
FOREST HILL AVENUE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT
STAKEHOLDER MEETING

September 21, 2011
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
St. Lukes Church

MEETING NOTES

- **Meeting Expectations:**

Stakeholders were asked what they expected to gain from the facilitation meeting and to voice their concerns with the overall project. Responses from stakeholders include:

- Hope to tweak option to gain a consensus among stakeholders
- Concerned that the existing option is too wide and encroaches on private property
- Want to find a common ground to improve a dangerous corridor
- Too much pavement in the existing option and a left turn lane into Willow Oaks is needed
- Concern with how stakeholders selected to participate in the facilitation were chosen
- Concerns with ROW encroaching on private property and taking away parking
- Speeding issues along Forest Hill Ave exist now that cause dangerous conditions
- All efforts should be made to save every tree possible
- Beautification efforts are needed to indicate drivers are in a residential neighborhood.
 - Balance aesthetics and safety in design process
- Bicycle safety is a major concern, vehicular traffic should be slowed
- Concerned about utilities and design - if possible power lines should be buried; textured crosswalks and native plantings should be included in final design

- **Current Project Status:**

City staff provided an update on the current status of the project, explaining that Option B was recommended by the Planning Commission. Their input is needed to develop the 60% plans. Project will go back before the Urban Design Committee and a public hearing will be held as well. A discussion among stakeholders followed and included the following:

- Stakeholder wanted to know how much closer the actual roadway would be to existing homes along Forest Hill Avenue.
 - Staff indicated that the roadway in general would be 6' closer and that the actual ROW would be 17' closer. This 17' also accounted for the bicycle lanes, curb and gutter, planting strip and a sidewalk.
 - Stakeholders once again voiced concern with encroachment on private property and the width of pavement and removal of existing trees.
- Stakeholder noted that the city should sell how the improvements along Forest Hill Ave will benefit neighborhood and property owners
 - There was discussion that sidewalks are beneficial for area
- Concerns were raised regarding the relocation of utility poles closer to homes
 - Staff indicated that it would cost \$4 million to bury utility lines underground and that the City would have to fund half of the costs.
 - Consensus was reached that utility lines should be buried if at all possible.
- Stakeholders questioned why the curb-to-curb pavement width is wider in residential areas than the commercial area.

- Staff indicated that it is a result of inconsistent typical section of the existing roadway as some sections already have curb & gutter while others don't.
- Concerns regarding the safety of cyclist were raised.
 - Cyclist should be routes through the residential neighborhoods to remove cyclist from Forest Hill Ave if possible – others felt bike lanes and routing should be on Forest Hill when designed properly
- Stakeholders wanted to reduce the turning radius in order to reduce speeds. City noted that some had already been reduced as requested and would consider.

Project Elements:

A discussion regarding individual elements of the project ensued as staff explained the widths and amenities associated with each element. Stakeholders were encouraged to voice their likes and dislikes of each element and also provided suggestions on how to improve existing Option B.

Bike Lanes

- All were in agreement that bicycle lanes should be included in final design of project, but in effort to reduce overall pavement width, it was suggested that the current design for curb and gutter pans be reduced to the greatest extent possible and that the bicycle lane pavement be extended as far as possible to the curb.
- Stakeholders want to maintain 5 foot width of bicycle lanes.
 - Potential concern was discussed that this would cause stormwater issues and would clutter the bicycle lanes with debris after rain.

Median

- Stakeholders raised the possibility of reducing the width of the median and irrigating the median (as long as it doesn't require increasing the width of the median). General recommendation was to make the median as narrow as possible.
- Native plants should used to landscape median and some sort of gateway marker should also be included in the design
 - While tall trees are liked by residents, plants should be kept out of above ground utilities, if utilities can't be buried.
 - General consensus that they want trees in median to create canopy effect on roadway.

Sidewalks/Intersections

- Stakeholder questioned if sidewalk could be constructed around existing trees
 - Sidewalks can be designed to avoid trees – would be done in design phase.
 - Staff indicated that 250 new trees would be planted with improvements and that the trees will grow over time to create the canopy effect desired.
 - Stakeholder noted that project would cause root damage to trees that remain that will make these trees more vulnerable during next big storm.
- Stakeholder suggested reducing the width of the sidewalk to 4 feet, reducing the overall typical section width by 2 feet.
 - Staff indicated that this would require design exception from VDOT and may require some “pass-by” areas for ADA compliance.
 - Stakeholders agreed that sidewalks should be reduced to 4 feet.

Lane Width

- Some stakeholders wanted lane width to be reduced to 10' travel lanes.
 - Staff did not recommend this as school buses, GRTC buses, and trucks all utilize Forest Hill Ave and require 11' travel lanes.

- Safety issues will persist if everything element is reduced to its minimal width.
- It was discussed that perhaps 11 foot lanes could be on outside and inside could be narrower.
- In general, stakeholders want as narrow lanes as possible to reduce speeding, but they also want it to be safe.

Planting Strip

- A four foot planting strip was selected in order to provide tree canopy to develop.
 - There is a relationship between the utilities and the trees. It was again noted that if possible, utilities should be buried underground.
 - All wanted to retain the four foot planting strip.

Other Discussion Items

There was also some general design discussion about trying to reduce impacts to houses that may have noise and visual impacts. The use of berms and attractive treatments for retaining walls was requested.

A parking lot was developed for issues that need to be addressed. They included:

- It was suggested that an additional meeting be held with specific property owners along Forest Hill.
- A comprehensive tree study was requested – including identification of trees removed and then short and long term effects of tree replacement. Goal is to recreate the canopy of trees.
- An additional meeting was requested and agreed to by the City to present how these comments would be addressed.

Next Steps:

- Design will be reviewed based on the comments received and redesigned where possible.
- Stakeholders hope Staff would review comments from the facilitation meeting and alter Option B accordingly. Stakeholder also wished to have another small facilitation meeting as they felt it was helpful to address the issues and reach consensus in a smaller setting.
 - Staff stated that another facilitation meeting would take place in the future.