

November 8, 2017

To: City Council and Staff

From: Charlottesville Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

Regarding: Belmont Bridge – Support for Retaining At-Grade Crosswalk at Graves Street

The BPAC supports the provision of a marked at-grade crosswalk of Avon/9th at Graves St. for the following reasons:

1. The at-grade crosswalk **meets all of the (non-subjective) VDOT technical criteria** (site-lines, ability for a car to stop in a timely manner, etc.) **except for** (1) the distance from signalized intersection (the crosswalk is 190' and the standard is 300') and (2) the engineer's opinion.
 - a. Proximity to the intersection appears to be an operational concern (i.e., traffic operations/ congestion), not a safety concern. Information provided by the City and designers has not explained why the spacing would pose a safety concern for pedestrians.
 - b. The engineer's opinion appears to be based on outdated engineering approaches akin to what was done on U.S. 29 north of Charlottesville (i.e., we don't want to encourage pedestrian crossings because it might be unsafe, so we won't put in any crosswalks). Modern, "streets-that-work"-compliant engineering recognizes that people will cross the street, especially at the most convenient locations, and works to facilitate those crossings as safely as possible within the constraints of budget and feasibility.
 - c. The standard block length in downtown Charlottesville is about 200', with marked crosswalks typically at every intersection. Assuming the Belmont Bridge project is intended to respect the downtown context, a 190' block with crosswalks on each end would be a context-sensitive solution.
2. The city's stated concern about potential liability if a crosswalk is provided is a figment of the outdated engineering thinking described above. Not marking the crosswalk at a location with known pedestrian crossing activity and desire is arguably putting the city at as much or more risk than marking the crosswalk. *Even if unmarked, the location would be a legal unmarked crosswalk under state law* and the obvious place where people will want to walk across based on the most direct path of travel. By *not* enhancing such a crossing using VDOT's crosswalk guidance (such as with high-visibility markings and a rectangular rapid flashing beacon as currently installed), the city could be liable.
3. The 2012 to 2016 crash data the City is using may not be relevant. It may not account for effects of the rectangular rapid flashing beacon that was installed in recent years. The new crossing would require pedestrians to cross fewer (and narrower) lanes of auto traffic than the current crossing, traffic may be calmed and speeds lower compared to current conditions, and visibility of pedestrians waiting to cross could be higher than under the current crossing geometry. Removing the crossing based in part on irrelevant 2012-2016 crash data is not logical.
4. Pedestrians should have more choices, not fewer. For many, the at-grade crosswalk is preferred to the signal at Levy/Garrett because the at-grade crosswalk is "located within close proximity to pedestrian generators and attractors including residential/ restaurant areas in the Belmont Neighborhood and the commercial/restaurant/municipal uses on the Downtown Mall" (from the city's memo), because it is the most direct route that provides ADA accessibility, and because it does not pose the personal security concerns that the tunnel might.

- a. The alternatives to the at-grade crosswalk (i.e., the signalized intersection at Levy and the tunnel) are important facilities but would require some pedestrians to deal with longer distances and vastly increased grades/hills/steepness/stairs. Some pedestrians may choose to use those routes; others will avoid routes that require traversing places that lack “eyes on the street,” particularly at night.
 - b. Levy St. does not have continuous sidewalks and has slopes that people with some disabilities likely could not navigate. Because the proposed tunnel would have stairs, the ADA-accessible detour (i.e., crossing at the traffic signal at Levy and returning to Graves) requires an additional 300+ ft of travel and a second street crossing (Graves) that would be avoided with the at-grade crosswalk. Coupled with the signal delays (see below), this approach does not equitably accommodate people with disabilities.
 - c. Pedestrian delay at the signalized intersection is substantially longer than pedestrian delay at an uncontrolled crosswalk at Graves (especially if a flashing beacon is provided).
5. In addition to the crossing’s primary use as a pedestrian connection, it will serve as an important bicycle connection between downtown and Belmont/Woolen Mills, especially if two-way bicycle travel is permitted in the future on Monticello Road between Graves and Hinton, which is the least hilly and most direct route connecting downtown with Belmont and several other destinations. Southbound bicyclists who are unable to or uncomfortable with merging across traffic would likely choose to stop and use this at-grade crosswalk rather than proceeding to Levy or Hinton and tackling the associated hills.

Signed:

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No dissenting voices have been received at this time.