

July 25, 2016

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Update on the Grand Connection Visioning process.

STAFF CONTACTS

Chris Salomone, Director, 452-6191

Dan Stroh, Planning Director, 452-5255

Bradley Calvert, Community Development Program Manager, 452-6930

Department of Planning and Community Development

POLICY ISSUES

On December 7, 2015, Council provided direction to proceed with the Wilburton-Grand Connection Land Use and Transportation project. A significant component of this project, and as a Council priority, is the Grand Connection Visioning.

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

 Action

 X Discussion

 X Information

Staff will provide an update on the Grand Connection visioning process. The update will provide information regarding process, sequence of work, public engagement, and upcoming tasks.

Background

On December 7, 2015, City Council approved the work plan for the Wilburton-Grand Connection project. The Grand Connection is a Council priority initiative to establish a vision for a non-motorized corridor that connects from Meydenbauer Bay, through Downtown Bellevue, and to the Wilburton Commercial Area and Eastside Rail Corridor. The Grand Connection will serve as a unique and signature element to Bellevue's urban landscape and will create opportunities for a new land use and urban design vision for the Wilburton Commercial Area, also an element to the Wilburton-Grand Connection project. The Wilburton Commercial Area land use and urban design analysis will begin late summer of 2016.

A series of events have been organized to assist in developing the vision, identity, and excitement around the project. These events have included the Grand Connection Visioning Charrette, co-sponsored by Bellevue Arts Museum, and the Urban Land Institute national advisory panel. Both of these events have contributed new ideas, visions, and considerations for the project as it moves forward. The City also contracted an urban design and landscape architecture firm to assist in creating the vision for the Grand Connection. Tonight, staff will provide an update to the project including public engagement, a design charrette follow up, and a status of the work in progress visioning of the route.

Public Engagement

New Website

On May 4th, 2016 staff launched the www.bellevuegrandconnection.com website. The website offers an opportunity to showcase the work completed from the charrette while enhancing the identity of the Grand Connection through its own domain and website. To date, the work has been viewed in 22 countries, 33 states, and 171 cities. A summary of the website's reach and engagement is provided in tonight's presentation.

The website has also been used as a means for public engagement. Staff and the consultant have created an online map that allows users to leave comments on their vision of the Grand Connection, similar to that of the map displayed at the charrette open house and in the City Hall concourse. A comment submission form is also available on the website, providing the public an opportunity to submit their thoughts on the project. As the visioning for the Grand Connection progresses, the website will be used to exhibit the alternatives and provide opportunities for feedback and public engagement in an open house format.

Grand Connection Visioning Charrette Publication

Staff has crafted a publication documenting the energy, events, and ideas that were a result of the Grand Connection Visioning Charrette. The 154 page publication highlights the concept of the Grand Connection, the charrette activities, ideas and concepts from the charrette, and the public open house. Tonight staff will provide Council with published copies of the book and provide an e-book version on the Grand Connection website.

Input from Stakeholders and the Public

During the design charrette in April of 2016, the selected design consultant installed an enlarged map of the Grand Connection route that allowed the public to provide feedback and input on desired improvements and existing features that they enjoyed. Per Council encouragement staff installed a similar map and feedback opportunity in the City Hall concourse. Staff and the consultant also launched an online version of the map on the City's newly created project website. The physical and online maps have generated nearly 300 comments that are summarized in the presentation, exhibiting some of the common themes that emerged. Some of the key themes and comments that have emerged included:

- Improvements to the pedestrian environment as they relate to access and safety
- Improved signage
- New recreational activities
- Permanent farmer's market
- Gateways at key locations
- Connection to the Botanical Garden
- New programming including festivals, vendors, recreation, and arts
- Overall improvements that enhance the character, vibrancy, diversity, and playfulness of the route

In addition to the comment maps, the consultant engaged with residents at four locations: the Downtown Park, Food Trucks, Compass Plaza, and the Transit Center. The consultant asked a series of questions to better understand how the public currently uses these spaces and what improvements could be made that would encourage additional usage or improvements that would enhance the overall experience. The most common themes have been summarized in the presentation.

During the charrette the City's selected design consultant engaged with a number of key stakeholders to understand their vision for the route. Since then communication has continued with several of the stakeholders to maintain open communication while providing input as the

project evolves. Staff has also engaged a number of companies, particularly those in the technology field, to better understand how the Grand Connection can serve as an amenity for their businesses, a showcase for their products, and how they can assist in playing a role in the visualization and realization of the project.

Visioning Process

Per the scope of work, the Grand Connection Visioning process was broken into multiple sequences to address the various challenges and scales that exist along the route. Tonight's discussion will focus on the status of Sequence One of the scope work.

Sequence One

This portion of the work seeks to identify a unifying element or theme for the entire route that will create the unique urban design experience. The goal of the unifying identity is to establish a context that will connect the individual places along the route within a common theme. Underscoring these unified themes will also be consistent elements in paving, weather protection, design, and other features that create additional layers of features that are identifiable to the route.

As part of Sequence One, the consultant was also asked to consider new and unique design features at strategic points along the route such as the Downtown Park, Compass Plaza, and Transit Center, employing the identity alternatives and creating places that encourage people to linger and engage. The consultant was also tasked with identifying solutions that could be completed in the short and long term. These solutions should provide opportunities for a long term vision of the route, while creating opportunities for concepts to be implemented early and quickly.

Sequence One work began in late April and has resulted in a series of concepts for improvements to existing space, as well as unique identity elements. Staff conducted a two day workshop in May with the design consultant as a means to provide direction and feedback in the process. Additionally, staff has concluded the selection process to add an artist to the Grand Connection Visioning design team. The artist will be tasked with producing an art plan for the route and identifying opportunities for location, design, and programming of art. The Arts Manager will be seeking formal approval from Council of the selection in September.

Tonight, staff will present a collection of the themes, ideas, and concepts that have emerged during the visioning process.

Sequence Two

This portion of the work will address the I-405 crossing and the connection. Sequence Two will begin in late summer 2016.

Sequence Three

This portion of the work will reassess the vision established for the Grand Connection, particularly the segment that connects Downtown to the Wilburton Commercial Area and the Eastside Rail Corridor. This sequence will analyze the compatibility and interfacing of the vision with the results of the land use, urban design, and transportation analysis of the Wilburton Commercial Area. Sequence Three will be conducted early to mid-2017.

Wilburton Commercial Area

Per the scope of work, the Grand Connection Visioning process was broken into multiple sequences to address the various challenges and scales that exist along the route. Tonight's discussion will focus on the status of Sequence One of the scope work.

Next Steps

- Staff will continue work with the design consultant on Sequence One
- Establish an online and in-person open house to obtain feedback on Sequence One
- Commence Sequence Two from scope of work
- Proceed with the recruitment and selection of consultants for the Wilburton Commercial Area in regards to:
 - Land Use and Urban Design
 - Transportation and Environmental
- Establish a public engagement process for the Wilburton Commercial Area

Attachments

1. Grand Connection Conceptual Route
2. High Level Project Timeline