical wall, albeit requiring additional space.

T. Herzog said that the Project Team took noise readings from local streets in the I-84 corridor in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). He concluded that the decibel level from local streets is similar to the level produced by I-84. He said that the highway has a 200-foot zone of influence, outside of which the local roads are the predominant noise source.

For discussion purposes, M. Glass divided the corridor into four sections, focusing first on the area between Park and Sigourney Streets. He explained the Project Team's study of capping portions of the highway between Park Street, Capitol Avenue, and Sigourney Street. He concluded that capping this section of highway at a cost of \$350-425 million would not likely produce additional economic development, although the cap may be suitable for up to 650 surface parking spaces or open space. He suggested that topography, landscaping, screening walls and a multi-use greenway could effectively hide the noise and sight of the highway.

T. Herzog said that berms in the Park to Sigourney area could reduce noise levels by three to eight decibels. He said that a three-decibel reduction would be difficult to notice, whereas an eight-decibel decrease would nearly halve noise levels. He noted that depressing the highway by 15 feet with parallel retaining walls could reduce noise. He said that a cap in this area would effectively cancel noise emitting from the highway, but would not address the significant existing noise sources on Capitol Avenue. He cautioned that the Project Team would need to demonstrate that noise mitigation techniques were in line with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regulations and be eligible for funding.

Francisco Gomes, of FHI, spoke to complete streets designs in the Park Street to Sigourney Street area. He contrasted existing conditions along Forest Street and Capitol Avenue potential improvements associated with the lowered highway alternative, including bus pullouts, bus shelters, wider sidewalks, street trees, a multi-use greenway, and bicycle facilities. He said that West Boulevard could extend to Hawthorn Street and include a green median. He noted the potential for low impact design techniques, like funneling storm water into the ground or street-side vegetation, rather than storm drains. He said that bicycle lanes and the inclusion of on-street parking would be determinant on selected land use patterns for this area.

M. Glass said that the Project Team does not recommend capping between Broad and Sigourney Streets. He suggested an expanded Sigourney Street overpass and multi-use greenway could better integrate the highway into the city. He said that the elevated greenway could include ramps to Flower Street on either side of the highway. He noted that the power plant on Capitol Avenue could be impacted and replaced by a landscaped berm. He said that under this scenario a traveler on Capitol Avenue would see a park-like embankment with the greenway running over top in lieu of the power plant. T. Herzog said that a greenway embankment could maximize noise reduction without using unattractive vertical structures.

Addressing the area between Broad and Asylum Streets, M. Glass said that the lowered highway could greatly consolidate existing ramp structures and make available significant developable land. He said that this would also require relocating the railroad and constructing a new rail annex. He said that capping over the highway, removing the existing rail viaduct, and constructing a new boulevard between Capitol Avenue and Asylum Street could create a new gateway into the city and better connect Downtown to Asylum Hill and Frog Hollow. He noted that the Project Team recognizes the historic significance of the rail viaduct and is discussing the potential for removing or adapting it.

T. Herzog said that the cap between Asylum and Broad Streets could reduce highway noise by 8 - 12 decibels. He noted that the greatest noise impacts to Bushnell Park come not from the highway but rather the surrounding local streets. He concluded that Capitol Avenue near the Armory is outside of the 200-foot zone of influence, and therefore would not experience any noise impacts from the lowered highway alternative.

F. Gomes said that currently there is poor pedestrian connectivity in the Asylum and Broad Streets area. He noted that the pedestrian bridge adjacent to the railroad and passing over the Capitol Avenue ramps is functional but unappealing. He said that a wide boulevard along the western edge of Bushnell Park could include a promenade similar to that currently under construction as part of the Intermodal Triangle project, as well as a cycle track, trees and a median. He said the Farmington and Asylum Avenue trident is a gateway into Asylum Hill and currently functions poorly for pedestrians and cyclists. He said that the Project Team envisions bicycle lanes on most streets, as well as a much greener and more comfortable environment.

Concluding with the area between High and Ann Streets, M. Glass noted that existing parking lots take up valuable developable land and create an additional barrier between Downtown and points north. He said that added greenery, infill and transit-oriented development would be ideal in this area. T. Herzog said that these mitigation strategies could reduce noise by 3-5 decibels. F. Gomes said that the area could include wider sidewalks, on-street bike facilities, greenery, and marked protected crosswalks. He noted the importance of connecting Downtown North and lower Asylum Hill with Union Station.

3. Questions and Comments

Mark McGovern, of the Town of West Hartford, said that the project is on good footing. He suggested the Project Team continue to work with stakeholders to assess priorities. He supported capping the highway between Broad and Asylum Streets but not further west.

Jackie Mandyck, of iQuilt, said that design concepts are moving in the right direction. She said that she was concerned about value engineering, and prioritizing complete streets, trees and sound barriers over expanded capping. She said the group should focus on creating spaces.

Dennis Goderre, of the City of Hartford, said that the City recently passed a complete streets ordinance, and that any redesign would be obligated to comply with those ordinances.

M. McGovern asked if the Project Team took into account future maintenance costs of streetscape improvements and plantings. F. Gomes said that the Project Team is attempting to balance several factors, and recognizes existing budget constraints, particularly to City forestry

services. He said that the Project Team keeps in mind sustainability, and the great role that foliage plays in mitigating air quality. He suggested that the benefit trees play in improving air and noise quality and property values justifies their maintenance expenses. M. McGovern asked the Project Team to also consider the cost of repainting and restriping roads.

A member of the public noted that the lowered highway would add several new streets. F. Gomes said that new streets could add several acres of land to the City's tax roll. J. Mandyck cautioned that the fiscal impact of any additional land would likely not be realized until 10-15 years after construction is complete.

A member of the public suggested using a noise canopy to reduce sun glare on the highway.

Sara Bronin, of the Planning and Zoning Commission, requested a perspective from the north side of the highway looking south between Broad and Sigourney Streets. M. Glass said that the Project Team has not closely examined this semi-private area because it is Aetna property. He said that the area could include a noise and visual screen similar to that along Hawthorn Street.

Ted Aldieri, of FHWA, said that the Department is interested in interagency partnerships. He suggested working with other agencies to combine a park space with a noise and visual barrier.

M. McGovern asked if the greenway would be elevated because of limited right of way. M. Glass said that unlike a ground-level facility, an elevated greenway could avoid impacting parking spaces, reconnect Flower Street, and reduce noise and visual impacts along Capitol Avenue. M. McGovern recognized the functionality of the elevated greenway but cautioned that removing the elevated highway to build a different elevated structure could come off as counterintuitive.

S. Bronin said that the Greater Hartford Transit District's (GHTD) Union Station Master Plan is very unpopular, particularly among local residents and the Planning Commission. She said that the I-84 Hartford Project Team's designs are preferable, and suggested better communicating with the GHTD team. M. Glass said that the Project Team should communicate better with GHTD in this regard and suggested the City could facilitate that process.

S. Bronin said that removing the rail viaduct over Asylum Street could greatly improve the pedestrian experience and expand access to Bushnell Park. She said that the Planning Commission would likely be in favor of removing the viaduct for this purpose.

D. Goderre requested more information on traffic design work in the Asylum and Farmington trident area. F. Gomes said that the Project Team is examining making Farmington Avenue traffic one way eastbound and Asylum Avenue one way westbound in the area between their junction and Broad Street.

M. McGovern suggested creating a rendering looking up the hill along Asylum Avenue.

S. Bronin inquired about the likelihood of the project being cut as a result of the new presidential administration. R. Armstrong explained that cutting the project has always been a risk. He said the Record of Decision is expected in mid-2019 at which point all decisions will be made. He said that the extensive public involvement process has put the project on good footing, and that the Project Team is close to making strong recommendations on where to

cap the highway and what other mitigation strategies to employ. He concluded that both presidential candidates campaigned on infrastructure investment policies.