

**Summary of Outcomes and Options for Next Steps**

**August 7, 2009**

A design charrette was held on August 3<sup>rd</sup> to look at the design of the proposed underpass on 30<sup>th</sup> Street at the Boulder Slough, one element of a package of transportation improvements on 30<sup>th</sup> Street. The complete package of improvements and issues related to the underpass project were previously addressed in a [Weekly Information Packet](#) (WIP) to Council on July 2, 2009.

Over 35 people attended the charrette, participating in a site visit and walking tour before hearing an overview of the project. Participants asked many questions and then turned to the primary task of sketching out their ideas and suggestions for refining, realigning or relocating the underpass project.

**Summary of Outcomes**

Participants were invited to participate at three different tables:

- REFINE: improve the existing design within time, budget and engineering constraints.
- REALIGN: change the location of underpass ramps or shift the bridge
- RELOCATE: other ways and locations to accomplish the goal of the underpass to provide a safe crossing of 30<sup>th</sup> Street between Pearl and Walnut and link the Transit Village to the Twenty-Ninth Street area.

Thoughtful, creative and feasible ideas emerged at all three tables, with robust and productive discussions of the relative merits of each. A team of designers sketched the suggestions. Staff then developed the tables in **Design Ideas: Attachment B** which summarizes the suggestions and provides initial staff feedback.

Design suggestions centered on several themes, including the desire to save as many trees as possible at the “oasis of greenery” on the west side of the Slough, and concern for nearby tenants, both in terms of the loss of trees and the impact on business during the construction process. Of particular interest to charrette participants was Ras Kassas, the Ethiopian restaurant at 2111 30<sup>th</sup> Street (directly southwest of the proposed underpass).

Other strong themes at the charrette emphasized the importance of the underpass as a link to the developing Transit Village area and a safe crossing for bicyclists and pedestrians of busy 30<sup>th</sup> Street. Concerns about the bridge at the Slough were also emphasized, as the bridge is the lowest-rated structure in Boulder (47 on a scale of 100).

## ***1 Refinement Outcomes***

This group looked at refining the current design of the underpass to make it work as well as possible, while keeping the project on time and on budget. Charrette participants generated several strong suggestions that staff is comfortable integrating into the project. More details are available on the accompanying table. These refinements include:

- Increase greenery through landscaping improvements in the final built project. Maintain shade over the Ras Kassas patio, either through retaining trees or building a trellis. Vines would be added along the retaining walls to soften their impact. Colored concrete will be used if the budget allows. (L1, L2, L4 on the ideas table)
- Minor revisions to the grading and sidewalk layout at 2111 30<sup>th</sup> will save the two trees flanking the Ras Kassas driveway. (G1 on the ideas table)
- Art elements, possibly with Ethiopian and other African images. will be incorporated into the bridge design and perhaps retaining walls. This art could be developed in conjunction with local artists and the community that gathers at Ras Kassas. (L3 on the ideas table)
- Narrow the multi-use path off the ends of the bridge at the north end, and build shorter retaining walls. These changes move the ramp slightly further away from 2121 30<sup>th</sup> Street and could save additional trees, depending on final design requirements. (M2, G3 on the ideas table)

Several more significant refinements were also suggested. Staff is currently exploring their feasibility, and recommends incorporating them into the design if engineering standards allow and they can be incorporated within the project timeline and budget.

- Refine the west side ramp entrance and retaining walls. The changes will provide additional buffer to the properties at 2111 and 2121 30<sup>th</sup>. These changes will spare between 4 and 10 trees (depending on final engineering) and could increase the space for the patio at Ras Kassas. (B5, R1, M1, on the ideas table)
- Refine the Ras Kassas parking lot drainage. This will allow for a larger patio space or additional landscaping at Ras Kassas. (G2 on the ideas table)

These refinements will improve the project and help mitigate the impacts on trees and adjacent businesses. Staff is reasonably confident the refinements will fit within the existing budget and the project can stay on the projected timeline. Other suggested revisions are not recommended due to safety, operational, budget and timing concerns. The complete list of suggested revisions is included in the **Design Ideas: Attachment B)**

## ***2 Realignment Designs***

This group looked at options to significantly reconfigure the ramp alignments and bridge placement. The time needed to incorporate these design changes would mean the project would not proceed on the current timeline. Due to tight timelines on the federal funding,

it could jeopardize the \$2.6 million federal grant, depending on how long the project was delayed. Additional design costs would be incurred, and construction would likely be more expensive.

Staff's initial review of these options suggest that none of them offer a significant improvement in the project or substantially reduce the impacts, with some options shifting impacts to other private properties. However, more detailed analysis would be undertaken if Council chooses to "reconsider other options."

The realignment designs are described in detail in the attached ideas table. Some of the realignment suggestions include:

- Bring the west-side ramp in from the south, instead of from the north
- Eliminate the at-grade path on the west side of 30<sup>th</sup>, with all users dropping down to the underpass entrance
- Loop pathway up the channel more, away from Ras Kassas
- Shift the alignment of 30<sup>th</sup> Street to the east by 20 or 25 feet
- Build the underpass at the Slough, but not provide connections to 30<sup>th</sup> Street.

### ***3 Relocation Options***

Participants at the third table identified alternatives to building the underpass at the Slough. Possibilities included:

- Build an at-grade, pedestrian actuated crossing instead of the underpass
- Move the underpass to Pearl or Walnut
- Rely on existing at-grade crossings at Walnut and Pearl, with the eventual connection of 32<sup>nd</sup> Street between Pearl and Walnut providing a bicycle/pedestrian connection.

These approaches would minimize impacts on the private property at the Slough. Because the city's various transportation plans (the Transportation Master Plan, the Boulder Valley Regional Center Connections Plan and the Transit Village Area Plan) identify an underpass at the Slough as the primary connection, a new planning and public involvement process would be necessary to identify a preferred location for a different crossing. Staff and Council would need to identify when that planning process would be undertaken. If funding is required for improvements, it would need to be identified.

Any of the "relocate" options would require the city return the \$2.6 million federal grant called "Boulder Transit Village Connections," including repaying approximately \$.5 million in design fees already spent. Several elements of the 30<sup>th</sup> Street improvements project were bundled together in this grant. In addition to the underpass, the grant money is intended to replace the bridge at the Slough, build an at-grade pedestrian crossing north of Pearl, and build a pathway link from northbound 30<sup>th</sup> down to the Goose Creek Pathway. Because the city has set aside matching dollars for this grant, staff believe they could shift the budget around to still build connection to the Goose Creek Path. The bridge, however, would not be replaced, nor would the associated flood improvements be

completed, until other funding was identified. Bike lanes could probably still be accommodated across the existing bridge, though some compromises would need to be made for street alignment and the sidewalk on the east side would remain narrow. The 30<sup>th</sup> & Pearl intersection improvements could also likely be completed.

### **Next Steps**

As was expressed to participants at the charrette, minor revisions to the proposed project design can be achieved within the existing budget and timeline, while more substantial changes in the underpass design would require reconfiguration of the project budget and timeline. New locations for a crossing would require a public process leading to revision of the Transportation Master Plan and other relevant connections plans, as well as identifying new funding to build the connection.

### ***Implement the Refined Underpass Design***

Staff proposes to refine the current design with charrette input and proceed with the project, keeping it within budget and schedule constraints. Based on the technical team's analysis, numerous refinements (described above) could definitely be incorporated, while the more substantial refinements show promise, pending confirmation that they can be achieved within CDOT guidelines and engineering standards. These changes would respond to some of the key concerns raised by charrette participants by reducing tree loss and mitigating the impacts on adjacent businesses, while still maintaining the functionality of the project. Nonetheless, a considerable number of trees would still need to be removed in order to implement the project. Staff will provide illustrations at the study session to show the trees that will need to be removed and the trees that will be saved.

### ***Reconsider Other Options***

Staff could explore significantly different approaches as suggested in the realign and relocate tables at the charrette. A number of ideas emerged which could be explored. This approach may require returning some federal funding and potentially reopening planning processes to amend relevant transportation plans. If Council would like staff to pursue this option, staff will return at a Council business meeting, likely on August 18, for further direction.