

2016 – 2017 DCPHD Planning Division Work Program

Lee Highway Initiative

Responses to Questions from the County Board

April 8, 2016

1) *Is there any possible way to initiate the Lee Highway process earlier?*

There are three specific actions that would need to be considered: accelerate the completion of the essential Scope of Work; budget for professional services; and assign a Project Manager.

A. Scope of Work

Conversion of the Lee Highway Visioning report to an actual detailed scope of work will be an essential first step prior to proceeding with what will be a multiyear effort to complete specific plans, zoning regulations and other strategies for both the Lee Highway corridor and specific focus areas. This effort will involve a commitment of staff resources from multiple County departments to ensure all work programs and priorities are fully aligned and agreed upon. Extensive engagement with the Lee Highway Alliance (LHA), County Board appointed boards and commissions, and other resident and business stakeholders will also be essential. Again, the preparation of the scope of work is critically important to ensure that the commitment of County and community resources is appropriately organized and phased to ensure success.

B. Budget for Professional Services

Completion of a detailed scope of work will assist in defining the actual planning and zoning priorities, the schedule for phasing and coordinating County and community efforts, and the right allocation of both existing County staff resources and the specific supporting professional services.

The LHA has recommended that the 2016 – 2017 work program focus on one of the commercial districts. Based on experience with comparable planning efforts, a minimum of \$500,000 would be necessary to fully support the completion of this effort within twelve to eighteen months.

C. Project Manager

Assigning a Principle Planner to lead the scoping and eventual planning process during 2016, 2017 and beyond is required. There are at least three staffing options that must be considered if this effort were to be accelerated.

1. Reassign the current Principal Planner (Elizabeth Weigle) from the Rosslyn Sector Plan and Ballston Quarter / Regional Commercial Center Sign Ordinance implementation efforts. This would result in extending the schedules for completing these efforts and reassigning staff from other projects.
2. Reassign the current 22202 Principal Planner (Anthony Fusarelli) and postpone the post TDP update of the Crystal City Sector Plan and ongoing planning coordination efforts with both Crystal City and Pentagon City, including the upcoming River House Special GLUP Study.
3. Reassign the Principal Planner (Jennifer Smith) for Columbia Pike and postpone the post TDP updates of the Columbia Pike plans. This reassignment would also extend completion of the Form Based Code and related policy work program areas.

In all of the above scenarios, an Associate Planner (.5 FTE, Kellie Brown) would also need to be assigned. This would require that the Courthouse Implementation effort be extended for several months, which could impact a site plan application by JBG for the redevelopment of the Landmark Block.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff estimates that if the above were implemented, the schedule for proceeding with the Lee Highway planning initiative would be reduced by 6 months and could proceed in January 2017.

This only pertains to the Planning Division Work Plan. These types of projects require interdepartmental participation and it is not clear whether other County departments would have the staff/resources to proceed under an accelerated schedule. Again, preparation of the detailed scope of work will be necessary to make that determination.

However, at this time, staff does not recommend changing the current 2016 – 2017 work plan which now would formally initiate Lee Highway planning in June 2017.

2) What is staff's perspective on the Alliance proposal?

Staff supports LHA's commitment to establish a non-profit organization to formalize a partnership with the residents, land owners, and businesses in the corridor. We recommend that AED work closely with the LHA to study organizational models that would be best suited for Lee Highway.

The grant proposal is not clear on the purpose and mission for such an organization beyond advocating for the planning process. We also suggest that the grant proposal be reviewed by AED to ensure that the proposal reflects the appropriate next steps in developing such an organization.

The mission of the future LHA related non-profit organization should not be focused solely on planning. Based on staff's professional experience, both in Arlington and with other localities, the planning function for Lee Highway should continue as a County – community partnership. This model has served Arlington well and can be further refined during the scoping process.

3) Response to March 24, 2016 Letter to the County Board from LHA

1. We agree that the Lee Highway Initiative is the top priority in 2017 after the Four Mile Run Initiative. The Four Mile Run Initiative does not have to be completed before the Lee Highway Initiative starts. Given the current priorities of the 2016 – 2017 work plan, we recommend that the Lee Highway process start in the second quarter of 2017 not the first quarter as recommended by the LHA.
2. We agree that the scoping effort will end in December 2016.
3. Refer to 2) on Page 2.

4) County Board Member John Vihstadt's Questions

1. *What sort of precedent would the creation of a non-profit funded in part by the County set for other planning initiatives? How could this request, if granted, be readily distinguished so as not to set a precedent?*

Staff Response: If the mission of the non-profit organization is to conduct the planning process, this would certainly create a new precedent for the County that the Planning Division does not currently support. As presented, the grant proposal is not clear on the purpose and mission for such an organization beyond advocating for the planning process.

2. *How was the \$89,000 request derived? What more would we want in terms of a detailed budget breakdown (and housekeeping items such as by-laws) if this request were granted in whole or in part?*

Staff Response: This question should be directed to the LHA. Staff is not aware of where the \$89,000 budget came from.

3. *As was clear at the Yorktown High School community presentation by LHA and the consultant earlier this year, while there is broad support for the LHA vision as evidenced by the instant "clicker" poll, there are also concerns by many residents flanking Lee Highway whose perspectives should not be discounted, that the vision should not mean significantly increased density a la our Metro corridors or even Columbia Pike. (Some drawings released show buildings, especially at the main intersections, rising six stories or higher.) There is also apprehension by some that the vision might include, as alluded to in the Lee Highway Visioning Report itself, a reconfiguration of Lee Highway into one lane traffic each way, with a central turning lane (not unlike the partially reconfigured "pilot" on a stretch of Wilson Boulevard) that could materially disrupt established commuting patterns and result in spillover traffic on adjacent streets as drivers seek new routes. (Of course, Lee Highway is a state road, and such change could be a tough lift anyway.)*

The above is a long way of saying that we would need a way to ensure that whomever comprises the officers and directors of the non-profit, and whomever the staff member is, that all voices and views are solicited, heard and addressed. Otherwise, the group's work could impair community support and its credibility will be undermined.

Finally, what ongoing oversight and communication would the County have with the non-profit and what other strings come with County funding?

Staff Response: It is difficult to answer these questions without a better understanding of what LHA's vision is for such an organization. Planning staff would have the same concerns. Regarding oversight and funding, AED and DMF would have the expertise in such areas.

4. *I think this question has already been asked by someone earlier, but how does LHA conclude that "twelve landowners have expressed interest in redeveloping their parcels"? Have we such a roster of proposals or any actual applications?*

Since redevelopment cannot be frozen as a lead-up to or during the Lee Highway planning process, how will the County approach such one-off redevelopment proposals?

How will the County work in planning considerations for any land the County acquires as a result of any land swap with Virginia Hospital Center?

Staff Response: Currently, Planning and Zoning staff are not aware of the potential for “rezonings to pour in”. There are no pending rezoning applications along Lee Highway. If rezoning applications are filed, staff would need to evaluate the appropriate processes (e. g. If there were a GLUP amendment involved, it would initiate a Special GLUP Study process). Ultimately, the Planning Commission and County Board would review all requested Lee Highway rezonings.

5. *If Lee Highway is to be the County's top planning priority after Four Mile Run Valley, exactly what planning items might the County have to defer, cancel, narrow in scope or otherwise modify to accommodate that prioritization?*

Staff Response: See 1) on Page 1.