



STAFF REPORT

MEETING

DATE: September 23, 2014

TO: City Council

FROM: Robert Brown, Community Development Director

SUBJECT: **North Redwood Boulevard Streetscape Report**

75 Rowland Way #200
Novato, CA 94945-3232
(415) 899-8900
FAX (415) 899-8213
www.novato.org

REQUESTED ACTION

Consider design options for improvements to the North Redwood Boulevard streetscape and provide direction to staff regarding next steps.

RECOMMENDATION

Provide direction to staff on whether to, with consultant assistance, refine design plans and cost estimates for a streetscape design for North Redwood Boulevard, including provision of feedback on preferred design features.

BACKGROUND

In fall 2013 a design charrette was conducted for the North Redwood Boulevard Corridor (NRBC) from Olive Avenue to San Marin Drive to determine desired land uses and design criteria for future redevelopment of this portion of the community. In January, 2014 the City Council adopted recommendations for the study area and directed staff to incorporate these into an update of the City’s General Plan. One area of concern had to do with design improvements to Redwood Boulevard. While streetscape improvements would be required for property frontages when redevelopment occurred, this would not likely yield a uniform streetscape design and would rely heavily on the first major redevelopment project proposed to establish a streetscape design which might or might not be applicable to other portions of Redwood Boulevard. As a result, members of the Design Review Commission volunteered to host a subsequent design charrette to focus specifically on design options for the Redwood Boulevard streetscape. The Council accepted this offer during their evaluation of the NRBC study.

Purpose of the Charrette

The purpose of the streetscape charrette for the North Redwood Boulevard was to develop and consider options for improvements to this major boulevard both to foster future redevelopment of private properties but also to improve mobility options for users (including vehicular movement, pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users) and to improve overall aesthetics for the community. While no budget has been approved by the City Council for design or capital expenditures, the intent of the charrette is to gauge the level of public interest in such streetscape improvements, consider design preferences and have the City Council determine if further design development is warranted to refine a project design for cost estimating and possible inclusion in the City’s Capital Improvement Program.

Study Area

The area of consideration for the streetscape design process was North Redwood Boulevard from De Long Avenue to San Marin Drive. This former freeway right-of-way ranges from a width of 90 to 180 feet and has various configurations within the study area (see Exhibit 2 for descriptions of each segment).

Charrette Process

To facilitate informed public input into design options for the North Redwood Boulevard streetscape two community workshops were held on May 22 and June 11, 2014. Approximately 30 persons attended each workshop. The first workshop included a presentation by local transportation consultant David Parisi of a Streetscape Design Toolkit introducing the concept of “Complete Streets” (which offer safe and desirable travel options for all modes – vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle) and offering examples of numerous streetscape design options. Attendees were then asked about their priorities for mobility and aesthetics in the study area. This feedback is summarized in Exhibit 3.

In between the public workshops on May 22 and June 11 seven volunteer architects and landscape architects met with assistance of David Parisi and City staff to create two different design schemes to present to the public and to City bodies. The purpose of the two design schemes was not to provide fully-developed design plans and cost estimates, but instead to offer ideas for community discussion and ultimately a decision by the City Council on whether to proceed from this very conceptual stage to more refined design development by paid specialists.

At the public workshop of June 11 the volunteer designers presented their conceptual schemes, responded to questions and finally a survey of attendees was taken to gauge their level of support for components of both schemes.

The two design schemes were also posted on Open Novato, the City’s on-line public input tool. Results of on-line public input are contained in Exhibit 4.

ANALYSIS

Two different schemes were prepared by the volunteer architects in an attempt to “bracket” the level of improvements with one scheme being largely the addition of landscaping and sidewalk/bicycle improvements and another being a more significant reconfiguration of the right-of-way. Both are summarized below:

The “Grand Boulevard”

The more minimal design scheme would maximize landscaping, including addition of trees within the main street median, the median dividing the parking frontage roads from the travel lanes and within a widened sidewalk on both sides of the street. Separated bicycle lanes would be added in either direction, but the traffic lanes, turning lanes and parking frontage streets would be retained, although the traffic lanes would be somewhat reduced in width (most likely to 11 feet) to provide additional width for widened sidewalks. In addition to lower cost, the other primary benefit of this scheme is that it could be implemented incrementally, a block at a time, as funds became available or as redevelopment occurred. Graphics for the Grand Boulevard concept are included in the attached report.

The “Town Square”

The more ambitious design scheme would create an active, linear public park/plaza of approximately 1.8 acres within a widened median between Grant and Olive Avenues. Traffic lanes would be shifted to the west side of the existing median and reduced from four travel lanes to three, with one lane in each direction and a center turning lane. Separated bicycle paths would be created on either side of the travel lanes and a meandering bicycle/pedestrian path would be included in the Town Square public space.

Diagonal parking would be retained on the east side of the street, and this area would be improved with specialty paving to allow the frontage road/parking area to be blocked off for community events and used for temporary installation of tents, food trucks, etc. On the west side of the roadway there would be a short decorative fence to separate the travel lanes from the linear park, and existing 41 diagonal parking spaces would be replaced by parallel on-street parking, which would reduce available spaces by approximately half. Staff performed parking surveys at various times of day and noted that the diagonal parking on the west side of Redwood between Grant and Olive has daytime utilization of 12-46%, suggesting that a reduction in spaces is feasible. On the east side of Redwood the 50 diagonal parking spaces have 60-80% daytime occupancy rates. Some of these spaces would be eliminated by the additional of street trees.

Existing street intersections would be maintained, with specialty paving at Sweetser and Vallejo to differentiate these intersections from the roadway and to allow them to be blocked during community events. The potential for roundabouts to replace four-way intersections was discussed. The benefits of roundabouts are their ability to accommodate a greater volume of traffic without delays inherent in signalized intersections. This may be particularly important with a reduction in travel lanes. A possible roundabout is shown on the schematic diagram at Grant and Redwood, but the streetscape design is not dependent upon incorporation of roundabouts.

Between Olive Avenue and Golden Gate Place/Ranch Drive the median would narrow a bit and provide some additional public activity space, but given its separation from the more programmable space south of Olive and its distance from the Downtown, this public space is not expected to have the same character or use as the “Town Square” portion of the median between Grant and Olive. Finally, the roadway would transition back to a more typical boulevard with median planting between Golden Gate Place and San Marin Drive.

Utility Undergrounding

The study area contains both PG&E underground gas mains and overhead electrical transmission lines. As part of the staff analysis for the charrette process we contacted PG&E to estimate the costs of relocating the gas mains and/or the electrical transmission towers. It is estimated that relocating the electric towers and lines would cost roughly \$12.5 million and relocating the gas mains another \$3.3 million.

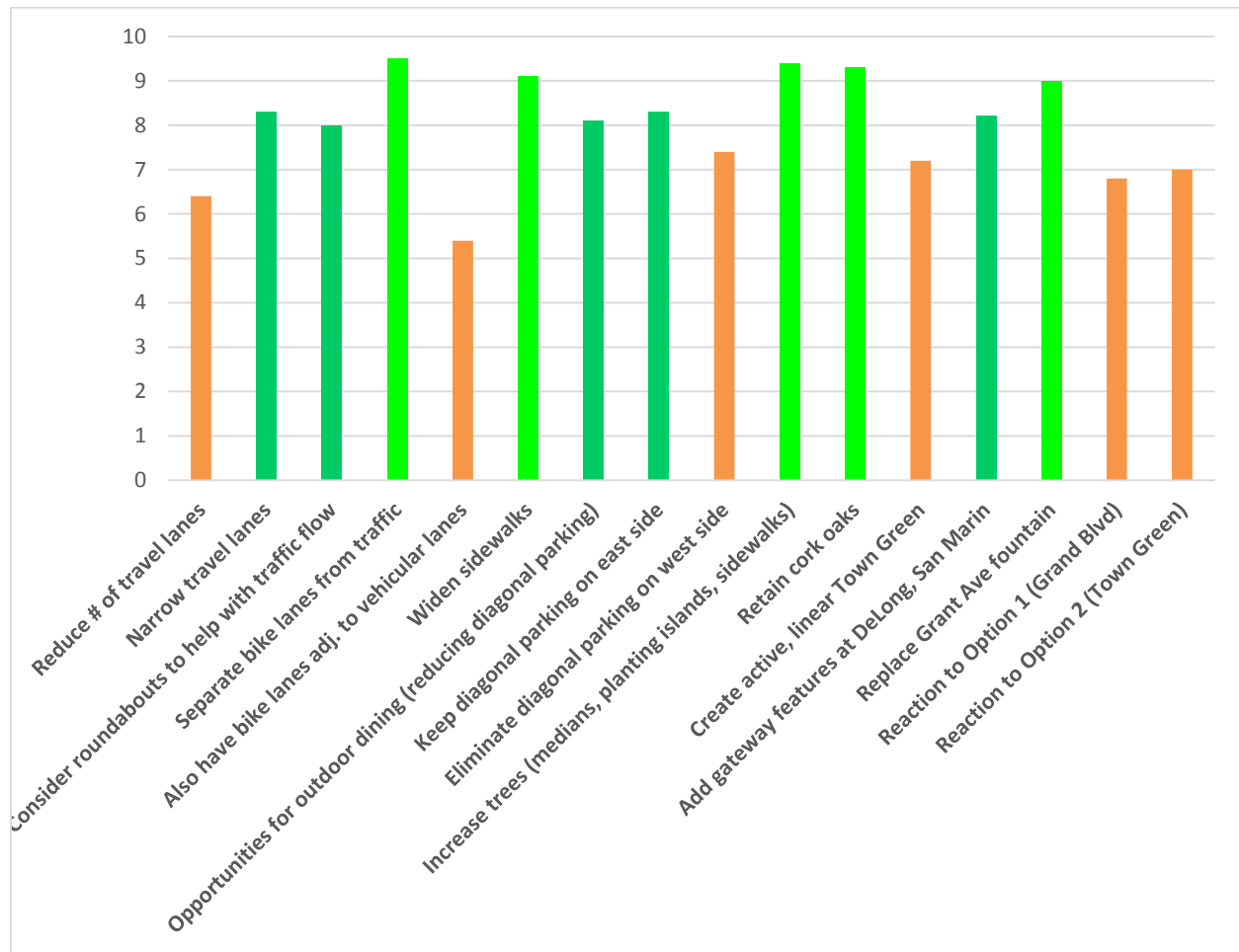
Bus Facility

Since improvements to the bus facility in the Redwood median between De Long and Grant are currently under consideration in a separate design review process the volunteer architects did not attempt to relocate or provide design options for the bus facility. As they noted, the right-of-way is sufficient to accommodate the bus facility in a variety of configurations.

Public Feedback

Feedback was solicited from attendees at the June 11, 2014 workshop at which the charrette results

were presented. Participants were asked to rate aspects of the designs, as well as both prepared schemes, on a 1-10 scale of importance. The following is a summary of the feedback received:



Project Financing

If the Council chooses to pursue preparation of a more detailed streetscape design and cost estimate, staff would also investigate potential funding sources. While it is premature at this point to speculate on ultimate costs and funding sources, a good example for comparison purposes is a similar project undertaken in Citrus Heights for improvements to Auburn Boulevard. This roadway has a very similar width and configuration to Redwood Boulevard, having been the former Highway 40. The roadway is 1.75 miles in length, while Redwood Boulevard in the study area is slightly less than one mile long. The Auburn Boulevard project was initiated in 1999 with a vision plan, a formal plan was Council approved in 2004, design completed in 2010 and the first phase of construction completed in 2013. The first phase cost \$24.2 million, and the second phase is estimated to cost an additional \$20 million. Funding for the \$24.2 million first phase came from 15 sources including utilities (\$5 million), Sacramento Council of Governments grant (\$6 million), Redevelopment Agency (\$4.6 million), other grant funds (\$1 million) and frontage improvements by private development (\$7.6 million). This roadway was identified as a high priority route by the Sacramento Council of Governments (similar to our ABAG/MTC) since it functions as a parallel route to the freeway, which qualified it for their grant funds.

INPUT FROM PLANNING COMMISSION, BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMISSION AND NOVATO STREETScape COMMITTEE

The Planning Commission, BPAC and Streetscape Committee will review the charrette results at a meeting on September 22, 2014. The recommendations/feedback from these commissions/committee will be shared orally with the City Council.

FISCAL IMPACT

At present there are no streetscape improvements for North Redwood Boulevard in the City's Capital Improvement Program. If the Council wishes to consider such a potential future project in greater detail, assistance from transportation and design consultants will be needed to further refine the conceptual project design and develop detailed cost estimates. This additional design development work would likely require an expenditure of \$30,000 – \$50,000.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Thank the volunteer architects for their assistance and take no further action.
2. Identify aspects of the design schemes that the Council believes would be appropriate as frontage improvements on those portions of North Redwood Boulevard for private redevelopment along the streetscape.

ATTACHMENTS

- Exhibit 1: North Redwood Boulevard Streetscape Planning Report
- Exhibit 2: Existing Conditions
- Exhibit 3: Summary of Participant Feedback from May 22, 2014 workshop
- Exhibit 4: Summary of Open Novato public feedback