


COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

	Number:	20-075	Meeting:	February 24, 2020
	Agenda Item:	32	Roll Call:	20-0349
	Submitted by:	Chris Johansen, Community Development Director		

AGENDA HEADING:

Amend PlanDSM Creating Our Tomorrow Plan to incorporate the Douglas Avenue Corridor Plan as an element.

SYNOPSIS:

- In 2015, a group of dedicated residents from the Lower Beaver Neighborhood Association (LBNA), concerned about deteriorating conditions in the neighborhood's commercial district, re-convened LBNA's Business Relations Committee. The committee was tasked with implementing commercial corridor priorities laid out in the Lower Beaver Neighborhood Plan, which was adopted in 2013. The plan included strategies for supporting neighborhood businesses, encouraging property owner investment, enhancing corridor aesthetics, improving walkability, and encouraging future growth of neighborhood commercial areas.
- The Prospect Park, Beaverdale, and Merle Hay Neighborhood Associations, sharing similar concerns about the trajectory of Douglas Avenue, added their support and the Douglas Avenue Coalition (DAC) was formed. The mission of the DAC is to support vibrant, viable businesses and revitalize the Douglas Avenue Corridor in the 2.4-mile stretch from Merle Hay Road to the Des Moines River.
- The DAC made a formal request to the City and Polk County for additional planning work to address the ongoing challenges along Douglas Avenue. After funding was secured, the consultant team of RDG Planning & Design and HDR was selected through a competitive RFP process. The project kicked off in October 2017.
- A steering committee consisting of DAC and neighborhood representatives, elected officials, business owners, stakeholders, and City staff guided the planning efforts. A technical committee also advised the project, with representatives from the City's Engineering Department, DART, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and the Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT). Douglas Avenue is also U.S. Highway 6 and under the jurisdiction of IDOT.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- The consultants conducted an intensive public input process that included a kick-off event, a 3-day public design charrette, focus groups with business owners and developers, stakeholder meetings with Moore Elementary and the VA Hospital, and an online survey that collected more than 280 responses. The message in each of these outreach efforts was consistent: Be BOLD.
- Plan recommendations for public realm improvements include:
 - Implementation of a 4-lane to 3-lane road diet west of Lower Beaver Road. An extensive traffic study, completed by HDR, found that current and projected traffic volumes to the west of Lower Beaver Road support a lane reduction. By reducing the roadway, public space can be re-allocated to allow for wider sidewalks, expanded parkway, and the addition of street trees. A 3-lane cross-section would also help calm traffic and reduce crashes. The consultant recommends a pilot project to test the conversion for a 1-year time period, collecting data to measure the impact of the project and evaluate the road diet as a long-term solution.
 - Narrow the existing five (5) travel lanes from 13-foot wide to an 11-foot width east of Lower Beaver Road, where traffic counts are higher. This provides for wider sidewalks, expanded parkway and landscape improvements in the public right-of-way.
 - Increase pedestrian safety with enhanced crosswalks throughout the corridor.
 - Improve aesthetics by reducing visual clutter, burying overhead utilities if feasible.
- The plan also highlights strategies for private realm improvements, outlining candidate sites for redevelopment and/or new development. Conceptual redevelopment strategies are provided at four (4) nodes including:
 - The commercial district between 54th Street to 59th Street near Merle Hay Road.
 - The Beavertdale Hy-Vee site (the plan proposes potential layouts of how Hy-Vee may situate its proposed building and parking lot once they move forward with the project).
 - The commercial node 38th Street & Douglas Avenue.
 - The intersection of Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway & Douglas Avenue, including Harding Hills Plaza & River Plaza.
- Over the course of the planning process, the design team was required to pivot and respond to multiple changing conditions. This included the flooding of the Harding Hills Hy-Vee, new ownership and changes in development interest of several commercial buildings, and re-mapping of the 100-year and 500-year floodplain along the Des Moines River. Most notably, Plaza Lanes – an anchor of the corridor and local destination – burned in December of 2017. The redevelopment of the River Plaza shopping center as parkland, with access to the river for fishing and kayaking, emerged as a potential new recreational destination for the corridor.
- The design consultants wrapped up the planning process with an Open House in late October 2019. Attendees were asked to record their opinions of the proposed strategies via the “dot method” directly on the display boards. These results are documented in the plan appendix.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: July 9, 2018

Roll Call Number: [18-1164](#)

Action: [First](#) Amendment to Professional Services Agreement with RDG Planning & Design for the Douglas Avenue corridor plan. ([Council Communication No. 18-349](#)) Moved by Gatto to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Board: Plan and Zoning Commission

Date: February 6, 2020

Resolution Number: N/A

Action: Recommend that PlanDSM Creating Our Tomorrow be amended to incorporate the Douglas Avenue Corridor Plan as an element. Approved by a 11-0 vote of the Commission.

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

- Future City Council action to support implementation activities, including a pilot project for re-striping Douglas Avenue as a 3-lane roadway, will be necessary. Any projects requiring Capital Improvement Program (CIP), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), or other funds will come before Council for approval.

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