



**PLANNING DEPARTMENT**

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**WESTLAKE PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF WORK SESSION MEETING  
January 19, 2021**

Present: Chairman Brad Lamb, Duane Van Dyke, Nick Nunnari, Matt Jones, Lauren Falcone

Also Present: Planning Director Jim Bedell, Economic Development Manager, Michelle Boczek

The work session was called to order at 7:01 p.m. by Chairman Brad Lamb.

**BUSINESS**

**I-90/Crocker Gateway Enhancements**

Jim Bedell introduced Rich Desich of Equity Trust, Dave Robar of VOCAN and Matt Hils of OHM Advisors who attended to present potential enhancements to the I-90 Crocker Road interchange. He explained that this project was presented to the Westlake Public Grounds, Buildings, Recreation Committee on 9/23/2020 and they “encouraged the mayor and staff to further study the project” and the proposal to be presented to the Planning Commission for input prior to it getting too far along in the design process.

Mr. Desich explained the vision for how this interchange can become the gateway to Cuyahoga County and the team he has enlisted with the needed talents and experience. Mr. Hils presented an overview of the adjacent land uses. He explained the different zones of experience for exiting and driving through the interchange and explained walls, significant new landscaping, the bridge treatment, and a storm water basin park to remind people that Westlake is a leader in innovation in the County and emphasis on this being the gateway to the county. Landscaping is in a straightforward bold design with long bands of plantings. Wall elements that may incorporate dramatic lighting were likely to be in precast concrete and when on the bridge in acrylic or fiberglass. Mr. Robar explained that the City is evolving to architecture that is more modern and the design reflects this in its use of materials, color and texture. The retention basin was envisioned as an interpretive wildlife park, with views to it from Crocker Road framed by vegetation and with interpretative signage, pathways and boardwalks to tell its story of how it retains and cleans water.

Planning Commissioners were impressed with the concepts presented for beautifying the interchange and noted that improvements are also needed for the Columbia/I-90 interchange. The location of the walls was discussed and it was agreed that some could be shortened, in order to not block views to buildings and not make them look like sound walls. It was agreed that the short section of the wall closest to the pond and other short wall should be removed for better views,

and, since it is such a large area, some asymmetry in design is acceptable. The walls will have to be carefully designed to not look like sound barriers or give the impression of driving through a “check point”. Low maintenance plantings, such as meadow plantings are intended. A contemporary design may work, but the treatment of the materials will be crucial.

The walking path around the retention basin was discussed and it was questioned whether people would want to be next to the interstate due to noise and other natural areas nearby. Mr. Hils answered it will likely be used by the neighboring residential developments and hotels and it has the likelihood of being used for educational purposes. Mr. Desich explained a similar walking trail they have done for employees that has been very successful. Planning Commissioners liked the boardwalk and potential for education for Westlake and other schools in the area. It was agreed that parking lot “C” for the retention basin cannot go where shown but this is a good location for a framed view into the basin from Crocker Road. Parking for twelve parking spaces should be explored behind Mr. Tire or the Hampton Inn.

Pedestrian connectivity across the bridge was discussed. It was noted that few office workers north of I-90 walk to Crocker Park for lunch because the bridge is minimally functional and not appealing to pedestrians and is thought to be dangerous and inhospitable. The concepts presented did not necessarily address this matter, as the bridge will need to be reconstructed. Planning Commissioners questioned if the pedestrian use of the bridge should be a top priority. This could be done by widening the bridge deck or constructing a second bridge for pedestrians only. It should be scheduled for improvement along with any required safety upgrades. During the Republican National Convention (RNC), when hotels were at capacity, many people walked across the bridge, but that is not typical. The 2012 Citywide Bike Plan and Cuyahoga County Greenways plan both have proposed trails for Crocker Road but they head west on Detroit Road and use Bradley Road for the I-90 crossing. This is likely due to the condition of the I-90 bridge. There may be less traffic on Crocker Road north of I-90 than on Bradley Road making this a better location for trail than on Bradley Road.

Westlake lacks a strong brand and this is an opportunity to tie into the community character versus looking like neighboring communities. The “Westlake” sign was a temporary measure for the RNC and a wayfinding plan for Westlake would be beneficial. It was asked if Westlake’s green and white color scheme could be somehow incorporated into the design.

The cost is broken out with the good option at \$2.5M and the best option at \$5.5M. Planning Commissioners questioned who is responsible for long-term maintenance. ODOT will require a memorandum of understanding for maintenance and upkeep to be adopted prior to construction. Mr. Desich thought they could be patterned after the City’s adopt-a-bed program. It was thought that Engineering should explore grant opportunities. There may be grants from the ODNR for recreation to fund the retention basin improvements. The County has grants available for branding. Tax increment financing (TIF) is not available for funding this project. Transportation for Livable Communities Initiative (TLCI) funding through NOACA was discussed. Planning Commissioners questioned how other ODOT interchange improvements are funded along I-77 and elsewhere.

Early engagement from the Engineering Department and ODOT is key to the success of this project. The next step is to meet with the Mayor and City Engineer and then present the concept

to ODOT for preliminary approval, which can be a two or three month process. Before getting much further in the design, the projected needs from ODOT's safety study for the interchange will need to be known. Phasing was discussed and it was agreed that starting with smaller interim projects that can be accomplished would build enthusiasm instead of waiting for many years to complete the entire project.

Members thanked Mr. Desich for his civic-minded leadership and investment of time, energy and resources in Westlake.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The work session adjourned at 8:35 pm.

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Chairman Brad Lamb

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Jim Bedell, AICP  
Director of Planning and Economic Development

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_