

Meeting Summary

St. Helens US 30 & Columbia Blvd./St. Helens St. Corridor Master Plan

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting #1

October 7, 2013

4:30 – 6:30 pm

**St. Helens Chamber of Commerce
2194 Columbia Boulevard**

1. Introductions and Meeting Objectives

- Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) members attending:
 - Jerry Belcher
 - J.J. Deuhren, owns apartment building on 2nd Street in Old Towne, Economic Development Commission
 - Don Patterson, The Chronicle
 - Al Petersen, architect, Planning Commission and Historical Commission
 - Kannikar Petersen, Arts Commission
 - Jim Wilson, resident at Columbia Boulevard/6th Street, business owner
- Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) members not attending:
 - Ginny Carlson
 - Trent Dolyniuk
 - Shannon Vaerewyck
- Project Management Team (PMT) consulting team members attending:
 - Matt Bell, Kittelson & Associates
 - Chris Brehmer, Kittelson & Associates
 - Jacob Graichen, City of St. Helens
 - Matt Hastie, Angelo Planning Group
 - Shayna Rehberg, Angelo Planning Group

- Tim Strand, GreenWorks
- Naomi Zwerdling, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT)
- Others attending:
 - Les Watters, property owner and Columbia County Museum Association
 - Jenny Dimsho, City of St. Helens/Americorps (University of Oregon RARE program)
- Matt Hastie, project manager at Angelo Planning Group and facilitator for this meeting, presented general meeting and project goals.
- The meeting PowerPoint presentation can be found under “Project Documents” on the project website, or here: [Kick-off Meeting/Corridor Planning Presentation](#).
- Questions/discussion

- Is this a 20-year plan?

Response: This is a long-term plan, addressing approximately the next 5 to 20 years. Recommended improvements will be identified through this planning process and the time period needed for funding and implementing the improvements will be discussed and estimated during this process.

- Are ODOT Rail and Portland & Western Railroad being notified of this project?

Response: Yes, they are part of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

- Were traffic counts on Columbia Boulevard conducted for this project?

Response: Yes, ODOT conducted those counts. They supplement counts that were already done during the Transportation System Plan (TSP) update process in 2010-2011.

- How do the technical groups for the project hear from the community?

Response: The CAC and TAC either meet at the same time or on the same day in consecutive meetings and members are invited to attend the other meetings. It is the responsibility of the Project Management Team (PMT) to share what they are hearing from community members with the committees and to share information between the CAC and TAC.

- What is the scope of improvements for this project (e.g., smaller scale improvements like traffic calming or larger scale improvements like rail overpasses?)

Response: This will be discussed in more detail later in the meeting, but the project will be focused on developing designs/cross-sections for each road in the corridor study area as well as intersection designs and improvements.

2. Project Area Tour

- Meeting participants took a walking tour of the Columbia Boulevard/St. Helens Street corridor from the highway to 14th Street.
- Meeting participants offered the following comments and observations, which are being recorded for potential future evaluation and consideration by the project team:
 - A lot of students walk along Columbia Boulevard and across US 30.
 - The intersection of Milton Way and Columbia Boulevard poses challenges. Drivers (visitors and residents) have been observed to turn right onto and travel the wrong way on Columbia from Milton Way in order to continue South on Milton Avenue or to turn right onto US 30. The offset nature of the intersection limits sight distance. Signage to indicate that Columbia is a one-way street could be improved.
 - Drivers travel at fast speeds downhill on Columbia to 6th Street.
 - Buildings are very close to the street at 21st and Columbia, making it difficult for drivers approaching Columbia to see around the corner.
 - Parking near crosswalks blocks drivers from seeing pedestrians (especially blocks below/east of 20th Street).
 - The right turn lane on Columbia at 18th Street may not be needed. It was originally put in to accommodate traffic using 18th to get to the Mill but there are very few people turning there now. People frequently park in the turn lane, blocking people from using the turn lane as well.
 - There is a substantial amount of foot traffic along 18th through the Houlton area.
 - There is a sight distance issue at Columbia and 15th due to the angle/curve of the road there.
 - Head-in parking along 18th Street, east of Columbia, provides an alternative supply of parking for people using businesses along Columbia.
 - There is an issue of one lane of traffic seeing and stopping for pedestrians and other lane not seeing and stopping for pedestrians in general along the Columbia/St. Helens corridor.
 - There is a need to improve crossings for children getting to school (Lewis and Clark Elementary School) and seniors getting to church (Christian Church of St. Helens and/or First United Methodist Church?).
 - Pedestrians cross at unmarked locations (surprising to drivers). Better pedestrian crossing facilities are needed throughout the St. Helens/Columbia corridor.

- Residents have seen bust, boom, and then again bust of businesses; there are currently a number vacancies in Houlton.
- Parking (on-street) can be difficult to find near car parts (NAPA) store; there is a preference for parking at the bakery, which has parking behind the building.
- Traffic moves very quickly along Columbia Boulevard due to the wide right-of-way, limited commercial use and a general feeling that faster speeds are appropriate there.
- The amount of right-of-way and width of sidewalks varies in several places along Columbia.
- The vacant lot where St. Helens and Columbia intersect represents an opportunity for a future redevelopment or creation of a public plaza or other feature.
- Sidewalks past the “Y” intersection are generally good.
- Sidewalks along St. Helens Street have been improved in a number of locations very recently (within the last two years), with new paving and construction of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant curb ramps.
- Above ground planters have been installed along St. Helens Street within the last year. A significant amount of discussion went into deciding where and how to locate the planters. However, the planters can be moved and this process should identify appropriate locations or guidelines for their placement.
- Basalt wall in the corridor is a St. Helens historic landmark.
- Opportunities exist along the right-of-way to install street trees. The basalt base varies in location and depth along the roadways, hindering improvements in some but not all areas.
- There is generally only one curb ramp per corner. Many of the curb ramps may not meet ADA requirements.
- Storm drains are generally located at or near the base of the curb ramps. Many of the storm drains are not bicycle friendly (i.e. there are no cross slats that prevent bicycle tires from slipping into the drain).
- Light poles are generally located adjacent to the curbs and often in line with the curb ramps.
- There does not appear to be a need for the additional travel lane east of 14th Street.
- Resurfacing has effectively reduced or eliminated the curbside in some areas, resulting in sidewalks near the same elevation as the paved roadway surface.
- A desire was expressed for this project to help attract more businesses that will draw daytime and nighttime pedestrian activity along the corridor – businesses such as restaurants, brew pubs, coffee houses, etc. The current businesses, for the most part, do little in that regard.
- A desire for spaces that bring people together was expressed, particularly in spaces that are well landscaped and designed in a way that buffers traffic noise. There was uncertainty of where to site those spaces in the corridor.
- More street trees are wanted to help bring the scale of the street down to the pedestrian scale.
- The existing trees on the south side of Columbia Boulevard and on the north side of St. Helens Street between 17th and 18th Streets add a lot to the streetscape and are worth preserving.

- Many sidewalk curbs along the study site are too “short”, some of which are flush with the roadway, presumably from roadway asphalt overlays. This problem should be addressed to properly create physical separation of the public between vehicular and non-vehicular areas.
- Banners suspended above the roadway are an important part of promoting local events and seasonal gatherings, as well as utility districts (Columbia River PUD) and other types of community information.

3. Corridor Planning Overview

- Matt Hastie presented the general concepts of corridor planning, including the topics of:
 - Travel modes;
 - Functional classifications of roadways;
 - Streetscape elements;
 - Street furnishings;
 - Access management;
 - Roadway safety; and
 - Mobility, capacity, and congestion.
- The corridor planning overview slides are part of the PowerPoint presentation that can be found under “Project Documents” on the project website, or here: [Kick-off Meeting/Corridor Planning Presentation](#).
- Questions/discussion
 - In considering streetscape elements, there are unique opportunities in the Columbia/St. Helens corridor given ample right-of-way. Often, in other communities, right-of-way constrains plans and potential designs.
 - Access management will not be addressed driveway by driveway in this project. The project will focus on how to help implement and advance existing City and ODOT plans for access management at a broad level (not property-specific).
 - Will Gable/US 30 signal timing be reviewed and possibly modified as part of this project? (This is an issue that is brought up regularly at Planning Commission meetings.)

Response: Addressing signal timing at that intersection is not in the project scope. The question could be referred to ODOT Region 2 staff for an update.
 - How was study area chosen (e.g., including Columbia Boulevard on the east side of US 30 and not on the other side of US 30)?

Response: The corridors included in the study area connect core commercial areas and the City wants to focus public and private investment in these corridors. There has been

community concern that Uptown/Houlton has received less attention than downtown. Carrying the designs and improvements developed for the Houlton area across US 30 does not serve these purposes as well.

- How innovative can recommendations in this project be?

Response: Innovative ideas will be welcome during this process, so long as they can ultimately be reasonably implemented and funded.

- Can converting Columbia/St. Helens from one-way streets to two-way streets be considered?

Response: This was also asked during the business and property owner meeting earlier today. The project scope and budget would need to be revisited to consider additional analysis that would be needed related to operations of two-way streets at these locations, including, for example, rail crossings, traffic volumes, and traffic turning. This was not included in original project scoping. While there are other communities such as Scappoose that have two-way streets across US 30 and rail, site-specific analysis would still be needed.

- Related to this issue, the PMT will do the following:
 - Ask the CAC to provide input about why community members would want two-way streets. (E.g., business visibility? Safety?)
 - Compile research and information from other communities about the relative pros and cons of one-way versus two-way street systems and issues associated with converting between one-way and two-way streets.
 - Estimate what it will take to integrate this set of considerations into the current project.

4. Project Goals and Objectives

- The draft project goals and objectives document can be found under “Project Documents” on the project website, or here: [Draft Goals and Objectives](#).
- Matt Hastie walked through the draft project goals and objectives handout, which addresses overall project goals, planning process and community involvement, economy and business support, transportation safety and mobility, and connectivity and streetscape aesthetics.
- Regarding objectives related to economy and business support, comments have already been received through the project website regarding on-street parking and wise investments

- Regarding connectivity and streetscape aesthetics, projects like a trail from the study corridors to other parks, open spaces, and trails will not necessarily be proposed, but improvements may be recommended that can provide support to these resources like wayfinding signage.
- The CAC expressed general concurrence with the draft goals and objectives without additional comment.

5. Citizen Comments

- CAC members offered the following general comments.
 - Effective signage leading to Old Towne is really important.
 - Streetscape design along US 30 is a major interest. There has been so much improvement in town in general in the last 30 years, and there is a lot of opportunity for improvement along US 30. There are opportunities with wetlands (e.g., Portland has done good work on developing bioswales in wet areas). There are two significant basalt outcroppings along the highway. This is a chance to address inconsistent landscaping along the corridor. While basalt is on the surface or close to the surface in some parts of the city – presenting challenges to landscaping – there are still good soils and opportunities for landscaping in other parts of the city. Work can be coordinated with ODOT Rail and its proposed new bridge (uncertain timing) and Gateway project. There is interest, also, in improving the bridge over Milton Creek.
 - There was agreement to address right-of-way design and improvements on US 30, including City enforcement of sign ordinances. It seems like there are more opportunities to be effective in Houlton to help business.
 - It was suggested that the project use the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) context-sensitive solutions materials – and related materials from the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) – as resources for this project. Those materials could be made available to people through the project website.
 - At a recent Main Street conference, there were “Quicker, Cheaper, Smarter” strategies presented that may be good resources for this project. The Houlton district needs more visual appeal and amenities and design consistency. The area has great business potential.
- Other meeting participants offered the following comments.
 - It is important to get a handle on one-way/two-way considerations before improvements are developed in order to ensure the best possible access to and visibility for the improvements.

6. Next Steps

- The project schedule/work plan summary and draft documents can be found under “Project Documents” on the project website, or here: [Short-Term Schedule – Aug-Oct, Work Plan Summary](#).
- The project team will be working on a series of draft technical memoranda in the next month addressing existing transportation and land use regulations applicable to the project, access, transportation conditions, land use, and street design. The drafts will be reviewed at the next CAC meeting and first TAC meeting in December, date and time to be determined.
- The draft Vision and Goals and Guiding Principles document will also be further developed and refined before the next CAC meeting. A visioning meeting with City Council will be held in early November. The date and time will be posted on the project website and sent to CAC members.