



**Spenard Road Reconstruction:**  
**Minnesota Drive to the Minnesota Drive On-Ramp**  
MOA Project Number 03-21  
ADOT&PF Project Number HRO-0001(172)/53986

**Meeting Notes**

**SUBJECT:** Spenard Road Reconstruction

**PROJECT NO.:** MOA: 03-21  
ADOT&PF: HRO-0001 (172)/53986

**GROUP:** Citizens' Advisory Group (CAG)

**DATE:** August 8, 2006

**TIME:** 11 am – 1:15 pm

**LOCATION:** CIRI Building Conference Room 2525 C Street, Anchorage AK

**MEETING OUTREACH:** Email and telephone calls to Group members

**MEETING ATTENDANCE:** Committee Members: Tom Bichsel, Jim Fredrick, Rene Haag, Marilyn Leland, Charlene Brown, Baxter Gambell, Tom McGrath, Marvin Ungerecht. Observers: Lynn Boots, William Perkins, Jeff Hummel, Pat O'Neill.

**MEETING MATERIALS:** 1) Handouts: Agenda, Issues Summary, Couplet Fact Sheet, Meeting Notes from previous meetings, Landscaping and Amenities  
2) Graphics – annotated aerial showing landscape and amenity opportunities; photos of amenity examples; Diagram of cross section alternatives.

**STAFF PRESENT:** Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Project Management & Engineering (PM&E): Rand Gaynor, Lori Schanche; Lounsbury Associates: Jim Sawhill, Dave Krehmeier, Charles Winkler; MOA Transit: Randy Bergt; Tryck Nyman & Hayes: Bert Lent, Randy Lyons; Brooks & Associates: Anne Brooks, Kathy Burgess, Lauren Jorgensen, and Travis Peterson  
Environmental Consulting, Inc. (TPECI): Michael Travis

**MEETING INFORMATION:**

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CAG members were greeted at the door, asked to sign in, and directed to their places at the meeting table where they found their agenda and handouts.

Anne Brooks opened the meeting with a welcome, agenda review, and began a round of self-introductions.

Rand Gaynor made a brief introduction to the meeting and its purpose.

Anne reviewed public involvement efforts that have taken place since the last CAG meeting:

- The design team met twice with business and property owners on the Spenard Road, Northern Lights to Benson segment to discuss business access and a proposed median in the segment. Two separate meetings were held. The first meeting occurred on July 31<sup>st</sup> with Blaine's Art and Graphics Supply, Pizza Olympia, and the Buckaroo Club. A second meeting was held on August 3<sup>rd</sup> with representatives of the Northern Lights Center. Rene Haag of Blaine's suggested closing the REI driveway on to Spenard. When discussed with the Northern Lights Center, they were not in favor of a full closure at this time. They would consider an exit only or right in/right out at this location. If an approach and an agreement can be secured from the Northern Lights Center owners, MOA will implement it and monitor its effect on safety. The exit's performance will be taken into account in the final road design.
- Project team members walked the Minnesota/Spenard couplet area, visited all businesses, handed them a fact sheet and map, and discussed the proposed change with owners and managers. The team will follow up with a mailing of the fact sheet to owners of property on the streets affected by the plan.

Kathy Burgess presented a consolidated review of project issues and comments received so far (see document appended to these notes). These were shown in groups of those that were outside the project limits and scope, those to be addressed/resolved in the current Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Phase, those to be evaluated and resolved in the upcoming Design Phase, those that must be considered iteratively throughout the design process, and those for discussion with the Group at the current meeting.

Lori Schanche, the Non-Motorized Transportation Coordinator for the Municipality presented pedestrian facility requirements and opportunities. Highlights:

- A review of the map created in the Pedestrian Plan process showing where citizens' walking destinations along the project corridor, pedestrian hazards observed, and official and *de facto* pedestrian crossings.
- The recently approved Long Range Transportation Plan for Anchorage requires project teams to work with transportation planning and physical planning to identify the typology of the street. Once identified, the typology indicates the elements desired on that street. The typology identified for the Northern Lights & Spenard area is a Main Street concept.
- On-street bike lanes make sense along Spenard
- West High School parents and neighbors expressed concerns with the Hillcrest Drive & Spenard intersection. They are supportive of a small roundabout or other safety measure to slow traffic and provide a safe crossing for students.
- There is concern for safe pedestrian and bicycle access from Spenard to the Chester Creek Trail.
- There may be opportunities to create parking at the north end of the street to be used by patrons of several businesses in the area.

Discussion: (in all discussion notes, questions/comments from CAG members are in plain type; responses from project team members are in *italics*.)

- I doubt whether people would park 3 blocks from their destination. *In other cities, it is common to park once to visit several stores in a neighborhood. Also, a high-rise office in the area that has parking problems could be helped by a parking concept like this.*
- Is there a recommendation for how wide sidewalks should be? *The sidewalks should meet or exceed the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) standards – 4-obstruction--free feet of width. There are opportunities in some places for walkways even wider than the sidewalks or pathways if private property owners join improvements to the project's work.*
- Park benches and street furniture are used and fouled by inebriates. *This is just an effort to give some examples of amenities—there is a wide range of possibilities to choose from.*
- The Municipality up to now has not taken into consideration the desires and suggestions of property owners.

John Spring, transportation planner for the Municipality, introduced the effort to create a Midtown Plan, which is just beginning.

#### Highlights:

- This is a brand new plan—will start from scratch.
- Spenard is the western boundary of the area to be covered.
- The Anchorage 2020 overall plan has designated Midtown as an employment area where it is encouraged to include residential opportunities for those who wish to live close to their work.
- The plan will have a land use element with density locations, housing opportunities, mixed uses, etc.
- The plan will have a transportation element, coordinating land use with transportation
- One of the characteristics of the current Midtown layout is super blocks that crowd intersections and cause delays in traffic. There may be ways to encourage separation into smaller blocks.
- There may be opportunities to plan for better transit service that will increase usage.
- The plan will have a public improvement element. Midtown has been neglected for parks and public spaces. Recommendations for streetscaping and plazas are a possibility.
- The plan will have an urban design element. There is potential to overlay the area with some design standards for building location in relation to the street, parking, etc.
- Public process for the plan will take about a year. Formats anticipated are a Citizens' Advisory Group, public meetings, brown bags, and a charette.

#### Discussion:

- Are more bus stops proposed for Spenard? *That question is more appropriate for road design. With a 3-lane cross section, there is a concern that a stopped bus will block the road.*
- How can we get involved in the public process for the plan? *It will start up in the early fall. Contact Anne Brooks or Jon Spring to indicate your interest.*

Bert Lent and Randy Lyons, landscape architects, presented some background information on landscape and amenities opportunities for the Spenard corridor and led a discussion on the Group's interests and preferences for the options available. They distributed a handout and spoke to graphics depicting the whole corridor annotated to identify where opportunities for landscaping and amenities might occur.

#### Highlights:

- South Spenard was improved a few years ago, an effort which included pleasing aesthetics and amenities. It would be good to continue the feeling north in some of the amenities in the current project.
- There is little room for landscaping and amenities in much of the corridor because of limited right of way.
- Spenard has a colorful history, starting with Joe Spenard creating the initial trail by bulldozing a path to his resort on Spenard Lake. An old log home, Chilkoot Charlie's windmill, and the reconstructed Bird House are some tangible reminders of history. History could be a part of the amenities development.
- Tryck Nyman Hayes (TNH) has reviewed Anchorage 2020 plan requirements that would apply to Spenard.
- TNH would like input from the Group in establishing a theme for amenities in the project corridor.
- Corridor opportunities for amenities include: Gateway feature at Minnesota/Spenard intersection, vantage point along the 1-way section of couplet, landscaping on corners as traffic calming measure, patterned paving in crosswalks or medians, northern gateway feature near 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue, transition to Chester Creek pathway and greenbelt.

#### Discussion:

- The banners from a previous beautification effort are a trademark. Could use figures from the banners as a theme or incorporate them into landscaping elements and features.
- Landscaping gets planted and then maintenance is lacking. Metal and textures are lower upkeep than plantings. Decorative lamps get hit by drivers and are expensive to replace. LED lighting is cheap. Dan Coffey's house is a great example of low cost LED lighting. Let's use lots of colors to brighten up the place even in winter. *Should we continue with the decorative lamps?* Yes, with protection from cars.
- Keep the theme simple. The history is interesting. It would be good to promote Spenard as a historical district. I think it's important to use the word Spenard in the theme.
- Other cities have an "old town" area. Maybe for Anchorage it could be Spenard.
- Mistakes were made in Mountain View with amenities. Most of the intersections were choked down and they used heavy fences and planters with crab trees that block sight distances. There is variability in how different amenities look after several years. I'd like to see a focus on hard amenities or no maintenance plantings.
- The current Spenard banners are on the west side of the road between 36<sup>th</sup> and Fireweed. Elements from them could be carried into other amenities. Spenard Community Council has raised \$16,000 for beautification that it will spend when the road project is done.
- Don't put in landscaping if it isn't maintained. But I don't want to discourage landscaping entirely. Perhaps it could include a watering system or something done well and right. Let's think outside the box. Beautification is not a beautiful with a lot of utilities and clutter. *We will forward the request for undergrounding to the utilities.*
- I'm not a fan of plazas and benches that are covered in snow half the year. And they need to have facilities and arrangements for cleaning them up.
- I'm in favor of concrete or stone masonry with inset moldings of characters, or trail markings, possibly with lighting on top.
- Please don't use bushes that need trimming. They block visibility and are a problem especially in minor intersections.

Design element examples were shown and discussed:

*Texture examples—pavers, stamped or molded concrete*

- It needs to be repairable. Too much indentation would hold ice and snow.
- Many of the Group members present liked the texture examples shown.

*Gateway examples—metal, stone, wood, Eagle River Business Boulevard metal cutouts of game animals*

- I like the salmon fencing on Christiansen.
- I don't like sculptures unless they have a practical purpose.
- Decorative structures could be used to keep people from crossing in the wrong place.
- They may also be an opportunity for adaptive management to keep cars from entering where they don't belong.

*Lighting*

- Keep lighting low
- LED lights are soft and inexpensive to run.
- Be sure they are high enough not to get covered with snow.

*Benches*

- Prevent the ability to sleep on them.
- Seating doesn't have to be a bench. It could be boulders, slabs, sculpture.
- Cast concrete has worked in front of my business.

*Trash receptacles*

- Who empties these? *Transit, because they are at bus stops.*

*Bus shelters and stops*

- Many in the group liked an example with swooping roof and no side walls

*Decorative lighting*

- I like the type we have now.
- *With underground utilities there could be decorative lamps on the east side of the street.*

*Medians and crosswalks*

- Raised medians inside a median protect plants from snow removal damage

Dave Krehmeier and Anne Brooks led a discussion of the 3 typical cross section alternatives mainly involving sidewalks and bike accommodations.

- The desire in the first Spenard safety project was to get sidewalks as far as possible from the vehicle travel way.
- The Area-wide Trails Plan states a need for an 8' path on the west side. A sidewalk is also on the east side.
- Recently need has been made known for bicycle accommodation on the street rather than on a pathway. Adding bike lanes eliminates the ability to have sidewalk separation. There is no room for them between Northern Lights and Benson, so they would have to be discontinuous.

There are so many driveways in the corridor; it would be safer for bikes to be on the road. Also, bikes on the sidewalks compete and can conflict with pedestrians.

#### Discussion:

- In winter pedestrians are separated from traffic by plowed snow berms.
- Plows will go curb to curb and bury sidewalks in snow if there is a bike lane and no separation.
- Bikers don't ride on pathways in the direction of traffic. Also, I don't like walking with bikes.
- It would be more consistent to have bikes on the sidewalk all the way through. *We just don't have room in the right of way to have bike lanes between Northern Lights and Benson.*
- *Bikes need to be treated like vehicles.* But the volumes are so different between bikes and motor vehicles. Bikes are so few compared to cars. *There are a lot of bikes on the Spenard corridor. There are bike destinations like bike shops and REI. The bike rack at REI is always full. The project corridor is a missing segment in a continuous bike route from Dimond to Chester Creek.*
- With all the driveways, it is hard to see bikes coming when you pull out of a driveway.
- I agree that plowing will be curb to curb and we need to keep the sidewalks available to a lot of pedestrians.
- If bikes are going to be on the sidewalks anyway, make them 8' wide.
- People in wheelchairs would have a better chance to get around with 8' sidewalks. *Regarding comments that stored snow is never cleared from sidewalks, the city has a much higher priority on removing snow from sidewalks than in past years. Responsibility has shifted from Parks and Recreation to Street Maintenance and new specialized equipment is now in use clearing sidewalks and pathways. There will always be times during and immediately after large storms where sidewalks are difficult to use but if you look around, crews do include clearing of sidewalks during big plow outs.*
- Why is the center turn lane wider than the travel lanes? *The preferred width is 16', wider than specified here for Spenard. Opposing cars in the lane waiting to turn in opposite directions need to be offset for sight distance for their turns. Width flexibility is in the travel lanes on the outside. They could be a foot narrower.*
- I was in the right lane of the current 4-lane Spenard with a semi-truck turning onto Spenard. It could not make the turn without going on the sidewalk.
- Perhaps a wide sidewalk could be marked to separate bike from pedestrian traffic.

#### Observer Comment:

What would the economic impact be to corridor businesses during construction? Is there compensation or loans available for relief? *There are unavoidable impacts to businesses, residents and roadway users during construction. During construction, contractors are required to maintain access and egress. Although there may be loss during the construction period, there is also potential gain after it finishes in a more attractive and safer street location for business. There are no compensation or loans available to compensate owners for business disruption.*

#### Committee Comment:

How long will construction be? *It is likely to be 2 seasons; generally it is left up to the contractor to determine construction phasing. Not all the corridor will be torn up the entire*

*time. Usually the heavy work that requires the most disruption is done in the first season; lighter work in the second season causes less obstruction.*

Anne Brooks presented what's next:

The draft Preliminary Engineering Report and the environmental document will be prepared and released this fall. There will be a public meeting at that time. Surveying will start on the corridor soon. All the Citizens Advisory Group information will be up on the web site by the end of next week so it is available to everyone. We can get the landscape drawings on the web, too.

How much time will it take to evaluate the interim median solution at Northern Lights/Benson? *The Municipality's Traffic Department will have to do the evaluation. If the changes are made by the end of the summer, there would be 3 or so years of data before construction of the Spenard project. The new owners of Northern Lights Center have some changes planned that may also help. If access is created on the south side, they may entertain closing the driveway on Spenard completely.*

Related documents on file:

- Meeting agenda
- Landscape graphic ideas
- Typical Sections

**Citizens' Advisory Group Meeting**  
**August 8, 2006**  
**Project Issues Report**

In the course of the project so far, we have heard a large number and wide variety of issues and comments from both the Citizens' Advisory Group and the public at large. Below is a summary arranged by the project phase in which they will be addressed/resolved.

*The following issues are not within the scope of this project:*

- Creation of pocket parks
- Undergrounding utilities decision – we will forward your request.
- Limiting truck use of the corridor
- Sign removal on private property
- Changing travel direction of Dahl Lane
- Official classification of Spenard Road as Minor Arterial
- Change in land use within the Minnesota/Spenard couplet “island”
- Enforcement of center lane when used for passing and other traffic law violations

*The following issues are evaluated during the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Phase (current phase):*

- Existence of a safety problem in the Spenard Road corridor
- Peak traffic impact from special events, West High School, future traffic
- Traffic calming measures from Hillcrest to Minnesota on-ramp
- Soils investigation for contamination, suitability for construction
- Satisfactory Level of Service for all modes of transportation
- Intersection safety
- Separation of motorized from non-motorized travelers north of Hillcrest Drive
- Americans with Disabilities Act items: sidewalk obstacles, curb ramps, crossing button locations
- Conversion of roadway from 4 to 3 lanes
- Preventing wrong way travel up the hill from 19<sup>th</sup> Ave south on Spenard Road

*The following items are evaluated and resolved during the Design Phase:*

- Lighting: decorative lights, preventing light pollution on northern section, pedestrian lighting and visibility
- Drainage and grades: storm runoff, storm drains and icing
- Sight distances at intersections
- Defense for building at Fireweed & Spenard that has had multiple vehicle hits
- Signal timing
- Signal visibility
- Protection of pedestrian space from parked cars
- Bus stop pullouts, locations and fixtures

*These issues will continue to be refined through all design phases*

- Aesthetic considerations
- Amenities—appropriate design to discourage loiterers, inebriates

- Traffic calming measures
- Safety on entire corridor, including curved section
- Intersections
- Parking
- Maintenance and snow removal
- Mid block pedestrian crossings (MOA Traffic Engineering decision)
- Medians

*We will review the following issues/items at today's meeting and further refine them in subsequent project phases:*

- Detached walkway in couplet area
- Separation between back of curb and sidewalks
- Pedestrian and bicycle safety from 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue north
- Bicycle accommodation on the corridor
- Wider sidewalks in 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue area (Chilkoots)
- Aesthetics: landscaping, visual appeal
- Gateway or special sign features