

City Responds to Streetscape Project Concerns

By: Pamela Papner and John Becker

On July 30, 2009, the VHCA organized a meeting for concerned residents to discuss with city officials construction and traffic concerns related to the recently completed "Streetscape II" improvements at/south of the intersection of Virginia and N. Highland avenues.

City officials leading the Streetscape II project, including Joe Basista, Commissioner of Public Works, attended the meeting to listen to issues and brainstorm with residents options for addressing them. The city studied our concerns, and a follow-up meeting to discuss their proposed plan to address these issues was held October 27th.

Traffic Back-Up and "Cut-Through" Issues

The city completed a traffic study to determine the magnitude of cut-through traffic and delay at Virginia and N. Highland avenues. The study was conducted over a 24-hour period during a weekday and the delay issue was also studied on a Saturday in late August/early September. The results of that study are published on **www.vahi.org**. Highlights of the study's findings:

- Street markings recently implemented for the "slip" lane in front of Murphy's and Taco Mac, along with growing awareness that the slip lane can still be used for traffic traveling eastbound on Virginia (turning right onto N. Highland Ave.), appear to have already significantly improved the traffic back-up situation.
- The study showed that as compared to the traffic statistics collected prior to the Streetscape II improvements, the amount of delay at Virginia and N. Highland actually improved during weekdays (post-streetscape), and it stayed the same on Saturday. After initial markings were completed, it appears residents began realizing they could still use the slip lane (eastbound on Virginia) for right turns onto N. Highland (entry being via the new apron cut), and it also became more evident that we still have two lanes eastbound on Virginia (one straight/right and one for left turns).
- The city's traffic study also showed that traffic volume did not show a significant spike during rush hours or, over a 24-hour period, along nearby residential streets. However, Vance and Highland View met speed hump requirements (15% or more cars exceeded speed limit by 10 mph or more). Therefore, if Vance and/or Highland View residents choose to petition for the city's speed bump program, they can. The VHCA will work with residents of those streets on the petition process (75% or more of property owners on each street must approve). Kathryn King-Metters, a new VHCA Board Member will be taking the lead on traffic issues in the future, and she will be "on point" to:
 - Get the word out to residents of Vance and Highland View about the street hump opportunity; and
 - Monitor any future Streetscape traffic issues once the immediate plans to ameliorate problems has been implemented.

- All-way stop analyses were also performed at Todd/Adair, Vance/Los Angeles, Todd/Rupley, Todd/Highland View, and Todd/Virginia Circle. The analysis at Todd/Adair showed that this intersection met the minimum requirements for all-way stop installation (it's a two-way stop today). Legislation will be introduced by the city, with installation expected in early 2010. Agreement by the city to install a 4-way stop at that intersection was an important "win" for neighbors on Adair, who have been attempting to do this for a long time.

Blockage of Left Turn From Todd, Slip Lane Signage, Cross Walk and Exaggerated Curb Cut Issues

- Two 'Do Not Enter' signs were posted to prevent wrong way traffic from entering the slip from N. Highland. A 'One Way' sign was also added at the entrance to the slip eastbound off of Virginia.
- Painted traffic directional arrows have been added to the slip (with word "ONLY" drawn to be painted soon), and two 'No Parking' signs were also added along the left side of the slip.
- A 'Do Not Block' sign was added west of the curb cut at Todd to prevent blockage of left turns from Todd onto Virginia. Edge lines were also added in this area.
- A painted, triangular tapered area will be added west of the curb cut at Todd, which will extend from the bus stop to the taxi stand. Raised, reflective pavement markers will be added throughout the triangle to "warn" people about the upcoming exaggerated curb cut. The striping and particularly the raised markers should dramatically ameliorate the unexpected curb cut area in front of the bank, which was implemented to promote traffic calming.
- Existing crosswalks were found to be the 'natural' places for people walking to cross from one side of Virginia Avenue to the other. Crosswalk signage and PEDS warning signs were/will be added to the two crosswalk areas near the bank to improve notice of crosswalks and promote safety.
- The sharp curb cut in front of Mooncake (that had proved to be tire-damaging) was rounded, and a parking space was added.

Truck Unloading, Murphy's Valet and Additional Items

- The apron cut into the slip lane was found to be adequate for traffic, including trucks. People seem to be adjusting now that there is more signage. This redesigned entry into the slip appears to be promoting traffic-calming at the new pedestrian-friendly island area, which was the intent.
- The city reversed their original position and agreed to create a 'Truck Unloading' zone in the slip from 9am-Noon weekdays to address the issue of an inadequate place for our commercial area trucks to unload. Murphy's and Taco Mac will continue to direct trucks to unload in the parking spaces directly in front of their restaurants or they can use slip area zone, once it's created. This resolution should make residents very happy because trucks can now avoid unloading on

Todd and other areas that were problematic for residents.

- Signage for the 'Truck Unloading' zone will be combined with 'No Parking' signage to avoid too much clutter along the slip.
- Murphy's has already relocated its valet parking sign from the city right-of-way to appropriate Murphy-owned areas, where it will remain. Murphy's agreed that its valets will walk owners of cars parked in front of Murphy's to those cars and advise them to exit toward N. Highland. This is intended to resolve a possible safety issue (preventing customers from going the wrong way in the slip and exiting on Todd or Virginia).
- Directional signage westbound on Virginia in front of Chevron has been added to make it clear there are two lanes (one left turn and the other straight/right turn). This should improve traffic flow westbound on Virginia.
- For now, parking in front of Murphy's and Taco Mac shall remain straight and not become angled as originally planned, as angled parking would have resulted in the loss of two parking spaces. It was originally thought that angled parking would make the flow of traffic in the slip more obvious, but the city and Murphy's would like to monitor the situation to see if wrong way traffic really is problematic in the future.
- Better-matching, deeper red color pavers are being installed where a color mismatch existed near Taco Mac and along the Mooncake to Paolo's area.

"I am so appreciative that both residents and the city took the time to meet and have a productive conversation about unintended consequences resulting from the Streetscape II improvements," said Pamela Papner, Virginia-Highland Civic Association president. "The city was extremely responsive, and we should allow some time for changes to be implemented and give them a chance to work. I was very impressed by the productive feedback from residents; by the city's responsiveness; by our local merchants' support; and by everyone's desire to make sure this wonderful 'Streetscape II' project is properly completed. We are also very appreciative of Council Member Anne Fauver's support throughout this process."

The VHCA has a new Board Member, Kathryn King-Metters, who will be in charge of neighborhood traffic concerns. If we find we have any continuing or new issues, Kathryn is prepared to coordinate communication with the city. The email address for contacting her is: traffic@vahi.org.