



CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Richfield, Minnesota

City Council & Transportation Commission Work Session

April 14, 2021

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Regan Gonzalez at 7:00 p.m. virtually via WebEx.

Council Members Present: Maria Regan Gonzalez, Mayor; Mary Supple; and Sean Hayford Oleary

Council Members Absent: Ben Whalen; Simon Trautmann

Transportation Commission Present: Wes Dunser; Husniyah Bradley; David Gepner; Louis Dzierzak; Dan Edgerton; Mollie O’Howard; Kyle Schmidt; Ken Severson; Jeff Walz.

Staff Present: Katie Rodriguez, City Manager; Kristin Asher, Public Works Director; Joe Powers, City Engineer; Melissa Poehlman, Assistant Community Development Director; David ‘Kris’ Weiby, Program Manager; Scott Kulzer, Administrative Aide/Analyst; Olivia Wycklendt, Civil Engineer; and Kelly Wynn, Senior Office Assistant.

Others Present: Amber Blanchard, MnDOT I-494 Project Engineer; and Andrew Lutaya, MnDOT -I494 Project Manager

Item #1	REVIEW THE APPROVED I-494: AIRPORT TO HIGHWAY 169 VISION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE IDENTIFIED “PROJECT 1” ELEMENTS AND OBTAIN GUIDANCE FROM THE CITY COUNCIL ON ELEMENTS RELATED TO THE FUTURE PORTLAND AVENUE INTERCHANGE DESIGN AND SUBSEQUENT IMPACTS TO PORTLAND AVENUE AND THE SURROUNDING PROPERTIES.
----------------	--

Director Asher gave an overview of the item and what staff is hoping to take away from the meeting tonight. This discussion will guide staff input to the MnDOT 494 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) who are currently working towards an approved preliminary layout for Project 1.

Director Asher turned the meeting over to MnDOT I-494 Project Manager Andrew Lutaya and MnDOT I-494 Project Engineer Amber Blanchard for a presentation on the I-494 Vision as well the identified project 1 elements. Blanchard briefly covered the I-494 Vision:

- Goals;
- Project timeline;
- Vision elements;
- Implementation plan; and
- Elements of “Project 1”.

Blanchard explained that the elements of Project 1 that the Policy Advisory Committee had approved in February 2021 consisted generally of a NB 35W to WB 494 flyover ramp, MNPASS lanes in both directions between highway 100 and the the 494/35W interchange, and access reconfiguration of the freeway ramps at Nicollet, Portland and 12th avenues, including an entirely new pedestrian bridge over 494 at Chicago Avenue.

Blanchard highlighted the 4 “listening sessions” that were held in early April to gather public comment and feedback on the project 1 elements. In total, through the four listening sessions there were over 221 participants on the live meetings. Blanchard noted the content presented at the listening sessions was online at www.494openhouse.com.

Blanchard then clarified that while project 1 consists of many elements, the real reason we are here tonight is to come up with a solution for the Portland and 494 interchange, which would be expanded to a full access interchange under the current plan while access would be eliminated at Nicollet and 12th avenues.

MnDOT I-494 Project Manager Andrew Lutaya then dove into the different interchange types that were considered for the interchange and specifically focused on the remaining two options under consideration:

- Tight Diamond Interchange (TDI); and
- Single Point Urban Interchange (SPUI).

Both interchange types would functionally serve as solutions for the Portland Avenue interchange, however, they have different outcomes as they relate to private property impacts in the area and the experiences of non-motorized traffic that will frequent the area.

Lutaya explained that in terms of traffic modeling and queue times for vehicles, both the TDI and SPUI had such similar operations that it would be safe to consider them effectively the same for this exercise. When it comes to the pedestrian experience, the TDI is clearly the better interchange type as it allows pedestrians and other users to cross each leg of the interchange similar to a traditional signalized intersection. In terms of right of way impacts, the SPUI prevails in that it has fewer impacts to ROW than the TDI but it costs more.

Lutaya went on to explain the potential ROW impacts that the project team was working through, and reiterated this is where they were looking for guidance from the City Council and Transportation Commission. Lutaya also highlighted MnDOT’s ROW acquisition process that only lets them condemn that part of the parcel that is necessary for the construction of the project, and no more. If either intersection is shifted to the Eastern extreme, it would result in more property impacts to the private residence on the NE quadrant of 77th and Portland Ave and businesses between 77th St. and 494. The shift to the east would likely make the residential parcel unviable. The offset to the east would have the effect of preventing impacts to Roosevelt Park, which is a known goal of the City’s Parks and Rec department. With either intersection design, the business parcels on the SW quadrant of 77th and Portland would be losing direct access to Portland, and would need to utilize access off the frontage road and 5th Avenue.

Lutaya went on to show the ROW impacts if the intersection designs were offset to the western extreme which would minimize impacts to the businesses and residential parcel on the East side of Portland. The parcels in the SW quadrant of the project area would still lose access to Portland and would need to utilize 5th and the frontage road. The big effect of shifting to the west is the impacts to Roosevelt Park to the benefit of the residence and businesses on the East side. Project staff then went on to open the meeting up for discussion and questions related to the presentation.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked if the two designs were cost neutral given the different ROW costs for each. Lutaya responded that it was impossible to answer given that ROW costs vary depending on the market value of the property and also the loss of revenue for the commercial

parcels, which is not known at this time. Given those unknowns, there is a good chance that the capital cost differences between the two designs could be made up for in the ROW acquisition.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez raised questions provided by Councilmember Whalen in advance of the meeting. CM Whalen was concerned why there needs to be so many lanes when north of 77th and south of American Boulevard it is one lane in each direction. Whalen also stated at first glance he is inclined to shift the intersection west to minimize the impact to the assisted living facility since people live there and the grocery store since this area of town is a food desert. Whalen reiterated he wants minimal impacts and the best pedestrian crossings possible in the area as well.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked about Community Development's perspective on these options given the CNU Portland gateway project. Assistant Community Development Director Melissa Poehlman stated they were disappointed in the needs for this many lanes in the area, as the priority were walkability and protecting small businesses, it's kind of a lose-lose. From a redevelopment perspective, shifting east is the better option to keep options open for redevelopment in the SW quadrant, as she sees the grocery store as unviable with either scenario due primarily to eliminated or diminished access from Portland and the assisted living facility is protected and could still function with the eastern shift.

Council Member Hayford Oleary acknowledged that professional opinions differ with his view that there are too many lanes for this area, and given two choices between bad options, the TDI interchange is less bad than the SPUI.

Council Member Supple stated that given what she has seen tonight she would prefer to see the TDI and was indifferent on the E or W shift, but she would like to hear more about Community Development's preference to shift east.

Director Asher sensed a consensus on the TDI being the preferred interchange type based off the feedback that has been given so far. She asked the Council and Commission if that was accurate and said she would assume otherwise unless someone said otherwise. Everyone agreed that TDI was preferred to the SPUI.

Director Asher noted that attendees seemed split on the E or W shift of the TDI, pointing out it really seemed to be either a parks impact decision or a SFH residence impact, since there will be ROW impacts between 77th and 494 on either side no matter what way it is offset. City Engineer Powers pointed out that in speaking with Recreation Director Markle, she is strongly against any park impacts. Acting Recreation Director Kris Weiby pointed out that it is his department's strong preference that there is no impacts to the park, as there is a new dog park in that area, and that this is precious green space for this area of town.

Council Member Hayford Oleary wanted clarification that no matter which way it shifts, the nursing home was not going to go anywhere. Asst. CD Director confirmed that was accurate.

In the context of shifting the layout E or W, Lutaya raised the point that if the project was to encroach on existing park space, that MnDOT was amenable to mitigating those impacts with park improvements, or whatever might be needed to meet their "no net loss" goals for Richfield parks.

Council Member Hayford Oleary indicated a slight preference for shifting the project east to avoid park impacts, but not a strong preference.

CSC Liaison Wendt noted that during Orange Line BRT discussions there was strong pushback from the CSC for even small encroachments into the park.

Asher stated what she believe she is hearing is to minimize impacts to the park, but it was unclear if they wanted to shift fully east or also try to minimize the impacts to the residential property, effectively "balancing" the layout and not sending it fully east.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez asked for staff clarification that a shift E or W with the TDI doesn't see much difference in change to the parcels to the south, but it does impact the single family home, or the park much differently, depending on which way we shift. She asked if an E shift guaranteed removal of that single family home. Asher stated that what we're seeing is the E and W extremes, so if there is not appetite for impacting that residential property, the project staff could "balance" the offset.

Lutaya stated that if the goal is to keep the residential parcel viable, project staff can work on that. He then stated they have shown the extremes to gauge if there is any appetite at all to impact the park property, and go from there.

Assistant Director Poehlman asked if they've spoken to the residential property owner, which Blanchard said they had. She said the property owner preferred to impact the park, was curious about compensation and the process for impacting her property, and mentioned concerns and frustrations with the bus stop in the area.

Director Asher stated that what she thinks she is hearing is shift the TDI to the east, and staff will work with the residential property owner to see what they are thinking, whether they are amendable to working with the project team to come to a solution that keeps the property viable or to sell the property. Others agreed in the comments of the virtual meeting.

Blanchard said project staff would work to play with the geometry of the layout to see what was possible. Director Asher suggested it is time to have conversations with the property owner to see what the appetite is for a total take. Blanchard confirmed they would do that.

Council Member Supple asked if the project could shift at 77th to give the best of both worlds on each side of the project. Project staff said the geometry of the turn lanes and the intersection would not work in this instance, as the through lanes would conflict with the location of the turn lane, and obstruct site lines for turning traffic.

Multiple attendees stated there seems to be a consensus on shifting east and Mayor Regan Gonzalez expressed willingness to exploring the possibility of a total take on the residential property and to see what the options are for shifting east, but made clear she is saying she is open to exploring it only at this point.

Lutaya asked the group if it was fair to say the consensus was to explore the options surrounding an eastward shift and a total take of the residential parcel while at the same time trying to keep the parcels on the SE corner as viable as possible. Mayor Regan Gonzalez said yes but if there are options to not totally take the residential parcel that the owner is agreeable to that would be preferable. She requested after project staff investigate these scenarios that they could be presented so they can decide what the options are.

An attendee asked about the TDI with fewer lanes, and the project team pointed out that reducing lanes would not work as it would completely upend the queue lengths in the area, sending them up to 75th street based on earlier analysis. Council Member Hayford O'Leary asked for clarification on that point and it was provided.

Mayor Regan Gonzalez asked Director Asher if she felt like project staff have gained what they needed from this meeting to bring back to the Technical Advisory Committee, and everyone confirmed they did.

ADJOURNMENT

The work session was adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Date Approved: May 11, 2021



Scott Kulzer
Administrative Aide/Analyst



Maria Regan Gonzalez
Mayor



Katie Rodriguez
City Manager