

Whittier Housing and Land Use Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, October 17, 2023, 6:30-8:00pm
Hybrid Format: WhittierAlliance (10 E 25th St) +
Zoom Digital Meeting

Attendees: Shannon Dotson, Nordby, Harry Davis, Joanna Johnson, Ron Johnson, Halley Norman, Christine Popowski, Nick Hutchinson, Ben Johnson, Jacob Molho, Kedar Deshpande, Aaron Keith
Presenters: Nicole Krause-Bolton & Menk, Kelsey Fogt-City of Minneapolis Public Works, Suado Abdi-City of Minneapolis CPED, Peter Bennett-City of Minneapolis Public works, Nathan Ellingson-Hennepin County, Haila Maze-Hennepin County, Aaron Warford-Hennepin County

Staff: Kaley Brown, Willow Kreibich

Welcome/Introductions

-The meeting is called to order at 6:35pm.

Attendees completed a round of introductions.

The agenda was shared

Note: September meeting minutes were not reviewed or approved and will be on the November meeting agenda

[New Nicollet Redevelopment \(Former Kmart Site\)](#)

City of Minneapolis Project Team attended to present the preliminary design concepts for the public space framework and the roadway.

Project Overview: City now owns the area, 10 acres, and has a broad vision of reopening Nicollet and redeveloping site with a high density walkable district. Right now we are in the second part of the Phase 2 of engagement, talking specifically about the street and public spaces with concept designs. There will be more public engagement next year. Kmart is scheduled to be demolished next March. Bridge construction in 2025.

Previous rounds of engagement:

First phase of community engagement in Aug 2022 to Jan 2023 yielded 5 goals -

- Reconnect people and places
- Build for who's here
- Live, work, shop, and play here
- Build safe, equitable, sustainable transportation networks
- Design safe and healthy communities

Heard a lot about pedestrian friendly interests and prioritizing boulevards and green space; bike infrastructure was a priority for many but not all groups agreed, citing the proximity of existing bike infrastructure on adjacent 1st and Blaisdell Aves.

Public Space - Strong desire for community space, flexible public space, park-like amenities; Midtown Greenway access was proposed to be moved to 1st to improve ADA accessibility, address the pinch point along the Greenway at the current Nicollet ramp, and better connect to the existing bike network.

Public Space Concepts

Concept A: Linear park along the midtown greenway. Two distinct park spaces on either side of the new Nicollet. Working with MPRB as this would be managed by them. Pedestrian Connections East/West thought the park



Concept B: Linear park along Nicollet North/South, wide pedestrian promenade, formal protected bikeway on Lake St, additional green buffer and pedestrian space on Lake St.



Concept C: Corner park and diagonal promenade; corner park would replicate a neighborhood park, a park next to midtown greenway; also has east/west bike and pedestrian connection mid-block; creates a diagonal pedestrian promenade with connection to Lake/Blaisdell intersection



QUESTIONS ON DESIGNS

- What sort of greening are you talking about? Shade trees, Pollinator gardens, Lawn-not clearly defined at this early stage
- Concept B - Specific reason it is garden and then bike lane which positions bikers as the buffer? Sidewalk area on Lake st with the new B Line station. Bike lane behind the B-line station so the bikeway is close to the B-line station. Idea shared that it is nice to have a buffer instead of being the buffer (for bikers)
- Who has the land the North buffer, could that be more gardens like Soo line? The Midtown Greenway is owned by Hennepin County, the City operates the Greenway by permit. Not enough property and a retaining wall on the north side so can't do gardens. The trench adjacent to the Greenway on the south side has also been preserved for transit from a long term plan.
- Your spaces for the park are nice, but what are you going to do about all the homeless people who are going to want to move in there? We would have an active partner in the Park Board that would help manage.
- What types of businesses would we be trying to attract? Still taking input but don't have that clear. Phase 3 starting in 2024 will clarify some of that.
- Do you have a sense of the density of the buildings that will be there? Zoned for Transit 15, so could be up to 15 stories with a minimum of 4, but likely to be something more in keeping with the existing structures
- What would the crossing look like in C? Unsignalized, but the road plan has to be finalized to fully know; would have clear pedestrian and bike crossing infrastructure to ensure safety and slow traffic

- None of these are a packaged “done deal” so can pull things you like from different ones, mix and match.

Attendee rankings for public space concepts, scale of 1-5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent:

- Concept A 1(0), 2(0), 3(2), 4(3), 5(0)
- Concept B 1(0), 2(2), 3(4), 4(1), 5(1)
- Concept C 1(0), 2(1), 3(5), 4(3), 5(1)

Discussion

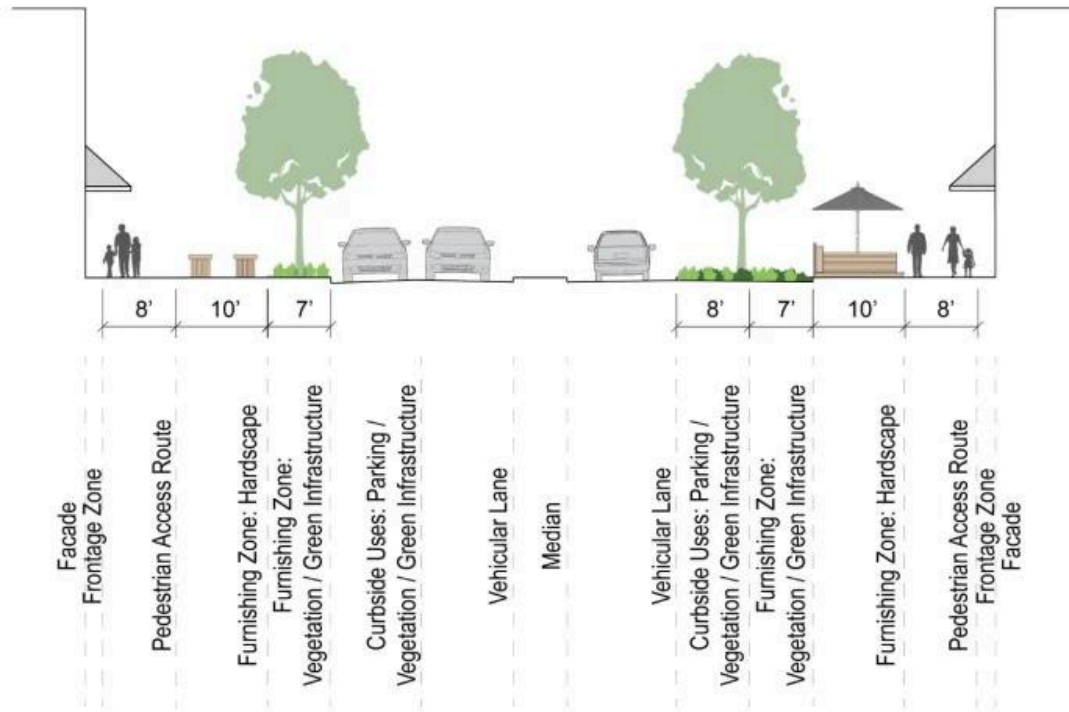
- Really like the idea of the promenade on Option B. Is there enough room for parcels that are West facing and East facing, or are we going to get things facing just one side? Have seen drawings with both; intent is to focus the commercial corridor onto Nicollet Ave, though Blasidell and 1st could have fronts too.
- Option C- How the diagonal site would get used? Buildings right up along? Maybe like the alley in Loring Park with small pedestrian spaces, with spaces that open up to it. Could include the public art concepts.
- Part of the reason C it is well-liked is because it broke up the space in a more appealing way, could encourage more interesting building designs than typically is seen
- Want there to be the promenade as well as the place to be broken up.
- Where does the crossing go? Where to put it and make it safe?
- Like the bikeway east/west being mid-block and not on Lake St which feels less safe
- As someone who walks and takes public transit, seems like it would be harder to maintain the third one, worried that it would all be tents. The middle one would have more activity and enforcement and be safer.

Roadways - 4 concepts

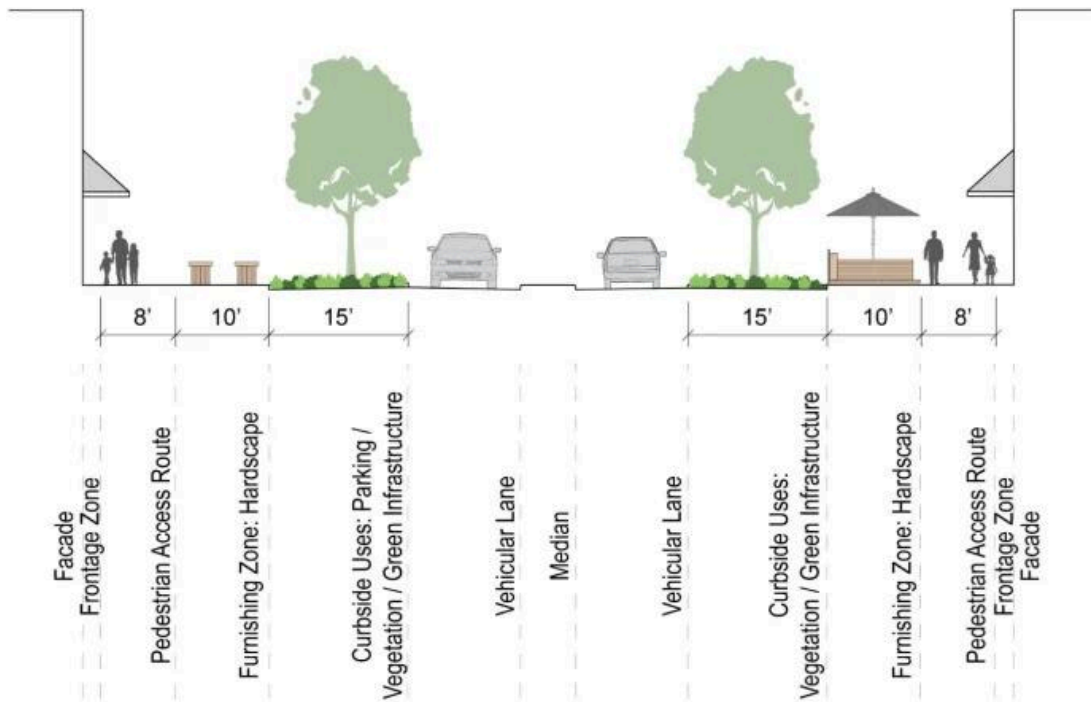
Concept 1: vehicular lane, alternating parking and green space, no bike infrastructure, 10 ft sidewalks, Allows for transit, emergency, private vehicles, space for furnishing zones - bike racks, patios, etc.



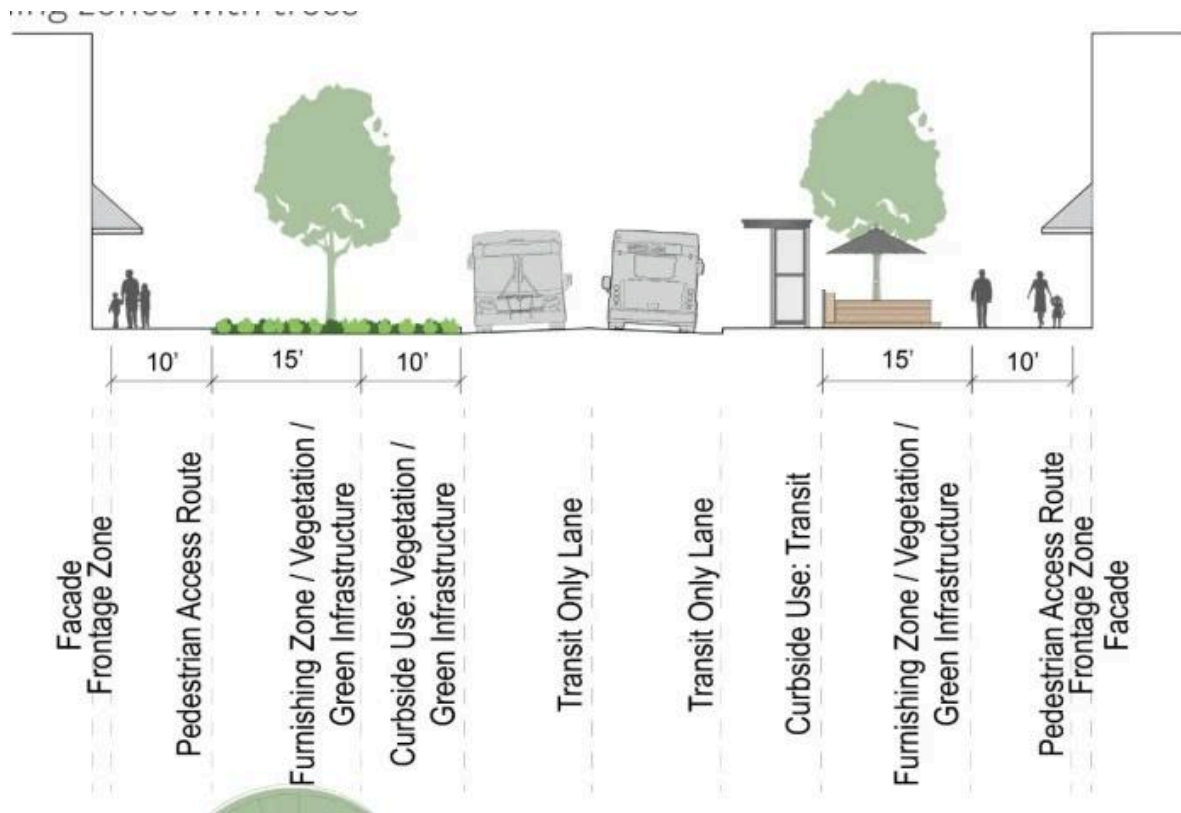
Concept 2: Emergency, transit, private vehicles, has a median which takes some of the green space, alternating parking and green space, 8ft sidewalks, furnishing zones



Concept 3: Transit, private vehicles, emergency, median, no on street parking, 8ft Sidewalks, 15 ft boulevard/greenspace, 10 ft furnishing zones



Concept 4: Transit and emergency only, no private vehicles (only on this section of the street), no parking, 10 ft sidewalks, 10ft wide boulevard greenspace, 15 ft furnishing with trees.



QUESTIONS

- Everybody loves the middle turn lane on Lyndale, why not have that instead of a median? Right now there isn't anything to turn left onto. There will be space within the median for future turn lanes. Likely there will be a left turn lane at Lake St.
- Is there a long term plan for the rest of Nicollet between there and downtown? No. Was redone less than 20 years ago. There has been talk of a street car, or transit way, but no concrete plan. Metro Transit has identified Nicollet as a future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route.
- Turning in that section of street for the buses is kowtowing to the metro transit, Keep it for cars and maybe some rail.
- If the idea is to open up the street and connect what was reconnected, whichever design has the fewest barriers is best.
- Connection as car connection vs connection as community connection are not necessarily the same thing. Create a level of connection that hasn't existed in a long time and doesn't have to be cars.
- Parking and medians seem like wasted land
- Can the median become the transitway? Not in the way it is designed right now.
- Clarification-There is a park, linear plaza adjacent to the street design that is basically another bike friendly space.
- It is about walking and public transit to bring people, and businesses. Bikes are great, but walking and public transit.
- Concern about the homeless will be factored in

SHARE WHAT LIKE/DON'T LIKE

- Medians
- Parking
- Cars
- Like the idea of Concept 1 right now, The idea of getting back and forth across Nicollet if you own a car works best here.
- Pro option 3, no parking option, also pro the park along Nicollet. If we are making a pedestrian friendly walkable space, why undermine that with parking, get out and experience the whole block.
- Ambivalent about parking, Pro-option 4 we have been fine without getting through until now, so if making a pedestrian friendly place then there need be no cars.
- Any conversation of putting parking or loading underground? That will come in future phases. This is about the right of way on ground level at this stage.

Attendee rankings for public space concepts, scale of 1-5, where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent:

- Concept 1: 1(2), 2(0), 3(5), 4(1), 5(1)
- Concept 2: 1(6), 2(2), 3(1), 4(0), 5(0)
- Concept 3: 1(4), 2(3), 3(1), 4(1), 5(0)
- Concept 4: 1(3), 2(2), 3(0), 4(1), 5(4)

Additional comments:

In fifty years this space has never been full. Need 25 ft pedestrian ways, need to have bigger vision, bridge needs to be wider, more greenspace, and public transit with the ability to have emergency vehicles get through.

[Franklin Ave Reconstruction Update](#) | Hennepin County and City Of Minneapolis Public Works Team

- This project is looking at Franklin Ave between Lyndale and Chicago, immediately East of recent reconstruction. Will be a full roadway construction. The project team has done a lot of engagement last winter, spring and in the last few weeks.
- Still currently in the design process -- planning happened in 2019-22, design from 2022-25, design concept has now been selected, and construction will occur in 2025-26. We are in the Preferred Alternative Design phase, which focuses on walking, biking and rolling, drive lane and intersection design.
- Of the proposed designs, none of them were four lanes, which is what is currently there. It is unsafe and doesn't manage traffic effectively.

Preferred design: Three lanes with center turn lane and median opportunities, sidewalk and bike or shared use path on both sides, boulevards with green space, removal of parking. Renderings have no lighting, but there will be pedestrian lighting in the project. To see the initial concept flier [click here](#).

- Western end at Lyndale Ave, will need to figure out how this ties in with the NEW Lyndale project. That construction might wait and happen in tandem with the final Lyndale Ave reconstruction, which the County is doing engagement on now.

- Gaining space for bus stops, standard shelter sizes etc something we don't currently have due to current space constraints.
- Will have some dedicated left turn lanes, and lots of two way turn lanes.
- Some median islands allow for transit stops, and protected crossings. Traffic won't be able to pass stopped buses due to the median island.
- Pillsbury would have a long median through the intersection, no left turns out onto the street creating a much safer way to cross and minimizing crash hazard.
- Blaisdell has existing bike facility- Protected crossing including pushing bike N/S crossing behind the curb
- Nicollet- Priority transit intersection, some the highest use stops, better transit stops-Heated and lit.
- Going East through First Ave intersection road narrows considerably. Will have to combine bike/ped facilities into a shared path. Will not be buying adjacent properties so have to make use of the limited space by Third Ave. Will only have green blvd on the north side.
- Opportunities for medians, especially with the one-ways.
- Shared use paths would have snow removal on them.
- Green Space-Did a report with MPRB to inventory the trees on Franklin. Almost all of the trees on this corridor are in Whittier. Got a recommendation on High value and priority trees, most between Pillsbury and Pleasant. Not an easy thing to do, to 'save' the trees.
- Swapping green space? Working to see how the project might affect the trees, especially the high priority trees. Hope to leave/replace existing trees, maybe move the bike facility behind the curb. Ongoing discussion as they finalize the design plan.

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

- So as we convert to the green space, bikes etc, who maintains and plows? The City plows bike lanes, not sidewalks, and maintains storm water maintenance plantings.
- Is there utility work happening with this project, Lyndale and Third ave are rough storm sewer situations when it rains? Yes, green infrastructure will help. Replacing all storm sewers.
- The traffic calming and pedestrians, losing trees for bike lanes! I see empty bike lanes, can't take 100 year old trees for bike lanes. Is this design that is trying to do everything helpful, maybe make a choice and choose trees over bike lanes.
- I went from Third and Franklin to the Aldi on a mobility scooter. There wasn't an alternative way to do it. Those sidewalks! Those trees are huge, how can we accommodate those root systems to get the sidewalks we are proposing. Can't imagine how much better my life would have been. Both sides have to be good. Everything is wonderful.

See the designs and engage with the design team in person at the upcoming Open House:

Wednesday, November 1
4 – 6:30 p.m.
Hope Community, Inc.
611 Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis

Food from local restaurant Lu's Sandwiches, beverages, and activities for kids.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, November 21, 6:30-8:00 pm - Hybrid in-person/zoom meeting
Meeting minutes submitted by Willow Rheault Kreibich