



CITY OF REDMOND
Community Development Department

716 SW Evergreen Avenue
Redmond, OR 97756
(541) 923-7721
Fax: (541) 548-0706
www.ci.redmond.or.us

DATE: December 5, 2013
TO: South US 97 Corridor Plan Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Members
THROUGH: Heather Richards, Community Development Director
FROM: Scott Woodford, Associate Planner
SUBJECT: Design Charrette Outcome

Report in Brief:

The report provides an overview of the October 29-30 Design Charrette and explores next steps.

Background:

On October 29-30, SERA Architects led a design charrette with the South US 97 PAC to explore potential solutions to several issues the PAC has been wrestling with over the course of the last six months, which were access and the desired visual character of the corridor. The charrette started with a discussion on what the challenges were for the corridor:

- Inconsistent frontage improvements
- Inconsistent/confusing access configurations
- Inconsistent signage
- Poor aesthetics
- High speeds
- Safety issues / history of collisions
- No sense of arrival from the south
- No access or crossings south of Yew Avenue
- Lack of pedestrian and bicycle access
- Poor east-west connectivity (canal & railroad)
- Poor accessibility to west side residential lands
- Vacant and underutilized land
- Local access vs. through traffic needs

From that, the PAC elaborated on what their vision is for the highway corridor:

- Uniform public improvements within three distinct "character areas"
- Attractive (Redmond-appropriate), including consistent/appropriate signage
- Improved safety and "calmed" traffic on highway
- Sensible access
- Vibrant business climate
- "Gateway" or sense of arrival at south end
- Improved east-west connectivity (citywide and locally)
- Enhanced bike/pedestrian access to residential area and canal trail
- Clarity in terms of future development standards
- Implementable (with defined methods, costs, funding, triggers, phasing, and roles/responsibilities)

Attachment A – Clustered Access Plan

Attachment B – Frontage Road Plan Concept

Attachment C – Frontage Road Section Concept

Attachment D – Urban Commercial Street Plan Concept

Taking that vision and understanding the constraints, the charrette progressed into looking at the unique issues and potential solutions for the three distinct character areas along the study area: Village Commercial (from Highland to Odem Medo), Urban Commercial (from Odem Medo to Yew Avenue), and Gateway Districts (Yew Avenue to the southern city entrance on US 97).

Village Commercial:

Noting that the properties along this section were very constrained with the highway on one side and the railroad or canal on the other and with a high density of accesses, the consultants looked at opportunities for shared access points to help increase safety. Initially, the idea was to do small clusters of two-three properties of shared access (please see Attachment A), but it became quickly apparent that once you strung multiple clusters together it essentially turned into a continuous frontage access all along the corridor (please see Attachment B). It was decided that in order to make the frontage road fully functional and to provide maximum mobility to businesses from the highway, it needed to be a two-way street. With this scenario, parking that most businesses currently have in front of buildings would be preserved and bicycle and pedestrian access and safety would be greatly enhanced through a more continuous path along the highway with less curb cuts. This would also provide a better, more cohesive landscape buffer. Also, by clustering access, 14 accesses for 16 properties could be reduced to 5 accesses for 16 properties, which would result in much safer turning movements on the highway, yet still retain convenient business access.

It was recommended by the consultants that the City own the land that the frontage road crosses so that consistent maintenance can be assured. Alternatively, it could be operated on a public access easement across private property, but this would rely on individual owners to maintain the street and some might not be maintained consistently. If it were a city street, it would require purchase of right of way from the business owners along this stretch of corridor. The frontage road with parking, sidewalk and landscape buffer generally fit into the existing conditions because there has been a 50' building setback imposed on the area for some time (see Attachment C). However, there are several older buildings that were constructed closer to the property line and would therefore be in the way. Also, there are other existing improvements in the area, including signage, outdoor seating areas, outdoor displays, etc. that may have to be reoriented to accommodate the frontage road. The frontage road could be done in clusters as property owners agree to consolidate access points and the ultimate completion of the frontage road may not occur until many years in the future when properties with buildings in the way redevelop and are required to build new structures to the 50' front setback.

Urban Commercial:

The issues surrounding this stretch of the corridor are different than the Village Commercial due to the lots being wider and deeper, thus presenting more opportunities for access options. Not to say there aren't some existing constraints:

- Poor connectivity between residential areas to west and commercial businesses along US 97
- Constrained access for businesses in vicinity of Yew Avenue interchange
- Physical constraints presented by canal to the west and railroad tracks / power lines to the east.
- Local and regional / through traffic all utilize US 97

To help improve mobility in the area between different properties without always relying on use of US 97, the following improvements are recommended (see Attachment D):

- New backage road on the east side of US 97 connecting Odem Medo to Wickiup to Yew Avenue
- New 17th Place extension
- New Umatilla extension
- New formalized roadway from US 97 across from Wickiup, adjacent to Big R
- New Wickiup extension with canal crossing

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- New signalized intersection at Wickiup
- Proposed recreation path along canal
- Buildings along 97 with parking to side / rear to slow down traffic

Gateway Commercial:

Access in this character district was not discussed in great detail as the access plan in the US 97 Corridor Plan for this area is fairly straightforward. The charrette did review a concept for the Gateway Feature that SERA created that showed a possible design for the ODOT owned jug handles in the Yew Avenue/US 97 intersection.

On November 15, 2013, the US 97 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) met to review the concepts generated in the charrette. The TAC consists of City Engineering and Planning staff, ODOT representatives, and Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD). While acknowledging that the design concepts generated are very conceptual and much more technical study would need to be done to investigate their viability, no initial, fatal technical flaws were pointed out.

The discussions at the TAC meeting also pointed out the opportunity for a partnership between the City and ODOT on future improvements to the South US 97 corridor in Redmond. ODOT plans a major street reconstruction between Veterans Way and Wickiup Avenue in 5-7 years. This coupled with the fact that the second phase of the reroute of US 97 is unlikely anytime soon due to the prohibitive costs (\$200-\$300 million) points toward the need to make improvements to the existing South US 97 corridor to allow it to continue to operate safely and efficiently into the distant future, which overlap with what the US 97 PAC has been working on. ODOT has leftover funding for design that could be utilized on the planning for these improvements and will investigate possible funding sources for future construction.

Discussion:

The goal of the December 5th meeting is to discuss the design concepts generated from the design charrette and establish the next steps in the process.

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