

Midtown Confirmation Group Meeting

June 4, 2020, 4-5 p.m. Remote meeting on Webex platform.

Attendees: Donna Rosefield, Robin Hammond, Stephen Brechbiel, Ted Kunstling

Staff: Jason Hardin, Sara Ellis, Bynum Walter,

Hardin began with a presentation. He stated that the adoption process has been delayed by COVID, but that the plan now is to move it forward. Staff had waited to see if in-person meetings would be a possibility, but that does not seem likely for the foreseeable near future.

Hardin stated that staff has used the delay to revise the plan document to make it more visual and user friendly. He briefly went through an outline of the document, demonstrating the more graphic-heavy approach.

Hardin discussed next steps, including putting the report and Comprehensive Plan amendments before Council at their June 16 meeting. The request would be for Council to refer the plan to the Planning Commission for their review and recommendation.

He then spoke about the impact of COVID on the plan. He noted that there are many uncertainties, including when the economy will rebound, which is closely correlated with transportation demand. However, he noted that many plan recommendations were not aimed only at vehicular mobility and that they also assist with top plan priorities such as walkability. Recommendations for park space, such as the Waterfront Park, and the Midtown Ring of safe places to walk and bike meet the current moment as well as reflecting the long-term vision of plan participants.

The group then raised and discussed several questions.

Rosefield asked if the area continues to see more office buildings, but if we're seeing growing vacancies with the rise in teleworking will that result in a lot of vacant buildings in Midtown? Concern about building more office space until we understand the impacts of COVID-19. Hardin said that developers do not want to create vacant buildings and that they are likely carefully looking at current conditions before moving ahead with any projects.

Rosefield asked about the status of the Six Forks Corridor Study as it was planned to begin a couple of months ago? Walter said that the project has been awarded to RK&K (engineering firm) and they are planning on some community engagement this summer. [Here is a link](#) to the project page with the full details.

The group discussed whether teleworking will affect transportation and housing demand. Hardin noted that travel stayed flat for nearly a decade after the Great Recession. It's hard to say now how comparable the current situation is.

The group asked when City Council will make decisions and how will this impact the timing of projects, given the loss in revenue to the City.

Hardin said that so far the impact has not been extremely significant, but the question will be how long will this last. It is likely that some projects could be delayed. Walter noted that there will still be a capital budget, that key priorities will continue to be funded.

The comment was made that looks from the schedule that we'll be pretty far along in the year before we see decisions being made for this project. Hardin agreed, saying that it likely would be fall when Council is set to decide. That may provide more time to assess the long-term impacts of COVID.

Walter stated that the city manager presented a draft budget to City Council in May, the public hearing on that draft was Tuesday night (6/2) and budget work sessions will be held on Tuesday afternoons until the Council is comfortable with a budget.

She noted that the budget office had been working since last October, but made many changes expecting a budget shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year which will start July 1 of this year. For example, employee salaries will not increase before January 1.

Hardin closed the meeting by emphasizing the importance of the voices of the Confirmation Group during the review and adoption period, with emphasis on the City Council review period which will have multiple opportunities for public comment.