memo

to Dustin Nilsen and Will Norris, City of Hood River

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re The Heights Streetscape Plan – Phase 2 Summary Memo

date June 17, 2022

This memorandum summarizes findings and outcomes from Phase 2 of the Heights Streetscape Project. In Phase 2 the project team:

- Developed concepts that align with the project goals confirmed in Phase 1;
- Completed transportation, parking, and other analyses to evaluate the concepts against project goals;
- Provided opportunities for community feedback on the concepts and technical analysis; and
- Identified preliminary recommendations for design.

The product of Phase 2 is the recommendation of a general design concept the project team will use to develop a preferred design concept during Phase 3 – Develop Preferred Concept and Action Plan. The project team's recommendation is based on a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the concepts related to the project goals and feedback from the community.

Design Process

The Heights Streetscape Plan has implemented a project design process approved by the Urban Renewal Agency Board (URAB) and informed through the Urban Renewal Advisory Committee (URAC) and extensive community input.

During Phase 1 (Feb-Aug 2021), the project team:

- Gathered information about the existing conditions and project context;
- Created a project webpage to provide the public access to project information;
- Conducted a public survey, which reached over 300 respondents, to develop project goals;
- Conducted discussions with a variety of agency and stakeholder groups including the Latino community, local businesses, county and transportation organizations (e.g., Columbia Area Transit), and Safe Routes to Schools project team among others.

During Phase 2 (Sept 2021-June 2022), the project team:

- Developed evaluation criteria and design concepts to gauge alignment with project goals;
- Conducted a district parking study;
- Refined evaluation criteria and design concepts based on URA feedback;
- Completed a technical evaluation of the design concepts based on final evaluation criteria;
- Conducted outreach with emergency service providers and agencies;
- Presented the design concepts and evaluation findings to the community;
- Coordinated a peer review for the potential to design roundabouts at key intersections; and
- Summarized in-person and online survey results.

The next step in this process combines findings from the technical evaluation and community feedback to identify a preferred design concept to be used as a basis and framework for improving the streets and intersections in the Heights.

Design Concepts

The project team developed three design concepts to explore potential street and intersection configurations for consideration. The preferred design to be developed in Phase 3 may combine aspects of more than one concept.

Design Concept 1 – Two Lane, Two-way Traffic

This concept converts existing one-way traffic on 12th and 13th Streets to two-way traffic, eliminating one-way streets. Along 13th, parking would be removed and replaced with one-way curb-separated bike lanes. Along 12th, parking would remain on both sides of the street. Traffic signals would be installed on 13th Street at May Street and Belmont Avenue.

Design Concept 2 – One Lane, One-way Traffic

This concept reduces 12th Street and 13th Street to one lane of one-way traffic in each direction. This concept was developed to calm traffic through the Heights, provide shared space for walking and biking along 13th Street, and provide on-street parking on 12th and 13th Streets. A roundabout at 13th/May and a double roundabout at 13th/12th/Belmont would control traffic at key intersections.

Design Concept 3 - Hybrid

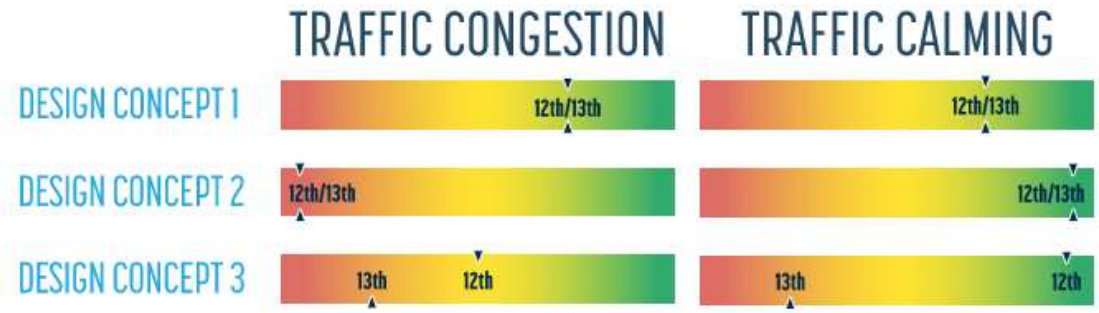
This concept converts the existing one-way traffic on 13th Street to two-way traffic while maintaining one-way traffic on 12th Street. For this concept 12th Street also has diagonal parking and a two-way protected bike lane (or cycle track) and 13th Street has a center turn lane and on-street parking on one side of the street. The intersection at 13th/May would be controlled with a roundabout and the intersection at 13th/Belmont would be controlled with a traffic signal.

Technical Evaluation

The project team completed a technical evaluation of the concepts to determine how each concept aligns with project goals. The evaluation summary memorandum (Appendix A) describes the findings of the analysis. In general, the technical analysis found that while each concept met many of the project's goals, Design Concept 1 aligned the best with project goals followed by Design Concept 3 and then Design Concept 2. A summary of key differences between design concepts, which were identified during the tehcnical analysis, are described below.

Traffic Congestion

Each design concept was developed with a goal to calm traffic along 12th and 13th Streets compared to today's traffic and to improve the street environment for people walking, biking, and taking transit. As a result, all three concepts result in more traffic congestion, a reduced Level of Service for vehicles, and more time to drive through the Heights compared to the future Transportation System Plan Scenario, which is the current adopted plan. The graphic below shows how each concept rated (green = good rating, red = poor rating) in terms of traffic congestion and traffic calming. Traffic calming is a key component of Goal 1.



Key intersections

The intersections at 13th/May and 13th/12th/Belmont are "bottlenecks" for vehicle performance. These intersections are currently operating at a failed condition and will continue to fail without intersection improvements with the projected growth in traffic. Existing pedestrian facilities also do not meet ADA or city standards and because there are no bike lanes the intersections do not align with the city's Transportation System Plan or Safe Routes to School recommendations.

In the future, these intersections could be controlled with a traffic signal or roundabout regardless of the preferred design concept for traffic along 12th and 13th Streets. Roundabouts will require a significant amount of land acquisition, have a greater impact on adjacent properties and businesses, and significantly increase implementation costs.

Appendix B includes findings from a "Roundabout Peer Review," which evaluated a potential layout and property impacts for roundabouts on adjacent properties.

Parking

Each design concept would alter and reduce on-street parking along 12th and 13th Streets, as described in Table 1; however, each design concept has less impact on existing parking than the City's Transportation System Plan, which was adopted in 2011.

Table 1. On-Street Parking Impacts by Design Concept		
	Approx. On-street Parking along 12th and 13th Streets	Approx. On-street District Parking (parking within one block of 12th and 13th Streets)
Parking (current)	141	304
2011 Transportation System Plan	56 (60% reduction)	220 (28% reduction)
Design Concept 1	68 (52% reduction)	230 (24% reduction)
Design Concept 2	112 (21% reduction)	275 (10% reduction)
Design Concept 3	81 (43% reduction)	245 (20% reduction)

One Lane Streets and Emergency Access

The project team met with local public safety officials to get feedback on the design concepts. The meeting included Hood River County Sheriff, City of Hood River Fire Department, and City of Hood River Police Department; West Side Fire District was also invited but did not attend. Representatives from each agency indicated that one-lane streets in Design Concept 2 would present challenges for emergency access and indicated that although a single lane street may work as a neighborhood street, 12th and 13th Streets serve a larger community and one lane streets are therefore not desirable for emergency access. There was less concern for the one-lane street along 12th Street in Design Concept 3 because first responders would likely use 13th Street for emergency access and regional trip travel and response.

Community Outreach and Feedback for Phase 2

Community outreach included a field visit to local businesses, a two-day public open house, and an online survey promoted for one month. Over 250 people attended the open house, 1,200 opened the City's Survey, and 306 people competed the full survey, including 21 people who completed the Spanish version of the survey.

Media Presence and Outreach

The project team used a variety of tools and platforms to spread the word, in both English and Spanish, to encourage community participation. The web and media presence included but was not limited to the following:

- Project webpage and online presence
- Radio Tierra
- Local news organizations (e.g., Columbia Gorge News)
- Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- City E-newsletter

Direct Business Outreach

Prior to the public open house project team members went store to store to engage businesses along 12th and 13th Streets and invite them to participate in the open house, answer questions, and inform their customers and community of the project and opportunities to get engaged and provide input.

A concern for some business owners, particularly those who depend on drive up customers, is reducing on-street parking and the perception that the project has become a bike lane project. Other feedback included growing concerns for pedestrian safety and excessive traffic speeds, particularly along 12th Street where the density of businesses results in more on-street parking and more people walking. The desire for improved curb appeal was also mentioned as was a truck traffic concern related to potential stops at May Street for commercial trucks travelling uphill on 13th during winter weather.

Open House

The open house provided an opportunity to provide comments and discuss the concepts with project team members and other community members (a complete summary is included as Appendix C). Key takeaways from the open house include:

- A **roundabout** was preferred over a traffic light at 13th/May.
- Some attendees noted concerns for the **loss of businesses and impacts to private property** needed to make improvements at the intersections of Belmont, 12th, and 13th.
- **Parking** for businesses was a common concern and there is opposition to reducing parking in the Heights.

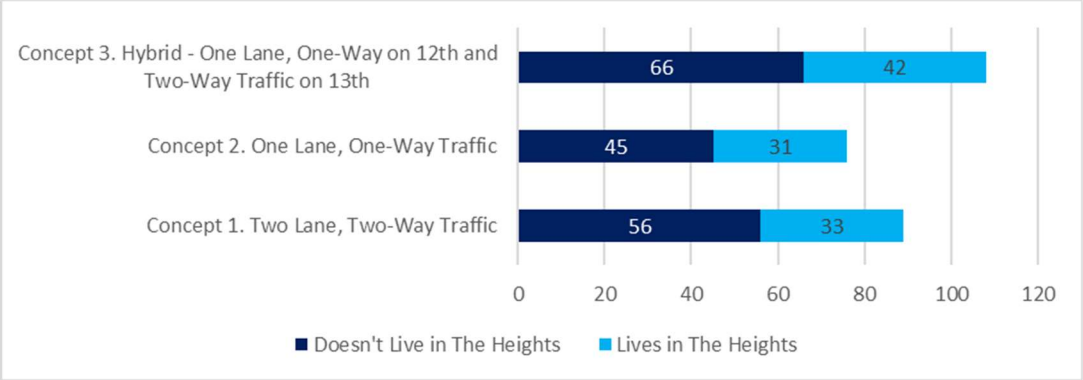
- People are concerned about **emergency vehicle access**.
- There are mixed views on converting 12th and 13th Street to **two-way traffic**.
- Some attendees were concerned with **winter conditions, particularly icy roads** and how a traffic signal could impact trucks travelling uphill (southbound) on 13th and how well bike lanes would be used during the winter months.
- Some attendees questioned whether 12th and 13th Streets are appropriate for bike lanes and wondered if **bike lanes should be located on neighborhood streets** instead.
- A dot exercise to solicit feedback on the **streetscape character** of the Heights suggested community preferences for creating opportunities for a variety of gathering spaces (small and large), using more contemporary materials, and incorporating local culture and character.

The community's feedback from the open house, including these key takeaways, have informed the project team's recommendation for developing a preferred design as presented below.

Online Survey

Survey results identified several key themes (see Appendix D for a complete summary):

- Results showed **respondents were divided** when asked for their level of support or to identify how important a concept, goal, or key difference was to them.
- When asked to pick which concept they felt most aligned with, **more people picked Concept 3** than Concepts 1 or 2.



- **Differences in decision-making**. Respondents who preferred Concepts 2 and 3 found better pedestrian access and opportunities for gathering and better bike access most important when choosing their preferred concept. Respondents who preferred Concept 1 found better auto access and preserving parking were most important.

Responses were also analyzed based on where respondents live.

- Respondents **who do not live in the Heights**:
  - Identified parking to be more important than respondents who live in the Heights.
  - Identified placemaking as the least important difference between concepts.
- Respondents **who live in the Heights** identified traffic calming, comfortable places for walking, and placemaking as important differences when compared to people who do not live in the Heights.

Respondents were asked to identify how important key differences are between the design concepts. The charts below show the average responses based on where respondents live and for all respondents ('Not at all important' = 0, 'Very Important' = 100).

Respondents were **split in whether roundabouts are appropriate to the District**. There was slightly more support for **roundabouts** from respondents who live in the Heights.

The survey included a **budgeting exercise** that asked respondents to prioritize and invest limited resources into improvements they valued for improving streets and intersections in the Heights. Generally, respondents spent most of their resources constructing roundabouts, but items that required less resources such as improved east/west crossings or enhancing street trees and landscaping were chosen the most. This suggests that improving all intersections for safety is important to the community as are opportunities to integrate planting and natural systems into the streetscape environment.

Recommendation for Developing a Preferred Design

Based on the technical evaluation and community feedback, the project team recommends a design concept that builds on Concept 3 (Hybrid). Concept 3 offers a compromise that aligns well with the project goals and balances the divided community feedback.

Initially, Concept 1 aligned slightly better in terms of alignment with project goals, however, this rating was not weighted for elements that are most important to the community. For example, Concept 1 has the greatest reduction in on-street parking and does not align as well with Safe Routes to Schools recommendations when compared to Concept 3. Although Concept 3 has some qualities in terms of traffic calming and walking environment that are not ideal along 13th Street, the project team feels a preferred design can be developed to help mitigate these concerns.

As the preferred design is developed the project team will incorporate the following features based on community feedback in order to develop a final design that aligns well with project goals and community feedback:

1. The design of east-west streets for on-street parking: to offset reduced parking on 12th and 13th Streets the design of east/west streets should explore opportunities to increase parking compared to today's streets; parking strategies on Taylor Ave and A St/Wilson St should be balanced with improving access for people walking and biking. Based on observations of existing parking use the parking on east/west streets should also explore ways to incorporate slightly longer parking stalls to accommodate trucks and sprinter vans recognizing longer vehicles may not park as comfortably in angle parking stalls on 12th Street.
2. Traffic calming and sidewalk environment along 13th Street: the three-lane road section on 13th Street did not align strongly with project goals related to traffic calming and comfort for people walking. The design of 13th Street will incorporate traffic calming strategies such as medians and visibility enhancements at key crosswalks. Along the east side of 13th Street, where the travel lane is directly adjacent to the sidewalk (no on-street parking), a continuous planting strip or similar treatment should be incorporated to improve the safety and comfort of people walking.
3. Emergency access and raised bike lanes: public safety officials suggested exploring how raised bike lanes adjacent to the roadway along May Street and 12th Street might be used by emergency service vehicles during an emergency response. The design team should explore how the design of the road edge/curb condition might support emergency access without compromising safety for people biking.
4. Bike connections: although the project study ends just south of Belmont the project could make a recommendation for how to continue the two-way cycle track south to Pacific Ave and the Indian Creek Trail, which has been a major infrastructure component considered in the safe routes to school effort. A more detailed review and design to support the movement of people walking and biking through key intersections at 13th/May and 13th/12th/Belmont will be completed after the intersection control type (traffic signal or roundabout) is identified.
5. Streetscape environment: opportunities for incorporating a variety of gathering spaces and vegetation (planting, street trees, and green stormwater facilities) will be explored.

As noted above both key intersections at 13th/May and 13th/Belmont are failing and require future intersection controls to properly function. These intersections also need to be improved and will require significant investment to meet ADA requirements, improve pedestrian facilities, and provide safe places for people biking. The city's adopted Transportation System Plan and the traffic analysis for this project

indicate traffic signals or roundabouts could be used to control traffic at the intersections of 13th/May and 13th/12th/Belmont. Intersection improvements, depending on whether it is a signal or roundabout, may have significant impacts to adjacent properties and businesses.

Given these impacts a decision for intersection control should be made the URAB. The following highlights key considerations for making a decision:

13th/May Intersection

- Based on feedback from the open house and online survey a roundabout was identified as a preferred alternative by the community and emergency responders, in part due to concerns related to a traffic signal stopping traffic from the north, which could cause trucks to get stuck in icy conditions more frequently than if a roundabout is constructed.
- A roundabout will require property acquisition. Figure 4 of Appendix B includes a geometric layout of a roundabout with potential property impacts. A traffic signal is also anticipated to impact property but to a lesser extent. The size of the roundabout shown in Figure 4 will likely increase to incorporate bike lanes and address topography.
- A roundabout will require a longer path of travel for people walking and biking to navigate through the intersection.
- A roundabout will require significantly more funding to implement compared to a traffic signal (potentially 3X the cost) due to the larger footprint and the cost to acquire property.
- The roundabout layout presented in Appendix B, with two entry lanes for the southbound and westbound approaches to the intersection, would operate at Level of Service B or better in the design target year (2039) and would easily meet ODOT's mobility target.
- Roundabouts reduce the severity of crashes at intersections and have the potential to reduce injury crashes by up to 82 percent (ODOT Crash Reduction Factor List, 2020, CMF ID: 228) and reduce vehicle speeds compared to traffic signals.
- Installing roundabouts in place of traffic signal has been found to reduce vehicle emissions and the delay for vehicles travelling through this intersection would be less for a roundabout than a traffic signal.
- Depending on preferences roundabouts could be perceived to contribute to placemaking goals.

13th/12th/Belmont Intersection

- A double roundabout would require property acquisition from up to nine adjacent properties, including up to four full parcels, and would eliminate at least two existing buildings. A roundabout will also change the street design on 13th Street between A St and Belmont from the typical street cross section to add a travel lane for vehicles entering the roundabout (see Figure 5, Appendix B). This additional travel lane could reduce on-street parking, impact business access, and change the streetscape environment along this block.
- Integrating the preferred design for bike lanes, a two-way cycle track along 12th Street from Concept 3, may expand the footprint of a double roundabout slightly towards the east. Depending on the final configuration a double roundabout may also require a longer path of travel for people walking and biking to navigate through the intersections.
- A double roundabout will require significantly more funding to implement compared to a traffic signal (potentially 5X the cost) due to the larger footprint and the cost to acquire property.

- The double, multi-lane roundabout layout presented in Appendix B would operate at Level of Service B or better in the design target year (2039) and would easily meet ODOT's mobility target.
- Roundabouts reduce the severity of crashes at intersections and have the potential to reduce injury crashes by up to 82 percent and reduce vehicle speeds compared to traffic signals.
- Installing roundabouts in place of traffic signal has been found to reduce vehicle emissions and the delay for vehicles travelling through this intersection would be less for a roundabout than a traffic signal.
- A roundabout would significantly change the south entry to the Heights and with that there would be different opportunities for incorporating placemaking.

Next Steps – Phase 3

Once the URA confirms the concept to be used to develop the preferred design the project team will prepare the Phase 3 contract for approval. During Phase 3 the preferred concept will be developed along with implementation recommendations and cost considerations for future implementation.

A draft of the preferred design will be developed and presented to the URAC and URAB for review and feedback. Phase 3 does not include focused community outreach and updates to the community will occur through URAC and URAB meetings, updates to the project website, and mailing list updates as the draft and final plan are developed.

Phase 3 is anticipated to last approximately four months with the goal of finalizing the plan in the fall of 2022.

Attached (Appendices not attached to this PDF)

Appendix A – Evaluation Summary of Design Alternatives (Feb 25, 2022)

Appendix B – Roundabout Peer Review Technical Memorandum (Draft, May 31, 2022)

Appendix C – Heights Streetscape Plan Open House Summary (April 2022)

Appendix D – Heights Streetscape Plan Online Survey Summary (May 2022)