



CITY OF EVANSTON CHICAGO AVENUE CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT PROJECT



Advisory Committee Meeting #1 Meeting Minutes: December 3, 2020

Date Published	December 8, 2020
From	Tim Gustafson
Project Name	Evanston Chicago Avenue Corridor Improvement Project
Meeting Location	Google Meet

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Project Staff & Consultant Team	Advisory Group: Aldermen, City of Evanston Staff, & Key Stakeholders	
Sat Nagar Senior Project Manager	Ald. Melissa Wynne 3rd Ward	Victoria Jacobsen Evanston Climate Action Group
Lara Biggs , Bureau Chief Engineering and Capital Planning	Ald. Donald Wilson 4th Ward	Liz Durham Evanston Bike Club & GO Evanston
Tim Gustafson Epstein	Ald. Ann Rainey 8th Ward	Annie Coakley Downtown Evanston
Mike Kerr Christopher Burke Engineering	Paul Zalmezak , Manager Economic Development	Katherine Gotsick Main Dempster Mile
Jodi Mariano Teska Associates	Jessica Hyink Mobility Coordinator	
Lea Pinsky Art Encounter	Cade Sterling Planning	

A meeting was held on December 3, 2020 to introduce the Evanston Chicago Avenue Corridor Improvement Project (Phase I Engineering) and seek preliminary input from the Advisory Committee assembled for the project. The project goals are to **improve the Chicago Avenue corridor between Howard Street and Davis Street.**

The following is a summary of the discussion that took place during the meeting.

Slides	Description
1-3	<p>Introductions and Project Overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sat welcomed the committee to the meeting and reviewed the agenda, provided a project overview, and introduced the project as following the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) Bureau of Local Roads Phase I process so that the project may be eligible for the use of Federal funds to assist in future stages of design as well as



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	<p>construction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The advisory group (attendance list above) is comprised of City staff, Aldermen, and stakeholders with specific technical and/or working knowledge of the corridor, and will serve as ambassadors for the project while the consultant team conducts engagement with additional stakeholders for the corridor.
Slides	Description
4	<p>Project Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project goals are to <u>Improve the Chicago Avenue corridor between Howard Street and Davis Street.</u> Sat emphasized a need to improve Chicago Avenue to create a complete street that supports multimodal transportation for all users, as well as address underground utility improvements, upgrade street lights, and resurface/improve the roadway.
5	<p>Why Now, and Why Chicago Avenue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project is part of several of the City's larger planning efforts, including recommendations from the Chicago Avenue Streetscape Plan, Bike Plan Update, and small area plans. The desire for a comfortable corridor would help to extend the bicycling connection in front of the Northwestern University campus and connect the City from end to end, as well as improving connections into Downtown Evanston and to the City of Chicago. Tim Gustafson stated that since adoption of the City's Bike Plan, Evanston has been progressive in linking the city with comfortable corridors for bicycling, and is making connections at its borders. Similar to the Chicago Avenue and Sheridan Road corridor improvement project through the Northwestern University Campus and improved connections to Wilmette, the proposed Chicago Avenue corridor would improve connections south to the City of Chicago. A continuous, connected, comfortable corridor would make Evanston among the first city to have such a facility from border to border.
6-7	<p>IDOT Phase I Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project is being processed through IDOT as a Phase I Local Roads project, which is required in order for the project to be eligible to receive federal funding. This reduces the overall cost to the city, but requires the City to follow a specific process and conduct certain investigations. Sat covered the items that are required as part of this process. In addition to IDOT coordination, Tim Gustafson from Epstein identified agency coordination which includes IDOT, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Pace, Northwestern University, and some engagement with the Evanston Historic Preservation Commission and the Evanston Arts Council.



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8	<p>Stakeholder Engagement & Communication Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jodi Mariano introduced the stakeholder engagement and communications plan which consisted of a project brand included in the presentation and a proposed roll-out of communications which include content for the City’s website, an online survey, and the use of social media, newsletters, printed communications, and requests for participation by the Advisory Committee to serve as project ambassadors. Jodi requested the advisory committee identify potential stakeholders for the consultant team to contact for the project.
Slides	Description
9	<p>Project Schedule, Meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tim reviewed milestones in the project schedule which will include stakeholder engagement meetings introduced by Jodi, two more meetings with the Advisory Committee in 2021 (dates TBD), and two public meetings prior to obtaining Design Approval from IDOT.
10	<p>Corridor Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tim reviewed the corridor context using maps of the Chicago Avenue corridor, identifying the locations of the Main Dempster Mile and Downtown Evanston districts, as well as a variety of CTA Purple Line and Metra Stations, Pace, CTA, and NU bus stops, bike share locations, signalized intersections, and other relevant destinations and land uses in the corridor. This part of the discussion emphasized the variety and diversity of user needs in the corridor.
11-12	<p>Corridor Context: Parking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tim reviewed parking utilization data collected for the corridor and described the methods used to identify parking utilization during a typical weekday, weekend, and also how to adjust utilization data to account for changed behavior during the pandemic. Generally, parking utilization is high in residential areas, but lower in commercial areas when off-street parking lots are present. One item discussed during this time was observations about constrained sidewalk conditions, and the presence of street furniture, bike share docks, and other items that reduce effective sidewalk width.
13-14	<p>Your Thoughts & Vision (Group Discussion)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sat returned the conversation to the Advisory Committee to mention five points to guide discussion with the group: 1) Acknowledge that the Chicago Avenue context varies from segment to segment, 2) Each outdoor “room” is different, 3) Your unique perspective is valuable 4) What would the Advisory Group like the corridor to accomplish and 5) What other stakeholders should be involved that have not already been discussed. Below is a summary of this discussion. <p>Alderman Wynne:</p>



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- Excited about the project, reflects an understanding of the scope of work initially presented in the Chicago Avenue streetscape improvement plan and TOD plans, both of which were ambitious.
- Making the corridor comfortable to all users is important.
- Identified additional stakeholders which include students at Lincoln and Nichols Schools, many of whom take buses that travel along Chicago Avenue, as well as students who attend ETHS.
- Residents view the cemetery as a quasi-public space, and suggested the Archdiocese and Salvation Army as potential stakeholders

Alderman Rainey:

- Interested in the project and represents south Evanston between Howard and Oakton, which includes the south half of the project corridor that often is overlooked; Chicago Avenue below South Boulevard seen as a raceway and has litter accumulation problems.
- New development at Chicago and Howard will be a good addition to the corridor.
- The closure of the Mulford Street connection limits connectivity for everyone except pedestrians and should be revisited.
- Has a vision for a naturalized, landscaped gateway-style entry into the City that could be so much more inviting than it currently is. Embankment beautification is an interest.
- Is interested in seeing a two-way bicycle facility incorporated into the project.
- Would like to see how the Chicago Avenue businesses and Howard Street business association can collaborate on potential reconnections.
- Suggest adding St. Boniface and the Archdiocese as mentioned above, also mentioning that animal lovers are fond of the public space afforded by the cemetery (dog walkers and bird/wildlife watchers).
- Oakton School may also be a stakeholder
- Offered to connect Jodi with the Howard Street business association

Victoria Jacobsen

- Excited about this project and eager to see speeding controlled on the Howard-South section of the corridor; currently speeds are enforced through the use of police stationed at the cemetery entrance but would like to see traffic calming included
- Sees a lot of long-term parking that does not encourage shopping, but rather residents occupying what should be used by visitors.
- Interested in seeing parking and curbside management that aligns with the user groups that visit the corridor and not just automobiles.
- Mentions that students of ETHS (District 202) are stakeholders, as well as a third in the corridor (Hemenway Church / Bread of Life @ 933 Chicago)

Liz Durham

- As a former business owner with a presence in Evanston, interested in seeing accommodation for car-free corridor visitors.
- Concerned about narrow and/or crowded sidewalks, wants the corridor to consider those who choose to walk/bike as well as those who have no other option
- Connecting to business districts on Howard, Main, and Dempster is desired, would help the corridor develop its own identity – these districts can serve as “bookends” to the corridor
- Consider the needs for those who commute by bicycle.



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Katherine Gotsick

- Finds it challenging to get around by bicycle in south Evanston; travels from Andersonville, and uses Ridge until she reaches Howard, but has to divert onto Howard/Custer/Chicago to continue north as bicycling is prohibited on Ridge
- Designated bike lane that ends on Chicago Avenue feels unsafe
- Expressed a challenge in getting contractors to clear sidewalks within the business district due to irregular/narrow widths and usually cannot find someone who can meet the insurance requirements, oftentimes the sidewalks are cleared by Boy Scouts instead.
- Would like to see a litter removal / trash removal plan that clears CTA property/embankment
- Parking in the corridor is a challenge if you're coming from somewhere outside Evanston and don't have the Park Evanston App
- Indicated Albany Care and Greenwood Care are potential stakeholders
- Identified Isberian Rugs as a business owner interested in improving/enhancing their building.
- A proposed development at Main/Sherman is planning to operate as a TOD and pledged to cater to residents who don't rely on cars
- Be mindful of parking removals that impact businesses; many will be entering a very fragile state in winter 2021 when anything that could impact their business will be met with resistance.
- Search, Inc. / JJ's List is a Disability Awareness program located at Dempster & Chicago; many of their clients are employed nearby at Jewel and would be a good stakeholder connection.

Annie Coakley

- Whole foods is Downtown Evanston's biggest stakeholder in the corridor, but loads in the rear which helps, but walking/driving in the vicinity of the parking ramp entrance is stressful.
- Want to be mindful of how restaurants and corridor stores receive shipments and deliveries as these are important (e.g. Walgreens, Binny's, Trader Joes, others)
- Offered to provide a point of contact to the Archdiocese.
[Submitted via email following the meeting: Megan Hughes, Real Estate Sales Manager, mhughes@archchicago.org, 312-534-8375]

Paul Zalmezak

- Think about how South Boulevard functions as part of the Sheridan Road corridor; it acts as a highway that poses challenges to calming traffic
- Hinman/South Boulevard is a potential development opportunity
- Would like to see wider/decluttered sidewalks in the corridor
- Is interested in crosswalks on Chicago Avenue at Madison and Washington Streets for better east-west connectivity
- The CTA wall along Chicago Avenue between Madison and South is an enhancement opportunity.
- Large planters on Chicago Avenue closer to the north end of the corridor are nice, but are inconsistent with other Evanston streetscape designs, and are bulky and prone to creating habitat for rats
- There is a lack of understanding about where the Northwestern University campus begins that could be used as an opportunity to extend the look and feel of the NU campus beauty and bring it farther south
There are some plantings/shrubs that seem out of place along Chicago Avenue



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Jessica Hyink

- The CTA is kicking off an Evanston Purple Line modernization study around the same time next year when the Red-Purple Modernization advances to its next stage, and offered to provide a connection/coordination with the CTA.
- CTA and Pace bus stops need improvements, would be interested in seeing ADA improvements where there is currently noncompliance.
- The Divvy station on Chicago near Dempster was (very) recently relocated to the Robert Crown center initiated by requests from stakeholders of the Main Dempster Mile. There is a chance to replace the old station with a smaller e-station, which would work better in constrained conditions and would encourage more bicycle tourism in the area. Would like to see stakeholders that include persons with disabilities, who use bicycles frequently (Rainey confirmed this as well).

Cade Sterling

- Interested in seeing more streetscape amenities to support business
- Want to see wider sidewalks, possibly through roadway narrowing
- Prefer simplicity of materials, authenticity is more important than being trendy
- Recognizes that the Chicago Avenue corridor travels through several smaller neighborhoods and would like streetscape that acknowledges/celebrates this. The corridor has changed a lot and we've lost a lot of the corridor's history, it would be interesting to see a design that embraces this history.

The above constitutes the author's understanding of the items discussed in the meeting.