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MEETING RECORD

MEETING DATE: February 1, 2011 7:00 – 9:00 pm
PROJECT NAME: WHITEFISH 2ND STREET IMPROVEMENTS
PROJECT NO.: 08-08-11
SUBJECT: Meeting Minutes – Public Meeting # 2
BY: Emily Brock-WGM Group
ATTENDEES: Jeremy Keene PE-WGM Group Mark Bancale PE-WGM Group
Bruce Lutz-Sitescape Associates Karin Hilding-City of Whitefish
Chuck Sterns-City of Whitefish 20 in Audience-see sign in sheet
Bryan Flaherty-Flathead Real Estate attached.

Meeting Telephone Conference Call

This is a summary of the notes from the Public Meeting that was held in Whitefish City Council Chambers on the Whitefish 2nd Street Improvements Project.

Background

This project will reconstruct two blocks of US Highway 93 in downtown Whitefish, from Spokane Avenue to Baker Avenue including those intersections and transitions beyond the intersections. Improvements include reconstruction of the roadway and adjacent sidewalks; reconstruction of underground utilities within the right-of-way; new streetlights; new highway signage; and new traffic signals.

Design for this project must meet the needs of both a US Highway and a downtown street. As a US Highway, this road is owned and maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). As a main street in Whitefish’s commercial core, the City of Whitefish (City) is a major stakeholder. In 2005 the City of Whitefish commissioned the Downtown Master Plan, which helped the project receive federal funding and for which design is based. The Master Planning Process included extensive public involvement.

Attendees to the February 1st, 2011 Public Meeting included merchants, residents, members of the Heart of Whitefish, and other stakeholders in this project.

Meeting Objective

To present the Preliminary Design of the project to the public. To meet stakeholder needs in the final design by receiving comments. To learn the preferred methods of construction, specifically traffic routing and street closures.

I. Presentation Opening

Mr. Keene gave a presentation on the background of the project, what is involved, and what the project outcome will be. He discussed how the project fits with the Downtown Master Plan.

Mr. Keene then gave a project update. He began with a description of the process. This included explaining the significance of receiving a Categorical Exclusion, which means that environmental documentation for the project is complete and funding cannot be taken away.

The Preliminary Design included the following major elements:

- Geometric Layout
- Parking
- Utilities
- Landscaping
- Lighting
- Traffic Signals
- Signing and Pavement Markings
- Right-of-Way
- Cost Estimating

Mr. Keene stressed that the design is only 30% complete and it is important for the engineers to receive feedback as the project goes to final design.

Segments of the presentation that were intended to be interactive were left for the end and are described in the following sections of these notes.

II. Traffic Model and Parking Presentation

Mr. Bancale presented the results of Traffic Demand Modeling. He discussed the scenarios that were examined. Following a brief presentation, Mr. Bancale and Mr. Keene discussed alternatives with the audience. This conversation mainly focused on parking and turn lane lengths.

Question (Q): Are the alley extensions only for aesthetics? They seem to be making parking worse.

Answer (A): They are important for traffic calming and channelization. They do not affect parking.

Q: Are engineers determining how long people can park?

A: No. Parking limits will be signed as they are today, unless the City directs a change.

Q: Are more people turning north from the east or from the west onto Baker?

A: The volumes are similar in the afternoon and mostly from the east in the morning.

Q: If more traffic is coming from the east, can we make the turning lane from the west shorter to create more parking?

A: Possibly.

Q: When you eliminate traffic turning left onto Central does that mean more people will turn left at Baker?

A: Yes, although currently very little traffic turns left at Central.

Q: Then do we need left turn arrows at Baker?

A: We haven't made that decision yet.

Comment: Locals currently avoid Baker and 2nd, especially northbound left turns. They cut through the neighborhoods. If you add turn lanes they will return. Therefore, we definitely need arrows.

Q: If we have arrows, will there be less stack up?

A: Yes. But, left turn arrows increase delay for thru traffic.

Q: If there is less stack up because of turn lanes, can we shorten the turn lane and add parking on 2nd, west of Baker?

A: Possibly. We will look into it.

Comment: We need phased turn arrows because otherwise cars are too busy looking for ways to turn and won't see pedestrians crossing the street.

Comment: Without arrows people won't commit to turning, and this is dangerous.

Q: Does your traffic model show the need for left turn arrows?

A: No, it does not show there is a need. But keep in mind the traffic model can only give us objective answers. We need you to tell us subjective things like people currently avoiding Baker and 2nd, how many people are going to the Mountain, or pedestrian safety concerns. The final decision will be based on engineering judgment and rests with MDT.

Q: Is a leading left, like we are discussing, the same thing as a protected left.

A: Yes.

Comment: When you add the left turn lane at Spokane going west, you are taking away parking.

Q: Do we need to have a left arrow on Spokane turning west?

A: Yes.

Q: Can the left turn lane on Spoken heading west be shorter to find parking?

A: Possibly, we can look into it further.

Comment: I think that we should have a leading left arrow turning west and east onto 2nd from Spokane because kids get out of school and just run across the street. When there is a left arrow, people pay more attention to pedestrians because they aren't focused on trying to get through the intersection.

Q: When the arrow goes away, can people still take a left turn?

A: Yes, if the light is green.

Q: Do left turn arrows help pedestrian crossing?

A: Yes, because the left turn phase is separated from the pedestrian crossing phase.

III. Construction Phasing Discussion

Mr. Keene discussed construction phasing with the audience. His objective is to use Central and 1st and 3rd as a starting point. The discussion focused on what stakeholders liked and what can be improved for the 2nd Street project.

Mr. Keene explained that the plan is to be finished with construction by the peak tourist season, July 2012. This requires that construction starts in the fall of 2011, closes down for winter, and continues in the spring of 2012.

Mr. Keene also explained that the most difficult part of routing traffic will be re-routing trucks through neighborhoods.

Comment: The fall does not start until October; September is still tourist season.

Comment: The fall starts when Going to the Sun Road closes.

Comment: It is better to lose weeks in September than July.

Q: Can we re-route traffic to Karrow-Blanchard Lake Rd during construction?

A: Possibly, yes.

Mr. Keene asked the audience, would they rather:

- 1) Close blocks completely one at a time for construction and reroute traffic. The advantage is that it is faster and less expensive.
- 2) Partially close blocks and construct the project under traffic. The advantage is that people can drive through downtown, having more access to business.

The general consensus was to complete construction as quickly as possible, closing entire blocks at a time.

Q: Why is re-routing more difficult for this project than for 1st and 3rd?

A: There is a much higher traffic volume on 2nd.

Comment: Don't forget that 100 block of Central will be finished by this time and you can detour onto 1st street.

Q: If we close the blocks completely, can we have incentives so they work more than 5days/week?

A: Yes. We plan to use monetary incentives and disincentives.

Q: Deliveries come through alleys. How will we get them if we close down the whole block?

A: We can do something special for deliveries if the block is closed.

Q: Are blocks on 2nd shorter than 1st and 3rd?

A: No, they are pretty much square.

Q: How will we mitigate parking during construction?

A: We can look into renting the lot on Baker and 2nd again.

Q: Can you replicate what was done with signage during 1st and 3rd construction?

A: Yes. Business signing will be similar to the Central Ave. Project.

Comment: The most important thing is adding parking, signage, and alley access. Keeping things similar to the Central Ave. project is important because locals are used to it.

Comment: I heard businesses were pretty happy with construction of 1st and 3rd.

Q: Has there been a cost comparison between closing it block by block and not?

A: No

Q: Is it less expensive to close whole block down?

A: Yes. Dramatically.

Comment: Incentives by the day are better than by the week.

Q: What will be done first, during the fall?

A: This is still to be determined. Most likely it will include utilities and storm drain. Quality problems with asphalt and concrete can occur if it gets cold.

Closing

Mr. Keene expressed appreciation to the public for attending and for understanding that the plan they see today is not the final design. He expressed a desire to continue opportunities for the public to provide input on final design through stakeholder meetings over the next few months. Mr. Keene reiterated that the contact information for designers is in the newsletter.

Key Issues

- Parking is critical, look to find more (especially the west half of Baker-Lupfer.)
- Left turn arrows are preferred at Baker for pedestrian safety.
- Traffic volumes may be low because of local diversions.
- Leasing the parking lot during construction is important.
- Closing down the entire block during construction is preferred.
- Maintaining access for deliveries to businesses is important.
- A Karrow St. detour is a good alternative.
- Incentives for faster construction by the day work are better than by the week.

END OF NOTES