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to Dustin Nilsen and Will Norris, City of Hood River  
from Nathan Polanski, PE, Alex Dupey, AICP, MIG  
re The Heights Streetscape Plan – Phase 1 Summary Memo  
date August 31, 2021

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This memorandum summarizes finding and outcomes from Phase 1 of the Heights Streetscape Project. Phase 1 was focused on establishing the project vision and foundation and included reviewing existing planning studies completed in the project area, documenting the context of the study area, and conducting public engagement to identify community and stakeholder priorities. A key outcome from Phase 1 was the identification of project goals that will be used to guide the development and evaluation of streetscape concepts during Phase 2 - Concept Development.

## **Existing Conditions**

Past community and Urban Renewal planning efforts - The project team reviewed existing planning documents relevant to the Heights Streetscape study area. This included Heights Urban Renewal documents and past community planning efforts such as the Walkshop with Dan Burden and Streets Alive demonstration projects. Findings from this review:

- helped frame stakeholder and community conversations,
- confirmed project specific goals align with Urban Renewal goals and community priorities, and
- will inform community preferences are integrated into proposed streetscape concepts.

Regulatory process: The project team also reviewed City and ODOT policies, regulatory requirements, and design standards to inform design discussions with City and ODOT staff. This review has informed preliminary coordination with ODOT. Prior to the start of concept development, the project team will confirm with ODOT the urban context, as defined in ODOT's Blueprint for Urban Design Manual, for 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets; the urban context is used to establish design guidance for elements of the street cross section (e.g. width of travel lane width).

Project basemap: a survey basemap was also conducted for the study area streets to assist in the development of streetscape concepts.

## **Community Engagement**

A comprehensive community engagement plan was conducted to gather information and feedback from the community and project stakeholders.

Online survey: an online survey ran from March 8 to March 29, 2021, that received more than 340 responses. The survey provided clear insights on preliminary project goals and existing issues and needs for the area building on our review of past city and community planning efforts. Key findings included:

- Project goals most important to survey participants are related to slowing traffic, creating safe streets and intersections for all users, and promoting a livable community through street improvements that support access to local businesses.
- Street improvements, particularly at intersections, are needed for people walking, biking and driving to increase safety throughout the project area, particularly for people moving east and west across 12th or 13th Streets.
- To support business and economic development, improving opportunities to access businesses across transportation modes and maintaining and improving views to storefronts on 12th and 13th should be considered.
- Accessibility improvements, street trees, and lighting are desired street environment enhancements.

The survey was published in English and Spanish, however, no surveys were completed in Spanish. For future outreach efforts we are planning to focus on in-person discussions to the extent feasible and adjusting our outreach to the Latino community. This adjustment has included getting the word out via Radio Terra , a local Spanish radio program, and contacting St Mary’s Church to advertise the project in church newsletters.

Stakeholder meetings: small group meetings were conducted to gather input on the project area from individuals and groups with a specific interest in the area (e.g., they own a business in the Heights). The project team conducted seven separate meetings, including two meetings in Spanish led by the Next Door. City staff led the process for identifying meeting participants and Next Door contacted attendees for the meetings in Spanish. Meetings included:

- Hood River Landmarks Review Board members
- Business stakeholders in the project area – this included a separate Spanish led discussion with Latino business owners
- Community members from Latinos en Accion
- Up Valley community members
- Local community organizations that have taken an active role in previous planning efforts or provided previous input on the Heights
- Columbia Area Transit

Key takeaways from these conversations were:

- Preserving the areas as a local destination and building on the area’s character and history; members of the Landmarks Review Board discussed how the development of infrastructure in the Heights likely contributed to and informed how people and goods move through the Heights
- Slowing traffic and making streets safer to cross
- Improving connections to neighborhoods and schools
- Improving bicycle connections and amenities
- Managing on-street parking

Although meetings were well attended the project team identified the need for additional participation from the local business community. A short letter and questionnaire were developed to circulate to local business owners. City staff, with support from Urban Renewal Advisory Committee members, sent the letter to local business owners. Ten completed questionnaires were received with additional feedback helping the project team to understand how the streetscape can be improved to support their business, how customers and deliveries access their business (e.g. on-street vs private parking lot).

A consistent topic of discussion with stakeholders was whether changes can be expected to the existing on-street parking. Given the concern for impacts to existing parking supply the project team is proposing to conduct a parking study to better understand the existing parking supply (on- and off-street) within the project area and how future development and design concepts might impact, or change the availability and access to existing parking. The parking study will be conducted during Phase 2 as concepts are being developed.

**Comments from the Project Website or Email:** The project website provides an opportunity to comment about any project related issue. As of July 22, 2021, 20 comments were submitted along with a handful of emails that provided input on the project. Comments were focused on the following topics, many of which are outside the scope of the streetscape project, but do inform feelings about current issues in and adjacent to the project area:

- Concern about future development that was recently approved by the City of Hood River at 1306 Taylor Street
- Desire for more mixed-use development
- Existing parking availability and lack of enforcement of two-hour limits
- Need for tree planting and green stormwater infrastructure
- Concern about changes to traffic flow and number of lanes for cars (there were comments both for and against lane reductions)
- Desire for a better pedestrian and bicycle environment and consistent signage.
- Reduction in the amount of gravel used during the winter
- Need to provide better crossings for people walking across 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets
- Include voices from the Latino community
- Keep the area local

## **Project Goals**

The Heights Business District Urban Renewal (UR) Plan (First Amendment March 2016) has seven goals that apply to the entire urban renewal area and are broad statements designed to guide future planning and urban renewal funded projects in the area. As a part of this project we have developed project specific goals focused on improving 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Streets and the intersections and couplets that tie the couplet together at the north and south ends of the area. These goals have been developed incorporating input from the:

- Urban Renewal Agency Board (URAB) and Urban Renewal Advisory Committee (URAC) kickoff meeting held February 4, 2021
- online community survey, open from March 8, 2021 through March 29, 2021
- stakeholder meetings held in April and May 2021
- URAC meeting on May 20, 2021, and
- URAB meeting June 14, 2021.

The project goals, affirmed by the URAB at their July 12, 2021 meeting, include four community priority goals and three additional goals that align with UR Plan goals:

Community Priority Goals:

- Calm traffic and improve intersections to improve safety for people driving, walking, biking, taking transit and supporting local businesses.
- Preserve and promote a livable community and economy through streetscape improvements that increases safety for people walking and biking and addresses parking needs to support local business access, and future mixed-use development.
- Create an identify for the Heights that reflects the diverse culture and history of the area and as destination for local residents for goods and services.
- Create streets and gathering spaces that provide safe, comfortable places for people walking, accessing transit, and biking along and across the corridor and that connects area recreation and commercial destinations and neighborhoods.

Goals that align with the Urban renewal Plan:

- Support existing and future development by maintaining and improving utility infrastructure as part of the streetscape project.
- Engage local residents and businesses, the school district, and those that use the corridor to provide ongoing input in the streetscape project.
- Provide locations for people to gather, to stop and rest.

During Phase 2 the project team will develop preliminary concepts and an approach to evaluate concepts based on the community's vision and project goals.