

STAFF REPORT

DATE: September 8, 2009

TO: City Council

FROM: Katherine Hess, Community Development Director
Bob Weir, Public Works Director
Bob Clarke, City Engineer
Michael Webb, Principal Planner

SUBJECT: Fifth Street Corridor Workplan

Recommendation

Staff recommends the City Council re-affirm the approved workplan and timeline for evaluating options for the Fifth Street Corridor. The workplan calls for the City Council to make a decision on which option, if any, to pursue for the corridor in October (see attached workplan).

The City has committed to a comprehensive, inclusive process for addressing the prospect of a “road diet” or other alternatives to make the Fifth Street corridor friendlier to other transportation modes. The city recently received correspondence from individuals in the community supportive of the “road diet”. These individuals contend that there is some urgency to accelerate a decision on the “road diet” to tonight’s meeting given SACOG’s request for evidence of community support in conjunction with their review of the city’s grant funding request for the project. While it is probably true that our grant application would not receive favorable consideration without community support as evidenced by an affirmative Council action, it is not a guarantee of funding as SACOG has identified other issues with the request. We may be able to address those issues, but there is still a possibility we will not receive funding. Accordingly, staff would caution against accelerating a decision solely for the purpose of the grant request. Staff believes ultimate “community buy in” will be more achievable by adhering to the process previously articulated. While receiving the grant would certainly be desirable, it is important to note we do have an established funding source from roadway impact fees with an adequate fund balance to proceed with the project. Also, should Fifth Street not be funded by SACOG, there is still the possibility that our other grant request to fund the 3rd. 1st. and B street improvements will be funded, and that would free up funds that would otherwise be used for those projects.

Fiscal Impact

The recommendation has no economic impact upon the City. Staff time for completing the tasks in the workplan has been incorporated into the operating budgets for the Community Development and Public Works Departments. Financial analysis of options for the Fifth Street corridor will return to the Council in October.

Council Goal(s)

The Fifth Street Corridor effort addresses the City Council goals of maintaining and improving the infrastructure by investigating opportunities to enhance the safety and efficient circulation of all modes of transportation. Specific City Council Goals and Initiatives relevant to the discussion of the Fifth Street Corridor include:

- Provide a safe and efficient circulation system.
- Present Council with recommendations to reconfigure 5th Street between A and L Streets.
- Encourage and support alternative forms of transportation.
- Provide five minute fire and emergency response time to all neighborhoods.
- Actively solicit neighborhood concerns regarding traffic safety.
- Further enhance the downtown to allow for more arts and entertainment, adequate parking, housing and commercial activity, recognizing that our downtown is the heart and soul of the community and one of our greatest potential net revenue generators.

Background

In September 2008, staff presented a workplan to the City Council detailing a process to engage the community in a discussion about the issues and opportunities for the Fifth Street corridor from A Street to L Street. The City Council approved the workplan unanimously. From October 2008 to February 2009, staff conducted a series of meetings with stakeholders, the public and community groups to obtain input about the corridor. In February 2009, staff presented to the Council details of the feedback received as a result of the outreach efforts and, in an effort to help focus further investigation, staff also identified a number of policy-related questions for the Council aimed at narrowing the key parameters to be considered in developing options. The Council considered the policy questions and there was a general consensus to keep as many options open as possible. In an effort to narrow the scope for the analysis phase of the workplan, in May of 2009 the City Council directed staff to do the following:

1. Conduct analysis of the following three options:
 - A. Maintain the existing four lane road configuration, provide improvements to alternative corridors for cyclists and implement improvements that address the principal safety issues for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists within the Fifth Street corridor.
 - B. Reduce the number of lanes from 4 to 3, provide on-street bicycle lanes and implement safety improvements for all modes of travel.
 - C. Pilot project (minimum cost option) for implementing option B above.
2. Engage the community in consolidated outreach meeting(s) with findings of analysis.
3. Present options and obtain recommendations from the SPAC and BAC.
4. Present staff recommendation to City Council for final action by October 2009.

The City Council did not allocate additional funds for analysis or for construction of any improvements, but recognized that implementation of any of the options would require allocation of resources.

Staff is developing more detailed project scopes pros/cons for each of the three options. Staff anticipates engaging the community with this information in mid September to ascertain community reaction to each, and to ensure that the potential benefits and drawbacks of each alternative have been fully vetted. We have been working toward a public workshop in late September. Staff will engage the SPAC and BAC in September and early October and, ultimately, return to the City Council with a recommendation for consideration in October. All of the above is consistent with the approved workplan.

In August of this year the City Council directed staff to submit three projects for the SACOG Community Design Grant application. A Road Diet for the Fifth Street Corridor is one of those projects. The City Council did not direct staff to deviate from the Fifth Street Corridor workplan. Staff submitted a pre-application letter to SACOG in mid-August. In its preliminary review of the proposal, SACOG noted that

1. It is unclear whether the City Council and the community at-large have endorsed a road diet project; and
2. SACOG has reservations about whether traffic engineering studies and CEQA analysis can be completed within a timeline that will still allow construction to be completed by the statutory deadlines for the funding.

Final application submittals to SACOG are due on September 3rd. By September 9th SACOG must be notified of any additional local actions that impact the application submittals. Staff will be preparing a full application package for the Road Diet proposal, in accordance with the Council's direction from August 3rd

Analysis

Staff believes that if the City is to address SACOG's concern noted above the City Council would need to deviate from the approved workplan and provide full endorsement of a Road Diet. Such an action would likely be coupled with directing staff to go directly to the implementation phase of the project. The implementation phase includes development of full project details, design, and completing CEQA analysis. The CEQA analysis will require some technical analysis of traffic impacts beyond that which has been conducted to date. The technical analysis will also tell us whether an EIR is required, or whether the project can be considered with a Negative Declaration.

It is unknown whether a Council endorsement of a Road Diet alone will be sufficient to address SACOG's concern for community support of a Road Diet project. This is particularly true given the high profile nature of the Corridor in the Davis community and the past application to SACOG, which was withdrawn by the City due to growing community concerns at the time. Evidence of community support would likely need to come in the form of endorsement letters from a full spectrum of community and stakeholder groups, such as neighborhood associations, bicycle advocates, and businesses. While support for a Road Diet, and for endorsement of the SACOG grant application, is being voiced Old North Davis residents and the Davis Bicycles! organization, the Chamber of Commerce and DDBA have expressed significant concerns over the Road Diet concept. Over the last several days the City Council has been receiving input from some in an effort to compel a Council endorsement of a Road Diet in order to bolster the SACOG application.

In the original discussions of a possible road diet in 2005, the primary driver of the analysis was responding to a proposed solution, a “road diet”, rather than making a comprehensive effort to engage the community to identify what problems, or opportunities, existed in the corridor. The corridor serves many modes of transportation, including vehicles, delivery trucks, buses, emergency vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. How the corridor is configured impacts these modes of transportation and the properties, businesses, and events served by the corridor.

In recognition of these multiple interests, staff proposed, and the City Council approved in September of 2008, the workplan that we are currently engaged in to gain a better understanding of the full breadth of interests, issues, and impacts. The workplan was deliberately designed to engage as many stakeholders and perspectives from the community as possible. Furthermore, the workplan is intended to ensure that open dialogue, understanding of the potential pros and cons of options, and transparency in process and decision-making, occur. It was, and still is, staff’s belief that, while community consensus on the final decision would be desirable, having community buy-in to the decision-making process was critical.

Staff believes that the rationale that went into devising the workplan is still applicable today. SACOG grant funding is not essential to implementing a road diet on Fifth Street, if that is the direction that the City Council ultimately decides to go. The City has unallocated funds in the development fee account for roadway improvements that could provide partial financing for Fifth Street Corridor improvements and also in Redevelopment Agency capital funds, Construction Tax, CDBG and General Fund accounts. SACOG and others will likely have future grant funding opportunities as well, so there is no financial reason to rush to a decision on project scope.

Staff believes that the best approach to the Fifth Street Corridor is one that includes a commitment to evaluating the issues, understanding the ramifications of the three options as best we can given budgetary constraints, and presenting our analysis to the community and, ultimately, to the City Council for final action. Therefore, staff recommends the City Council reaffirm the approved workplan and timeline for evaluating options for the Fifth Street Corridor.

Attachments

1. Fifth Street Corridor Workplan
2. August 24th letter from SACOG

Fifth Street Corridor Workplan Revised May 5, 2009

Overall Approach: engage the community, interest groups, and decision-makers to identify goals/objectives for the Fifth Street corridor, to facilitate development and analysis of project options, and to decide on a course of action.

Proposed Workplan and Timeline

1. Present proposed workplan and timeline to City Council (Sep., 08)
2. Engage in comprehensive civic engagement (Oct/Nov/Dec 08)
 - a. Goal is to identify issues, comments, concerns, ideas to examine – there is no pre-determined outcome or project.
 - b. Existing conditions, traffic data, and accident data will be provided
 - c. See attachment A for details
3. City Council Workshop (Feb. 09)
 - a. Check in with findings from civic engagement
 - b. Identify key issues
 - c. Establish key parameters to help focus analysis phase.
 - d. Approve necessary budget adjustments/contracts for future steps.
4. Present Options to City Council (May 09)
 - a. Introduce conceptual project options based on criteria established in step 3 above (e.g. to resolve issue X you might employ options A, B, or C).
 - b. Narrow range of options before embarking on further development, analysis, and community engagement.
5. Development and Analysis of Alternatives (May - Aug 09)

Staff and consultant(s), if needed, to devise and detail specific alternatives and analysis of each. Note: some alternatives may require technical analysis, such as traffic modeling. Peer review of technical analyses may also be utilized.
6. Re-engage the Community with Details of Alternatives (Aug - Sep 09)
 - a. Meeting with stakeholders and community at-large
 - b. Meetings of the SPAC and BAC for recommendations to Council
7. Report back to City Council with recommendations for action (Sep - Oct 09)
8. Implementation (TBD)
 - a. Details of implementation to be developed at a later date depending upon action.
 - b. Environmental review (CEQA)
 - c. Additional analysis, if needed
 - d. Design



August 24, 2009

Robert A. Clarke
City Engineer
City of Davis
23 Russell Blvd.
Davis CA 95616

Re: Fifth Street Corridor Road Diet

Mr. Clarke:

Thanks for providing us with the city of Davis' pre-submittal letter for initial review for the Fifth Street Corridor Road Diet as a potential candidate for the Community Design Funding Program. The main purpose of the pre-submittal letter is for the SACOG/Caltrans Review Team to help determine if your potential project is eligible for federal-aid funding through the Community Design Funding Program.

The SACOG/Caltrans Review Team has completed a review of your project, and the following are its comments:

1. The Team understands that your project will convert one travel lane in each direction on Fifth Street between A and L to allow for median islands, turn pocket at intersections and bicycle lanes.
2. The Team believes that this project is generally eligible for federal aid funding and therefore the city may apply for Community Design funding. However, some concerns were raised by the Team regarding this project.
3. First and foremost, the Team could not tell if this project has been endorsed by the city council and the community at-large. The city submitted an application for this project in Round 2, and then withdraw it before the program's selection committee reached a conclusion on whether to fund it. The Community Design Program is intended to fund projects desired by the recipient community that promote the Blueprint. The Team is requesting that the city make an affirmative statement in its application that it is fully committed to the project.
4. In addition, the Team did not see any information in the pre-submittal letter that right-of-way issues have been completely resolved. Also, because traffic circulation is likely to be altered a result of this project, please convey the conclusion of traffic studies that have been completed. If impacts have been identified, the Team has reservations about whether this associated EIR/EIS can be completed in timely manner and still finish construction within the program's timeline. Please plan to discuss these items in your application.

5. The pre-submittal letter did not reference an engineer's cost estimate, which suggests that this project may not be ready at the level the program would prefer. Also, the proposed minimum match suggests that it wishes the Program to assume the vast majority of the risk. Given the likely controversial nature of this project, please identify how the city will fund other road diet projects in the city if this one is considered successful.

The following notes are sent to all applicants:

6. If you choose to apply for Community Design Program funding and your project is recommended for funding by the Community Design Selection Committee (the first of two review committees), you will be contacted the week of September 28 and at that time, you may be required to calculate the emissions benefits of your project before the October 8 or 9 interviews. SACOG will ask you to perform this requirement only if and when there is a realistic possibility your project may receive Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program funding. For a project to spend CMAQ, it must show that it reduces emissions of certain types of pollutants.
7. Likewise, if your project is recommended for funding by the Community Design Selection Committee, and there is a realistic possibility that the project might receive STIP-TE funding, then you will have an additional requirement. A new law requires that SACOG give priority to TE-eligible projects that partner with or employ the Sacramento Regional Conservation Corps (916) 386-8394 or the California Conservation Corps (916) 341-3129. For this reason, the SACOG Review Team will work with your jurisdiction if this project is recommended for funding by the Community Design Review Group. Again, you will be notified the week of September 28 whether you will be offered an interview for the grant funds and whether this requirement may affect your project. If so, you will be given further information and then you will be asked in your interview on October 8 or 9 about your plans to meet this new requirement.

Based on the comments above, the Team has concluded that this project is federal aid eligible as proposed but a number of questions linger. You may apply for funding, but please address the issues raised above. Please keep in mind that if the project that you apply for substantively changes from what you have written in your pre-submittal letter, you may need to re-send a new pre-submittal letter for SACOG review. Because of your qualifications in managing federal-aid funding, SACOG will defer to you if and when a new letter is warranted. Also, if you decide to apply for the Community Design funding during this round, please include a copy of your pre-submittal letter and this response in your application.

If you have any questions about SACOG's response, please feel free to contact me at (916) 340-6227

Sincerely,



Gregory R. Chew
SACOG Community Design Program Manager