



## REPORT OF MEETING

**Date, Time, Location: Tuesday, November 15, 2016, 12 - 8 PM at Parkville Senior Center, 11 New Park Avenue, Hartford AND**

**Wednesday, November 16, 2016, 4 - 8 PM at Asylum Hill Congregational Church, 814 Asylum Avenue, Hartford**

**Subject: Open Planning Studio #11**

### 1. Meeting Advertising

The Project Team advertised the eleventh Open Planning Studio in the following ways:

- Creating a press release and sending it out via the Connecticut Department of Transportation Communications Office and a direct email to select news sources.
- Creating a visually appealing postcard which was distributed and displayed at libraries, community centers, neighborhood meetings, churches, and local business gathering places. The postcard was printed double sided in English and Spanish.
- Sending two e-bulletins to the 2,500 person contact list before the event. One e-bulletin went out two weeks prior to the event, and the other went out the day before the event.
- Posting the event details to social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) at least two times prior to the event and creating an Open Planning Studio Facebook event.
- Publishing an article for Broad Street Happenings, Trinity College's quarterly newspaper that serves the Trinity community and adjacent Hartford neighborhoods.
- Developing English / Spanish newspaper display ads which were submitted and printed in the following publications before the event:
  - Hartford Courant
  - Hartford News
  - Identidad Latina
  - La Voz Hispana
  - Northend Agent's
  - Viva Hartford
  - West Indian American
- Submitting event information to the following local/neighborhood communications:
  - Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association
  - Broad Street Happenings (Trinity/Behind the Rocks)
  - Farmington Avenue Alliance
  - Frog Hollow NRZ
  - Golden Ager Newsletter (East Hartford)
  - Hartford 2000
  - Parkville Revitalization Association

- o SODO NRZ
- o Real Hartford
- o West End Civic Association

## **2. Meeting Schedule and Attendance**

The Open Planning Studio (OPS) was held over two days on Tuesday, November 15<sup>th</sup> from 12-8 PM at the Parkville Senior Center and Wednesday, November 16<sup>th</sup> from 4-8 PM at the Asylum Hill Congregational Church. The Tuesday meeting consisted of an Urban Design Working Group session, and both meetings had open houses where members of the public could obtain project information and speak directly with Project Team members. There was a computer station that allowed participants to see three dimensional (3-D) renderings of the alternatives. Six (6) stations with corresponding boards were set up at each day of the OPS.

Twenty-seven members of the public attended the first day of the OPS. Twenty-four members of the public attended the second day of the OPS.

## **3. Work Stations and Informational Boards**

### Station 1: I-84 101

- 1) I-84 Fast Facts
- 2) I-84 Study Area Map
- 3) Mainline Alternatives: Vertical Alignments
- 4) Preliminary Screening Matrix: Level One
- 5) Base Lowered Highway

### Station 2: Potential Impacts

- 6) 3 Property Impacts Boards- Lowered, Tunnel and All Alternatives
- 7) Potential Impacts (various)
- 8) 2 Conceptual Noise Study Boards

### Station 3: East Side Options

- 9) East Side Options

### Station 4: West Side Options

- 10) West Side Options
- 11) Sigourney Street Ramp Options

### Station 5: Urban Design

- 12) Integrating I-84 Into the City boards (7)
- 13) Multiuse Greenway
- 14) Multi-Use Greenway: Concept for I-84
- 15) Bicycle Network Opportunities
- 16) Asylum Street: Two Potential Views

### Station 6: 3-D Simulation

Discussion boards were provided at Stations 1-5. Attendees were encouraged to provide feedback by placing responsive dot stickers as instructed at each board. The responses to discussion board questions are listed below.

- Ten respondents attended the OPS as their first I-84 event. 6 respondents attended an I-84 event in the past.
- 6 respondents heard about the OPS via social media
- 4 respondents heard about the OPS via the project newsletter or a project e-bulletin
- 2 respondents heard about the OPS via a friend, neighbor or colleague
- 2 respondents heard about the OPS via a flyer
- 0 respondents heard about the OPS via a newspaper or other print or digital media
- 7 respondents believed the property impacts associated with the Tunnel Alternative were acceptable. 4 Respondents believed these impacts were unacceptable. 2 respondents marked "Don't know / no opinion".

- 7 respondents believed the property impacts associated with the Lowered Highway Alternative were acceptable. 3 respondents believed these impacts were unacceptable. 0 respondents marked “Don’t know / no opinion”.
- 3 respondents believed the Elevated Alternative should continue to be analyzed because it has the fewest property impacts. 5 respondents believed it should not continue to be analyzed. 2 respondents marked “Don’t know / no opinion”.
- The primary public concern in the eastern side of the project area was neighborhood connections (8), followed by traffic on local roads (6), and Union Station and public transit (2). Private development opportunities, open space, and property impacts each received one dot.
- Eight out of eight respondents supported replacing the High and Trumbull Street ramps with a frontage road.
- 12 out of 14 respondents were either comfortable or very comfortable with reconfiguring the Sisson Avenue ramps to Capitol Avenue and Laurel Street.
- Eight out of eight respondents said they would use an elevated multi-use greenway for either commuting or recreation.
- A question asking respondents to place 3 dots over the most important reasons for better integrating the highway into the city identified reconnecting neighborhoods as the greatest reason (6 dots), followed by Hiding the sight of the highway and Hiding the sound of the highway (4 dots each), and Improving air quality (2 dots).
- Respondents identified the following potentially impacted properties as the most significant in their opinion:
  - 600 Asylum Avenue (Capitol View Apartments): 2 respondents
  - 105 Spring Street (Calvin Day House): 2 respondents
  - 98 Garden Street: 2 respondents
  - 28 Myrtle Street: 2 respondents
  - 69-73 Myrtle Street: 2 respondents
  - 75 Laurel Street (Knox Parks/GROW Hartford): 1 respondent
  - 135 Broad Street (YWCA): 1 respondent
  - 151 Farmington Avenue (Aetna Atrium Building): 1 respondent
  - 151 Farmington Avenue (Aetna Sigourney Street Garage): 1 respondent
  - 39-45 Spring Street: 1 respondent
  - 49-51 Spring Street: 1 respondent
  - 87-101 Spring Street: 1 respondent
  - 2 Fraser Place: 1 respondent
  - 41 Walnut Street: 1 respondent

#### **4. Meeting Overview and Discussion**

OPS participants were free to ask questions and offer comments, walk around the room and engage with the six (6) topic-based work stations, take a 3-D tour of the alternatives with a member of the Project Team, or join Project Team members in a charrette-style design process. An Urban Design session was held from 2 to 3:30 PM on the first day of the OPS.

This OPS focused on the question of how to hide the highway, specifically the lowered highway alternative, and achieving public consensus. Many of the informational boards covered this topic, as did the Urban Design session in even greater detail. Design considerations covered included possible capping of the highway and ramps, expanded bridge widths for local streets that would pass over I-84, landscaping, berms, and other noise and visual screening techniques. Participants were encouraged to provide feedback on discussion boards at each of the first five stations.

## **5. Center for Latino Progress- Construct Your Future Program**

Eight students and one staff member from the Center for Latino Progress (CLP) Construct Your Future (CYF) program attended the first day of the OPS from 12:45 to 2 PM. The program is for unemployed youth ages 18-24 who have a high school diploma or graduate equivalency degree and are not seeking higher education. CYF students study construction techniques, machinery operation and weatherization, receive a number of construction and labor certifications, and undertake training and apprenticeship positions, notably with the local ironworkers union.

Mike Morehouse, of Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI), gave the CYF group an overview of the project during lunch, at which time students were able to ask questions and share their own interests. After this they rotated freely through different stations dependent on their interests. CYF students were primarily interested in construction techniques, the practicality of relocating the railroad, and green and sustainable infrastructure.

## **6. Urban Design Discussion (November 15, 2016)**

Rich Armstrong, of the Connecticut Department of Transportation, welcomed everyone and explained that all were welcome to speak at the day's working session. He said that the Project Team is refining its design of the lowered highway, although there may be some changes to ramp configurations. He concluded that the project's extensive public outreach process has driven the public closer to consensus. He introduced Mitch Glass, of Goody Clancy, to discuss new concepts to minimize the visual and noise impacts of the highway.

M. Glass acknowledged the challenges of integrating the highway into the city, including neighborhood discontinuity, visual and noise impact mitigation, creating quality local streets for pedestrians and bicyclists, and developing attractive places. He presented several different strategies for achieving these goals, including freeway caps like the Hartford Mortensen Riverfront Plaza and the Downtown Hartford Public Library, widened bridges at highway overpasses, landscaping berms, and the multi-use greenway.

Tom Herzog, of AECOM, said that vertical noise barriers, or walls, are the most affordable noise mitigation method. He said that the Project Team is examining other ways of mitigating noise that are more visually and aesthetically pleasing than traditional noise walls. He noted that a landscaped berm could be as effective as a vertical wall, albeit requiring additional space.

T. Herzog said that the Project Team took noise readings from local streets in the I-84 corridor in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). He concluded that the decibel level from local streets is similar to the level produced by I-84. He said that the highway has a 200-foot zone of influence, outside of which the local roads are the predominant noise source.

For discussion purposes, M. Glass divided the corridor into four sections, focusing first on the area between Park and Sigourney Streets. He explained the Project Team's study of capping portions of the highway between Park Street, Capitol Avenue, and Sigourney Street. He concluded that capping this section of highway at a cost of \$350-425 million would not likely produce additional economic development, although the cap may be suitable for up to 650 surface parking spaces or open space. He suggested that topography, landscaping, screening walls and a multi-use greenway could effectively hide the noise and sight of the highway.

T. Herzog said that berms in the Park to Sigourney area could reduce noise levels by three to eight decibels. He said that a three-decibel reduction would be difficult to notice, whereas an eight-decibel decrease would nearly halve noise levels. He noted that depressing the highway by 15 feet with parallel retaining walls could reduce noise. He said that a cap in this area would effectively cancel noise emitting from the highway, but would not address the significant existing noise sources on Capitol Avenue. He cautioned that the Project Team would need to demonstrate that noise mitigation techniques were in line with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regulations and be eligible for funding.

Francisco Gomes, of FHI, spoke to complete streets designs in the Park Street to Sigourney Street area. He contrasted existing conditions along Forest Street and Capitol Avenue potential improvements associated with the lowered highway alternative, including bus pullouts, bus shelters, wider sidewalks, street trees, a multi-use greenway, and bicycle facilities. He said that West Boulevard could extend to Hawthorn Street and include a green median. He noted the potential for low impact design techniques, like funneling storm water into the ground or street-side vegetation, rather than storm drains. He said that bicycle lanes and the inclusion of on-street parking would be determinant on selected land use patterns for this area.

M. Glass said that the Project Team does not recommend capping between Broad and Sigourney Streets. He suggested an expanded Sigourney Street overpass and multi-use greenway could better integrate the highway into the city. He said that the elevated greenway could include ramps to Flower Street on either side of the highway. He noted that the power plant on Capitol Avenue could be impacted and replaced by a landscaped berm. He said that under this scenario a traveler on Capitol Avenue would see a park-like embankment with the greenway running over top in lieu of the power plant. T. Herzog said that a greenway embankment could maximize noise reduction without using unattractive vertical structures.

Addressing the area between Broad and Asylum Streets, M. Glass said that the lowered highway could greatly consolidate existing ramp structures and make available significant developable land. He said that this would also require relocating the railroad and constructing a new rail annex. He said that capping over the highway, removing the existing rail viaduct, and constructing a new boulevard between Capitol Avenue and Asylum Street could create a new gateway into the city and better connect Downtown to Asylum Hill and Frog Hollow. He noted that the Project Team recognizes the historic significance of the rail viaduct and is discussing the potential for removing or adapting it.

T. Herzog said that the cap between Asylum and Broad Streets could reduce highway noise by 8 - 12 decibels. He noted that the greatest noise impacts to Bushnell Park come not from the highway but rather the surrounding local streets. He concluded that Capitol Avenue near the Armory is outside of the 200-foot zone of influence, and therefore would not experience any noise impacts from the lowered highway alternative.

F. Gomes said that currently there is poor pedestrian connectivity in the Asylum and Broad Streets area. He noted that the pedestrian bridge adjacent to the railroad and passing over the Capitol Avenue ramps is functional but unappealing. He said that a wide boulevard along the western edge of Bushnell Park could include a promenade similar to that currently under construction as part of the Intermodal Triangle project, as well as a cycle track, trees and a median. He said the Farmington and Asylum Avenue trident is a gateway into Asylum Hill and

currently functions poorly for pedestrians and cyclists. He said that the Project Team envisions bicycle lanes on most streets, as well as a much greener and more comfortable environment.

Concluding with the area between High and Ann Streets, M. Glass noted that existing parking lots take up valuable developable land and create an additional barrier between Downtown and points north. He said that added greenery, infill and transit-oriented development would be ideal in this area. T. Herzog said that these mitigation strategies could reduce noise by 3-5 decibels. F. Gomes said that the area could include wider sidewalks, on-street bike facilities, greenery, and marked protected crosswalks. He noted the importance of connecting Downtown North and lower Asylum Hill with Union Station.