



SPENARD ROAD RECONSTRUCTION

LANDSCAPING AND AMENITIES

Citizens Advisory Group Meeting
Tuesday, August 8, 2006
CIRI Conference Room, 11 am to 1 pm

THE PROJECT

The Spenard Road Reconstruction project will upgrade the northern half of Spenard Road.

LOCATION

Spenard Road intersects with Minnesota Drive, then curves north to the Chester Creek Greenbelt where it rejoins Minnesota Drive. The project area encompasses 1.5 miles of Spenard Road from the Minnesota Drive intersection to where Spenard Road once more joins Minnesota Drive at Westchester Lagoon.

BACKGROUND

The southern half of Spenard Road was recently reconstructed, with numerous landscape and amenity improvements, resulting in a visually appealing roadway and a pleasant traveling experience. These improvements could be incorporated into the reconstruction of the northern half of Spenard Road. With this in mind, the upgrade of the northern half should include landscaping and amenities to visually enhance the traveling experience and the safety of vehicles and pedestrians. We are soliciting input and guidance from residents and stakeholders to determine community preferences for landscape improvements.

HISTORY

The history of the Spenard area is steeped in Anchorage lore. When the area was originally developed, trails crisscrossed the Anchorage Bowl. One of the earliest trails led south from the Townsite to a homestead owned by Joe Spenard, near the lake which now bears his name. Joe was a

colorful character who enjoyed a good time and who drove a yellow car. In 1916, he developed a full scale resort with a roadhouse, bathhouse and bathing beach at the lake. Joe then personally supervised improvements that enabled visitors to drive out to the beach and recreation area that he created at the lake. Spenard Road is that same route today (1).

Later, with the advent of aviation in Alaska, Lake Spenard and Lake Hood were used by floatplanes. But their size would not allow for larger loads. So in 1939-1940 a canal connecting the two lakes was constructed to allow for larger loads.

Then, Anchorage International Airport opened in 1951 (1). As a result of all this activity in aviation, traffic on Spenard Road increased dramatically. Finally, Minnesota Drive was constructed in the 1970's to accommodate the increased traffic. And Spenard Road was left in its original location. It is a roadway that evolved from a wagon trail into an urban street. And the "unique" neighborhood of Spenard grew up in a topsy-turvy manner, without the benefit of the City of Anchorage's planning and zoning controls, all along its route. In a way, the atmosphere along today's Spenard Road speaks volumes of its namesake Joe.

CONTEXT: For a successful, well-accepted project the design needs to demonstrate sensitivity within the context of satisfying the overall Community's needs. More simply stated, the design should be the product of the "Context Sensitive Solution" process advocated by the FHWA and AKDOTPF (3).

The subjects that address the needs for traffic safety, capacity and roadway design are covered in the engineering reports. The following is an expansion on those reports that addresses the overall needs of the community:

Aesthetic Characteristics: The landscaping and amenities installed on the southern half of Spenard Road present a good example of the possibilities and opportunities for the northern half. However, a major constraint to design in the northern half is that the right-of-way is much narrower. Some originality will be necessary in the new design of the landscape improvements.

With respect to this, for a distance along the east side of the Road, there are many utility poles and lines. ML&P has a program for funding the placing of lines underground and this should be a goal for the project. It would free up some room for other needed improvements.

Because there was no early planning, a variety of businesses were developed along the route with little regard to aesthetics or even leaving some room for any future beautification. Two exceptions to this are the Enstar Building and the recently opened Brown Jug. Both of these have attractive landscaping along their frontages.

Overall Community Needs; Planning: A majority of the areas fronting on this project's length of Spenard Road are zoned B-3, General Commercial. On the north end of the project are different zones. Above Hillcrest Drive are R-1, R-2M, R-3 and R-3SL zoned areas. These areas have been developed with different types of housing units. Then the most northerly portion of Spenard Road is in the PLI-zoned lands of the Chester Creek Greenbelt.

This project runs through two Community Council areas: from Minnesota to Fireweed – Spenard Community Council and from Fireweed north – North Star Community Council. The project’s terminus is at the bridge over Chester Creek, which is the southern limit of the South Addition Community Council area.

General planning considerations, including those in the Municipality’s 2020 Comprehensive Plan are: beautification, open space preservation, parking and shared parking, the Spenard Transit Corridor, lighted/sheltered bus stops, pedestrian facilities and trails. Future Plans call for a Spenard Town Center to the west, a major Employment Center to the east, and higher density housing in northwest Anchorage / Spenard. Public-private development possibilities are also suggested (5).

Regarding trails, the Municipal Area wide Trails Plan designates the west side of Spenard Road for a multi-use paved trail that would include bicycles (6). However, given congestion of the middle portion of this project and the space limitations mentioned above, this may not be possible. This is currently being addressed from a safety standpoint. Please also refer to the previous presentation of the same date of this Report by Lori Schanche, MOA Coordinator.

Reference is hereby made to the separate graphics that show landscaping and amenities “opportunities”. Please study these, the examples of “Key Elements” such as lighting standards, etc., and let us have the benefit of your preferences.

References:

- (1) Patterns of the Past. Michael E Carberry for the Municipal Planning Department and the Historic Landmarks Preservation Commission. January 1979. Northern Printing. 180 PG.
- (2) Interview with Michael W. Gordon, President, Chilkoot Charlie’s, August 3, 2006.
- (3) Context Sensitive Solutions Seminar Manual. U.S. Dept. of Transportation/CH2Mhill. 2003.
- (4) MOA Zoning Maps from Municipal Website.
- (5) Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan. 2001. Municipal Planning Department. 121 Pg.
- (6) Area wide Trails Plan. April 1997. Municipal Planning Department. 154 pg., maps.

THOUGHTS FOR ESTABLISHING A “THEME” NAME FOR THE PROJECT:

Following are some ideas for your consideration for a neighborhood related theme. A selected name could be included as a part of a Spenard Community Gateway feature.

- ~ “Haven of Hospitality”
- ~ “Gateway to Alaska’s Waters”
- ~ “(Picture of airplane propeller) - Spin it in Spenard”
- ~ “Anchorage’s First Suburb”
- ~ “Neighborhood with Personality”

August 8, 2006

3

