

Washington Street Public Space Design Guidelines
Community Meeting Notes
February 20, 2007

The first hour of the meeting provided an opportunity for attendees to browse several exhibits of proposed streetscape concepts and the existing conditions surveys.

Rich Josephson, Acting Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning, provided an introduction and welcome. A presentation was then given by Deana Rhodeside, Elliot Rhodeside and Aaron Feldman-Grosse of Rhodeside & Harwell (http://alexandriava.gov/planningandzoning/pdf/washington_streetscape_presentation_022007.pdf), which was followed by community comments and discussion, as summarized generally below:

Proposed Concepts:

There was a question as to why the three proposed concepts were presented separately, and the suggestion that some combination of all three may be a good approach. Concern was expressed about not sterilizing the streetscape by having the same elements to create a uniform look throughout and that variation is important. Some attendees voiced their support for articulation of different districts along Washington Street, as is demonstrated in Concept #2.

Another comment was made about the role of the street as a commuter thoroughfare and a city “main street,” and that the street is unwelcoming during rush hour when parking is prohibited. There is a need for more uses that attract pedestrians.

Trees and Landscaping:

There was a concern about tree wells, and the need to create them so that trees can survive and grow. There was a comment that a continuous planting strip may be a good idea because the area in between tree wells is not used or needed anyway. Others disagreed with the idea of a continuous planting strip. A comment was made about the desire for consistency between the streetscape in the residential areas, and Washington Street.

John Noelle, City Arborist, responded to a question about best practices for healthy trees and stated that there are a variety of planting methods that can increase soil volume, and provide more area for root development to get larger trees. Another idea is to have some space between a tree pit or well and the curb as a “courtesy area” for people to have room to get out of their cars.

Historic Character:

There was a comment that the street should not be artificial or an historic theme park, and that Washington Street does not need to be a reproduction of Old Town. Another meeting attendee

thought that Washington Street should not be a theme park, but that there is a need to eliminate the hodge-podge.

Streetscape Elements:

A question was asked about overhead wires and light pollution. It was noted that much of the utilities along Washington have already been undergrounded. There are opportunities to consider other kinds of lighting fixtures, such as the decorative poles used along other areas of the parkway. Comments were made regarding the desire to reduce clutter along the street and sidewalk, and to include strategies other than consolidating the parking meters.

Gateways:

Gateways at the north and south end of the street were identified as important. There was a suggestion that there could be a memorial circle as the southern gateway near Hunting Terrace. There was a concern that the gateway presented did not include or consider Porto Vecchio. The graphics should better reflect that their property is within the city limits. Corrections should be made to graphics presented at meetings that better reflects their location inside the city limits.

Sustainability and the Environment:

Consider sustainable street initiatives, such as charcoal filter systems for sewer/stormwater system, and pervious street surfacing for parking lanes. IT was discussed that sustainable design can be incorporated in to various aspects of the streetscape. An example was shown of a consolidated parking meter that ran on solar power. Lighting standards can also be developed for the traffic light poles to control light pollution.

Process:

There was a concern about the process being rushed, and that there should be two weeks given to respond to the community meeting survey and more than two weeks notice for a community meeting.

Rich Josephson confirmed that there would be two weeks to respond to the survey once it is posted on the web.

Implementation:

There were questions about implementation, and whether there was funding for the proposed improvements. It was noted that the King Street Retail Strategy did not designate funding for implementation. It was stated that property owners need to be involved with implementation. Rich Josephson, Acting Director Department of Planning and Zoning, responded that Planning Commission and City Council will have to approve whatever is developed from the process. He added that the guidelines will include a phasing and implementation plan, which will be over several years (from 5,10 or 15 years).

Businesses and residents should work together on improving the community. Washington Street businesses are welcome to OTBPA, and can find more information at KSMET.com

Next Steps:

Following the discussion, meeting attendees were asked to browse the concept stations, and provide comments directly on the exhibits, or submit the survey provided that evening. The survey will also be available on line, and responses can be sent in via email to Valerie Peterson.

Staff stated that the comments received at the meeting and from surveys would be considered , and the concepts would be refined. Another community meeting will be held to review the refined concepts.