

**City of Charlottesville  
Department of Neighborhood Development Services  
Staff Report**

**CITY COUNCIL AND PLANNING COMMISSION  
JOINT PUBLIC HEARING**

**DATE OF HEARING: AUGUST 8, 2017  
RE: BELMONT BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT**

**Project Manager: Jeanette Janiczek  
Date of Staff Report: June 27, 2017**

<p><b>Action Required:</b> Pursuant to Virginia Code section 15.2-2232, the Planning Commission will review the proposed Belmont Bridge Replacement concept, located on 9<sup>th</sup> Street between Market Street and Garrett Street / Levy Street in the City of Charlottesville, to determine if the general character and extent of the proposed improvements are substantially in accord with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan or part thereof.</p>
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**Background:**

The City of Charlottesville has been engaged in a process to replace the bridge referred to as "Belmont Bridge" which crosses CSX rail lines and Water Street maintaining an important community connection. The prior bridge design process reached the 35% plan stage before strong community participation implored exploration of other alternative designs/concepts. After two years of discussion, City Council voted on July 21, 2014 to focus on the "enhanced bridge" concept including a specified list of design performance guidelines. The design direction is for a shortened bridge (reduced from more than 440 feet to approximately 205 feet) to be designed with the following criteria in mind:

- Belmont Bridge is a gateway into the Charlottesville and its downtown
- Belmont Bridge should be an enjoyable pedestrian experience
- Views of the mountains and railroad tracks are appreciated and should be preserved
- The design should be innovative and entertaining
- The design should maintain a 25 MPH speed limit with one lane in each direction
- The design should include space for vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians. The pedestrian zone should be separated from vehicles and bicycles
- The design should have a shorter span
- Bike and pedestrian lanes should be 10.0 feet wide, traffic lanes should be 11.0 feet wide

- The design should incorporate improvements to the north and south intersections along 9th Street
- Landscaping should be enhanced on the approaches
- Accent lighting should be considered to showcase the bridge

A Request for Proposals was advertised that included these design parameters as well as an extensive public participation process and in January 2017, the City of Charlottesville contracted with Kimley-Horn, an engineering consulting firm to develop plans for the replacement of Belmont Bridge.

In addition to the design parameters established by City Council, Kimley-Horn also researched a variety of initiatives within the City of Charlottesville that are focused on enhancing the vibrancy and quality of life, including the City of Charlottesville Comprehensive Plan, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, Streets That Work, and the Strategic Investment Area. Work product was analyzed from the previous design effort and additional studies were performed to update information (such as survey and traffic counts). With a firm grasp of background information, the project team began the public involvement process to ensure agreement with the project's purpose and need before beginning development of a conceptual design.

### **Community Engagement:**

To help guide the project, the City Council appointed a project Steering Committee. The process also involves coordination with the following City Council appointed stakeholder groups:

- ADA Advisory Committee
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- Board of Architectural Review
- Downtown Business Association/Chamber of Commerce
- PLACE Design Task Force
- Planning Commission
- Tree Commission

The City of Charlottesville has provided multiple opportunities for the public to provide input into the plan development process. A project website, two on-line surveys, three community events (Mobility Summit, Design Charrette, and Open House) as well as 18 stakeholder meetings occurred between February 21 and June 14<sup>th</sup>. The stakeholder meetings were open to the public. Information presented and gathered at the meetings can be found at [www.BelmontBridge.org](http://www.BelmontBridge.org), however a summary of each event is below:

### **Project Website:**

The Project website ([www.belmontbridge.org](http://www.belmontbridge.org)) contains information that has been presented to date as part of the process. Information presented includes:

- Project background
- Project schedule

- A “resource” page that provides access to the traffic analysis, project fact sheet and FAQ, information presented and gathered from community events, and information presented at the stakeholder meetings
- A contact form
- A “get involved” page

As of June 22, 2017, the project website has logged approximately 3,000 unique users, and over 8,000 page views.

### **Community Event 1: Mobility Summit, March 11, 2017**

A Mobility Summit was held on Saturday, March 11, 2017 at the Sprint Pavilion from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. The event drew nearly 100 people to discuss issues and needs related to the replacement of the Belmont Bridge which resulted in 1,679 data points. Participants provided input on the future design through a combination of 6 interactive stations, guided walking tours and biking tour of the study area, and, had an opportunity to have one-on-one conversation with the consultant team and City staff. At sign-in, participants received an information handout, a rack card with more detail on upcoming events, and a passport to guide them through various stations.

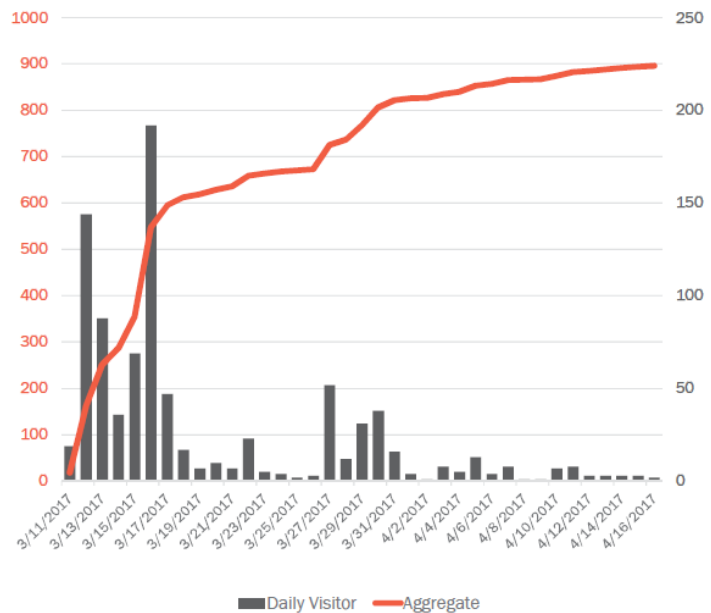
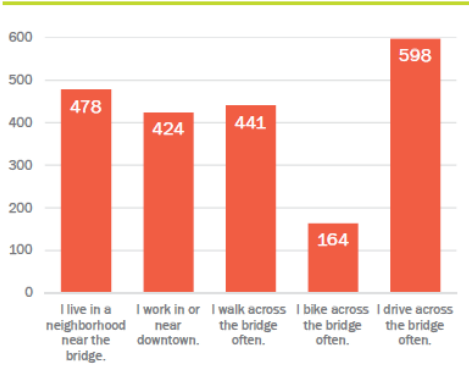
A summary document provided on [www.BelmontBridge.org](http://www.BelmontBridge.org) briefly summarizes the community input data collected at the event and offers stakeholders and community members the opportunity to see the thoughts of others in the community. In addition to data collected in person, the event served as the launch for the MetroQuest survey.

### **On-Line MetroQuest Survey:**

The MetroQuest survey was active from March 11, 2017 through April 16, 2017. The goal of the survey was to educate the public about the project and collect feedback on project priorities, tradeoffs to help direct design, and design preferences related to function and aesthetics. Following completion of the survey, an optional question requested how the participant uses the existing bridge to further illustrate the needs of the project. The survey was design to mirror the activities of the in-person activities at the Mobility Summit, and included:

- Priority Ranking
- Tradeoffs, which included categories such as Design, Role, Views, Mobility, and Parking
- Visual Preference Survey, which included categories such as Landscaping, Lighting, Public Spaces, and streets

The results for each category can be found at [www.BelmontBridge.org](http://www.BelmontBridge.org), on the resources page. Additionally, the 771 written comments can be found on the project website as well. The amount of participation captured in the MetroQuest survey is summarized in the below graphic:



## **Community Event 2: Design Charrette, April 17-19, 2017**

Project team members held a collaborative charrette on April 17-19, 2017 at CitySpace in downtown Charlottesville. During the event, conceptual design concepts were developed based on the original City Council design directive that was supported by feedback collected at the Mobility Summit and online survey. The design process throughout the charrette was iterative, with the working studio open to the public throughout the day to encourage engagement with the project team. Pin-up sessions each evening occurred to show the day’s progress, and allowed project staff to answer questions, address concerns, and document new ideas.

Additionally, five work sessions were organized around key topics central to the bridge design – Traffic, Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities, Parking, Community Space and Bridge Design. The outcomes of the topic discussions informed the design process and the selection of preferred alternatives throughout the remainder of the charrette process.

Overall key takeaways from the design charrette include:

- Overall corridor approach
  - New block structure
  - Closing Old Avon St. at Garrett St.
  - Creating new east/west public street at the railroad property line
- Develop a two lane, 62’ bridge section with a protected bike lane and wide sidewalks
- Additional vertical circulation (pedestrian) north of the railroad tracks on the east side
- Modern / Funky design features
- Enhanced landscape elements on approaches
- Accent lighting for pedestrian safety (not theatrical)

- Interim / shared parking solutions (in cooperation with property owners)
- Minimize maintenance concerns regarding raised, planted medians

Following the design charrette, concepts were refined and alternatives were developed for various design elements. The concepts and alternatives were presented to the Steering Committee, Technical Committee, and Small Stakeholder groups on May 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. A full summary of the event, including a summary of the work sessions is posted on [www.belmontbridge.org](http://www.belmontbridge.org).

### **Community Event 3: Open House, June 1, 2017**

Project team members held an open house on June 1, 2017. The open house provided an opportunity for the public to provide feedback on the latest design concepts for the Belmont Bridge. The design concepts were developed from more than 30,000 outreach data points and 1,000 written comments provided through previous public meetings, the project website, and MetroQuest survey. At the open house, a presentation was made that provided a brief overview and the public was requested to visit stations set up with the following focus areas to provide feedback and ask questions:

- Bridge Architecture, which included architectural elements such as fencing, lighting, walls, vertical circulation, and overall 3-dimensional views of the concept. This station also included an interactive 3-D architectural model, giving the opportunity to see alternate views of the design.
- Corridor, which included the recommended corridor concept, and, a potential “future build” concept. Additionally, cross sections of the road and plan views of the intersections were a focus.
- Traffic, which included graphics depicting lane configuration, queue length, delay, level of service, and projected future traffic conditions in a video format.

Additionally, voting sheets were provided to attendees to help provide the design team with direction on three outstanding items, which included:

- Graves St. Access. Options for this item included:
  - Alternative 1: Restrict left turns from southbound 9<sup>th</sup> St. to Graves St; allow right turns onto and from Graves St. (but prohibit left turns from Graves St. to southbound 9<sup>th</sup> St.)
  - Alternative 1A: Allow left turns from southbound 9<sup>th</sup> St. to Graves St.; allow right turns onto and from Graves St. (but prohibit left turns from Graves St. to southbound 9<sup>th</sup> St.)
- Pedestrian Circulation. Options for this item included:
  - Construct a pedestrian underpass
  - Maintain existing at-grade crossing near Graves St.
  - Construct a pedestrian underpass AND maintain existing at-grade crossing near Graves St.
- Vertical Circulation. Options for this item included:

- Concept 1: Construct stairs on east and west side with a mezzanine connection between 9<sup>th</sup> St. and Water St.
- Concept 2: Construct stairs on east and west side (no mezzanine connection)
- Concept 3: Construct stairs on east side with mezzanine connection between 9<sup>th</sup> St. and Water St. No west side stairs to Water St.

Feedback was received in the form of verbal public comment in a group setting at the end of the meeting, written comments, and feedback provided to consultant and City staff at the stations. The comments received, as well as voting sheets are posted under the resources tab at [www.belmontbridge.org](http://www.belmontbridge.org). The results of the voting sheets were presented to the Steering Committee on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

### **Focused Survey**

Following the open house, an on-line survey was available through the project website. The on-line survey was intended to capture opinion and feedback from the public and others that may have not been able to attend the Open House. The survey focused on the three outstanding issues presented at the open house, including:

- Graves St. Access.
- Pedestrian Circulation.
- Vertical Circulation

244 people participated in the focused on-line survey, and the results were presented to the Steering Committee on June 14<sup>th</sup> to help inform committee members of the public input/comment.

### **Stakeholder Meetings**

Throughout the process, individual stakeholder groups were met with to receive input and feedback during the design process. Stakeholder meetings were open to the public. The following groups were met with on the following dates:

- Steering Committee: February 21, 2017, March 29, 2017, May 15, 2017, and June 14, 2017
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee: February 23, 2017, and May 16, 2017
- PLACE Design Task Force: February 22, 2017, and May 16, 2017
- Downtown Business Association / Chamber of Commerce: February 22, 2017, and May 16, 2017
- Board of Architectural Review: February 22, 2017 and May 16, 2017
- Tree Commission: February 23, 2017, and May 16, 2017

The ADA Advisory Committee and Planning Commission were invited to attend any of the five stakeholder group meetings. These stakeholder groups provided feedback in their specialized areas of interest and confirmed that design was progressing in keeping with the project's purpose and need.

Meeting agendas and summaries can be found under the resources tab on the project website [www.BelmontBridge.org](http://www.BelmontBridge.org). Additionally, a Technical committee was formed which is comprised of representatives from appropriate City departments. The technical committee held meetings on the project on February 22, 2017, March 30, 2017, May 16, 2017, and June 13, 2017. The technical committee meetings confirmed input received from the public and stakeholder groups could be technically attained and then maintained.

### **Standard of Review**

Pursuant to Virginia Code section 15.2-2232, the Planning Commission will review the proposed Belmont Bridge Replacement concept, located on 9th Street between Market street And Garrett Street / Levy Street in the City of Charlottesville, to determine if the general character and extent of the proposed improvements are substantially in accord with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan or part thereof. The Planning Commission shall communicate its findings to the Charlottesville City Council, with written reasons for its approval or disapproval.

The conceptual design concepts of the proposed improvements may be examined at the Department of Neighborhood Development Services, 610 East Market Street, Charlottesville, Virginia, Monday – Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. The conceptual design may also be found within the presentation materials provided for the August 8<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission meeting as well as on [www.BelmontBridge.org](http://www.BelmontBridge.org).

### **Comprehensive Plan Alignment:**

The following denotes alignment with the City of Charlottesville adopted 2013 Comprehensive Plan.

Transportation:

- Goal 1: Increase safe, convenient and pleasant accommodations for pedestrians, bicyclists, and people with disabilities that improve the quality of life within the community and within individual Neighborhoods.
  - This project provides approximately 40 total feet in width dedicated to bicyclists and pedestrians, an increase in width from the existing condition. That width includes 2, 10' wide sidewalks on each side of the roadway, and two, 10' wide protected bike lanes in each direction. In addition, a pedestrian tunnel is proposed underneath 9<sup>th</sup> Street, south of the railroad tracks as well as new vertical circulation on both the east and west side of the bridge down to Water Street. A connection is also proposed on the western side of the bridge that would connect 9<sup>th</sup> Street to Water Street during paid Pavilion events.
- Goal 1.2: Provide convenient and safe pedestrian connections within ¼ miles of all commercial and employment centers, transit routes, schools and parks
  - This project provides wide sidewalks and vertical circulation to enable multi-modal connections to transit routes and employment centers
- Goal 1.3 Provide design features on roadways, such as street trees within buffers, street furniture and sidewalk widths that improve the safety and comfort level of all users and contribute to the City's environmental goals.

- This project includes street tree plantings within buffers where appropriate as well as 10' wide sidewalks.
- Goal 1.4: Explore and implement safe, convenient and visually attractive crossing alternatives to enable pedestrians and bicycles to cross major thoroughfares
  - The project provides a pedestrian passageway under 9<sup>th</sup> St. south of the railroad tracks, and provides for a mezzanine connection from the east and west side of 9<sup>th</sup> St. north of the railroad tracks
- Goal 1.5: Continue to include bicycle and pedestrian accommodations in conjunction with the planning and design of all major road projects, all new development and road paving projects
  - The project provides two, 10' buffered bike lanes continuous in each direction from Market St. to Garrett St as well as the aforementioned new pedestrian connections.
- Goal 1.6 Consistently apply ADA standards to facility design and ensure that accessible curb ramps exist at all pedestrian crossings where conditions allow.
  - Curb ramps will be provided at all crossings.

#### Urban Design:

- Goal 1: Continue Charlottesville's history of architectural and design excellence by maintaining existing traditional design features while encouraging creative, context-sensitive, contemporary planning and design.
  - Per the public comment received, design focus is on seeking to blend and connect the new bridge into the surrounding neighborhoods with several modern and/or funky design features – such as the treatment of abutment walls and pier system – to add distinct contemporary details.
- Goal 1.1: Emphasize the importance of public buildings, public spaces, and other public improvements as opportunities to promote a sense of place and a welcoming environment for residents and visitors.
  - The project is proposing to close Old Avon Street at the Garrett/Levy/9th intersection to create a pedestrian zone. Both the pedestrian passageway and mezzanine will be designed to encourage pedestrian use through good design concepts. Enhanced landscaping is also proposed.
- Goal 1.2: Promote Charlottesville's diverse architectural and cultural heritage by recognizing, respecting, and enhancing the distinct characteristics of each neighborhood.
  - This project will be coordinated with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources as well as receive a Certificate of Appropriateness from the City's Board of Architectural Review.
- Goal 1.3: Facilitate development of nodes of density and vitality in the City's Mixed Use Corridors, and encourage vitality, pedestrian movement, and visual interest throughout the city
  - The project provides for upgraded pedestrian and bicycle facilities, as well as architectural elements that will enhance the neighborhood and corridor
- Goal 1.4: Develop pedestrian-friendly environments in Charlottesville that connect neighborhoods to community facilities, to commercial areas and employment centers, and that connect neighborhoods to each other, to promote a healthier community.



- The project provides for an upgraded multi-modal connection from the pedestrian mall in downtown Charlottesville to the Belmont and Martha Jefferson neighborhoods.
- 1.5: Encourage community vitality and interaction through the incorporation of art in public spaces, neighborhoods, signage, and gateways.
  - Opportunities for art are being proposed along the bridge's abutment walls south of the railroad tracks – as well as preservation of a programmed space for graffiti or commissioned art.
- 1.6: Encourage the incorporation of meaningful public spaces, defined as being available to the general public, into urban design efforts.
  - Retention of the graffiti wall for public, free expression and creation of a new pedestrian space along Avon Street are intended to meet this goal.
- 1.7: Promote design excellence for public projects and installations at all scales.
  - The request for proposals created a project development process centered around design. The extensive public participation process is ensuring design excellence - is sought in meeting the community's present and future needs.

### **Suggested Motions for Amendment of Comprehensive Plan Text and Map**

1. I move that the proposed Belmont Bridge Replacement concept's, located on 9th Street between Market Street and Garrett Street / Levy Street in the City of Charlottesville, general character and extent of the proposed improvements are substantially in accord with the City's adopted 2013 Comprehensive Plan or part thereof.

2. I move to deny that the proposed Belmont Bridge Replacement concept's, located on 9th Street between Market Street and Garrett Street / Levy Street in the City of Charlottesville, general character and extent of the proposed improvements are substantially in accord with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan or part thereof for the following reasons:

**Attachments**  
Resolution

**RESOLUTION  
OF THE CHARLOTTESVILLE PLANNING COMMISSION  
RECOMMENDING THE BELMONT BRIDGE REPLACEMENT  
PROJECT IS IN CONFORMANCE WITH THE CITY'S  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Whereas, this Planning Commission and City Council jointly held a public hearing on the proposed Belmont Bridge Replacement concept, after notice given as required by law, NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED that this Planning Commission confirms that the general character and extent of the proposed improvements are substantially in accord with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan or part thereof.

Adopted by the Charlottesville Planning Commission, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of August 2017.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary, Charlottesville Planning Commission