

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

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

**DATE OF HEARING: AUGUST 12, 2017  
RE: BELMONT BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT**

**Project Manager: Jeanette Janiczek**

**Date of Staff Report: September 12, 2017**

**Action Required:** 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, approximate location and extent of the proposed improvements are substantially in accord with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan or part thereof.

**UPDATE:**

At the August 8<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission Meeting, there were three Open Design issues:

- Vertical Circulation North of Water Street
- Graves Street Vehicular Circulation
- At-Grade Crossing at Graves Street

Since the meeting, the project team has further explored these issues and has also met with the Board of Architectural Review, Steering Committee, Tree Commission and Bicyclist/Pedestrian Advisory Committee. The following is the updated status on these 3 issues.

**Vertical Circulation North of Water Street**

Both sides of the bridge will be connected by stairs to a mezzanine and then to Water Street. The Board of Architectural Review suggested the eastern staircase be oriented to the east (instead of west, to the Transit Center). Steering Committee, Tree Commission and Bicyclist/Pedestrian Advisory Committee all supported this concept.

A ramp was under consideration from the bridge to the mezzanine on the east side of the bridge which could be constructed ADA-compliant. The connection from the mezzanine to either the Downtown Mall or Water Street could not be meet ADA standards due to space constraints and the amount of height needing to be overcome. The ramp was eliminated from consideration by the Steering Committee due to cost of design tradeoffs needed for construction.

## **Graves Street Vehicular Circulation**

Existing condition allows full movement turns entering and exiting Graves at 9th Street. The issue was to whether to allow southbound left turns onto 9th which creates a safety concern and congestion impacting traffic on 9th Street. If left turns out of Graves Street onto 9<sup>th</sup> Street were not allowed, how could this movement be efficiently accommodated in another circulation pattern?

Traffic counts were taken in February 2017 during the AM and PM peak hours which showed minimal lefts out of Graves onto 9<sup>th</sup> (under a dozen) – particularly compared to the number of rights out of Graves (over 100). A turning movement count was conducted on July 20, 2017 from 7am to 6pm to ensure turning movement patterns remained consistent. There was a slight uptick from noon to 1pm of 15 vehicles turning left, but the remaining hours remained consistent with the original traffic counts.

An existing access easement for the public was confirmed on the 110 Avon Street (Innova property) that allows access from Graves Street to Avon Street, East South Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Street SE and Levy Avenue back to 9<sup>th</sup> Street. The project will be adjusting the existing street network and neighboring parcels to ensure two way traffic can be maintained as well as truck deliveries/circulation. While there are many turns on this route, the distance traveled is approximately 2,000 feet or 0.4 miles from Graves to Levy/9<sup>th</sup> signalized intersection.

A pilot project is also under consideration by the City, separate from the bridge replacement project, to “flip” the direction of a single block of Monticello Rd, to allow vehicles to turn onto Monticello Road and then onto Levy Avenue to access the signal at Levy/9<sup>th</sup> Street. This is moving forward through upper City management and then will proceed with communication/coordination between the neighbors and neighborhood before being instituted as a demonstration project.

Other measures – such as time restrictions for left turns from Graves onto 9<sup>th</sup> – have been considered and eliminated due to enforcement concerns.

## **At-Grade Crossing at Graves Street**

### **Issues Summary – At-Grade Crossing at Graves Street**

- Crossing is a desirable, convenient location for Belmont residents to cross 9th Street
- Conflicting and potentially unsafe conditions at crossing
- 10 Crashes at Graves and 9th Street (2012 – 2016)
- 2 crashes involved pedestrians in/near existing crosswalk
- Existing 6% grade along 9th Street – high travel speeds
- Existing crosswalk is 190' north of signalized crosswalk at 9th/Avon/Graves/Levy Intersection
- Crosswalk is not in accordance with Streets That Work or VDOT guidance

### Current Concept

- Pedestrian passageway beneath 9th Street
- Provides east-west accessible route under 9th Street for bikes and pedestrians
- 10'+/- tall and 21' wide – emphasis on good lighting
- Opportunity to promote new, safer mobility patterns
- Will help activate 6th Street, South Street and Old Avon Block with planned redevelopment
- Maintain existing pedestrian crosswalk north of Graves Street on 9th
- Stairs on west side and/or sidewalk in Old Avon R/W provide access to 9th Street
- Pedestrian upgrades at intersection at Levy – Old Avon – Garrett for improved mobility

The Steering Committee narrowly endorsed maintaining the existing pedestrian crosswalk north of Graves Street on 9th Street by a vote of 5 to 4. Other boards such as the Planning Commission, Board of Architectural Review, Bike/Pedestrian Advisory Committee and Tree Commission generally feel the convenience of the crossing outweighs safety concerns. We have heard both vocal support for the maintenance of this crossing from the public as well as comments that support its removal. However, staff and our technical consultants cannot recommend nor support maintaining the mid-block crossing.

The previously forwarded Mid-block Pedestrian Crosswalks on 9th Street Technical Memo outlines the following main concerns:

- 1) In the past five years (2012 to 2016) 10 total crashes occurred near candidate location A. Two of the 10 crashes involved pedestrians and resulted in minor/possible injury. Eight of the 10 crashes were property damage only with rear-ends as the predominant crash type.
- 2) While the mid-block at-grade crossing location does provide unrestricted views of the entire length of the crosswalk for vehicles traveling in the northbound and southbound directions, the crosswalk is located on or near a 6% gradient. This 6% gradient will lead to longer stopping/braking distances for vehicles should a pedestrian enter the crosswalk unexpectedly.
- 3) The proposed location of the at-grade crossing is less than 300 feet from another marked and signalized crosswalk across 9th Street at the intersection 9th Street/Avon Street and Garrett Street/Levy Avenue.
- 4) The proposed at-grade crossing location can be facilitated by two other means. The first route is for pedestrians to utilize the existing and proposed signalized crosswalk at the 9th Street/Avon Street and Garrett Street/Levy Avenue intersection, which is located approximately 190 LF south of the candidate crossing location. The second route is for pedestrians using the proposed pedestrian underpass and stairs on the west side of 9th Street. It is noted that pedestrians will have to utilize stairs or a longer route, but the inconvenience is deemed to be secondary to the potential safety concerns presented by the pedestrian crash pattern, the proximity to the marked and signalized pedestrian crossing to the south and conflicts with vehicles exiting from Graves Street onto 9th Street NB.

The City Attorney's office has reviewed whether the City would be exposed from a liability standpoint if the consultant team's recommendation was overturned and the crossing was installed. It was the City Attorney's office opinion that the City would be potentially at risk should an incident occur under that condition.