

LORAIN AVENUE PEDESTRIAN PLAN

Community Meeting #1 Minutes

August 21, 2012

Purpose of the Meeting:

To introduce the community to the TLCI process and the intended scope of the Lorain Avenue Pedestrian Plan through a presentation of the neighborhood analysis, the community survey responses and a discussion of topics intended to inform community perception, needs, desires, and expectations.

Meeting Overview:

Melissa Miller from Bellaire Puritas Development Corporation opened the meeting by welcoming the community and introducing Councilman Martin Sweeney. Councilman Sweeney spoke about the importance of this effort to the community, thanking the community for their outstanding attendance and discussing the relationship he personally has with the neighborhood. Mr. Sweeney spoke to the impact this planning effort will have on the residents he represents and also on his personal life as a resident.

Melissa Miller provided an overview of the planning effort, speaking to the TLCI grant, awarded to BPDC by NOACA, making this possible and the impact this effort can have for the neighborhood. The audience was made aware that this is the first community meeting, the beginning of the planning process and that their input now is crucial in directing the process to meet the community's desires and needs.

Matt Schmidt of City Architecture was introduced and began with an overview of the study area, similar efforts and surrounding communities' initiatives. The presentation discussed the background of the TLCI process, the ways in which coordinated transportation and redevelopment investments affect a community and the idea of highlighting the value and sense of place within a neighborhood. Previous streetscape redevelopment plans for Variety Village to the east and Kamm's Corners to the west were shown to attendees. The Kamm's Corners study relates directly to this effort, as it is based around the West Park Rapid Station as a community asset that can spark re-investment on land surrounding the station and to the west to link with Downtown Kamm's Corners.

During the Arts Festival this summer, City Architecture was present to introduce the community to the planning effort and solicit feedback in the form of surveys. The survey data included information about Lorain Avenue, its appearance and access, amenities, transit options, and use. Information was also collected about the overall neighborhood, people's routines, children's amenities and their access to the schools. The survey provided an overview of the optimism, current shortfalls, and desires of the residents to improve their neighborhood and build off their assets, particularly in the context of surrounding communities' efforts and successes.

City Architecture discussed initial impressions and the intended course of analysis for the study area. A breakdown of the area focused on usage, existing amenities, and potential growth areas. Lorain Avenue was divided primarily into three districts: the *Transit Link* (from the railroad bridge to W 140th Street); the *Destination Retail District* (from W 140th to W 135th Street, including Fairwood Shopping Plaza and Giant Eagle); and the *Neighborhood Commercial District* (from W 135th to W 130th Street including Jefferson Park and St Vincent de Paul). W 140th Street was discussed as a fourth district that focuses on the concentration of school and civic investment, known as the *Education Corridor* by BPDC.

Following the presentation, attendees were asked to participate in one of four interactive break-out group sessions. Each session focused on a specific topic relative to the West Park / Lorain Avenue study areas, and a list of questions was given to neighborhood facilitators to aid in the discussions. The meeting concluded by bringing the attendees back together, at which time each break-out group summarized their conversations and questions / comments were addressed.

Community Discussion – Break-Out Groups:

The following points were made by the individual break-out groups.

Discussion questions were provided to each group, responses from groups in *Italics*.

Group 1: Transportation and Streetscape

- What is the most important asset of Lorain Avenue?
 - *Bus Routes, however scheduling and frequency are inadequate*
 - *Small Businesses*
 - *Proximity of Assets*
 - *Diverse Foodie Awesomeness*
- What do you consider its biggest fault?
 - *RTA scheduling – ridership is up so why not add more trips?*
 - *Lack of parking*
 - *Crosswalk distances*
 - *Condition of the railroad bridge*
 - *Aesthetics and lack of green space*
 - *Curb Cuts – unused and too frequent*
 - *Overall lack of cohesiveness*
 - *Poor / Inconsistent Lighting*
- Are bike lanes important on the City streets? *Yes, but none exist*
- Is biking as a recreational activity important to residents? *Yes, there are a lot of residents that ride out of necessity, but also quite a few that ride for fun and exercise.*
- What improvements do you consider important to enhance the West Park Rapid Station and bus stations?

The group provided a wish list of RTA bus and rapid stop improvements

- *Signage to better let people know what's at each site*
- *Amenities – coffee, newsstand, etc. that will support potential riders*
- *Public Art – similar to University Circle Mural – designed by local artist Hector Vega, sketched out by Cleveland Institute of Art students, painted by community members and CWRU staff = community involvement*
- *Bike Racks – also an opportunity for public art*
- *Better lighting to provide a stronger impression of safety*
- *Safety – even though there is little crime, the environment feels unsafe*
- *Scheduling information at the stops*
- *Bridge improvements would help connect the station with the neighborhood.*
- *A multi-modal neighborhood loop – connect community to rapid station*

The group provided a general wish list of improvements relating to transit and streetscape:

- *Landscaping Enhancements around the stops / station*
- *Community Involvement with Streetscape and Art*
 - *Involve recreation center, kids & local artists*
 - *CDC art programs have been a success – expand programs to Lorain Avenue*

- *Centralized parking lot to support storefront businesses & eliminate street parking to provide bike lanes*
- *Sidewalk maintenance – particularly in winter, plowing / salting is particularly important given the number of people that walk*
- *Ethnic diversity in neighborhood culture – restaurants, etc*
- *Attract local and innovative businesses (ex: ice cream!)*

Group 2: Parks and Green Space

- Do you utilize the neighborhood's parks? *Yes*
- What public places draw the community together now?
 - *Jefferson Park*
 - *Churches*
 - *Shopping Centers (Giant Eagle, Marc's)*
 - *Bars*
- How can these places be better?
 - *Cleaner*
 - *Safer*
 - *Greener*
 - *There is too much concrete*
 - *Existing landscaping needs to be improved and needs to be better maintained by businesses*
 - *Add streetscaping elements (ex: brick pavers like Gordon Square)*
- What do you consider the neighborhood center? *There isn't one, but there should be to help provide the neighborhood with a particular identity and character.*
- If a neighborhood-wide connector path were to be considered, what would be important to connect?
 - *Jefferson Park*
 - *Schools*
 - *Shopping Centers*
 - *Rapid Stations*
 - *Adjacent neighborhoods & attractions*
- What recreational and green space amenities are missing that would benefit residents (children / teens / adults / seniors)?
 - *Losing pool with John Marshall renovations – would like to see a new one*
 - *Indoor recreation facilities that are accessible year round*
 - *Amenities for an aging population*
 - *More community gardens*
 - *Landscaping & maintenance of vacant lots*
 - *Benches on the street*
 - *Dog Park – a mixed reaction, but city owners would benefit greatly*

Group 3: Development and Business Retention

- What do you consider the main business district? *Why? Fairwood Plaza, because of the concentration of businesses and low vacancy. It's a place that the whole community uses.*
- What type of identity should Lorain Avenue business districts portray for West Park?
 - *Safety as the top priority to address existing concerns and draw new residents / businesses.*
 - *More & better businesses to attract foot traffic and upscale businesses*

- *Mix of businesses to attract different people and visit more than one place at a time – discourage one single competitive market (ex: all gas stations) and encourage variety, limit replication of what is already available.*
- Do you shop in the neighborhood? What is missing?
 - *Too many used car lots*
 - *Maybe chain restaurants (not fast food) TGI Friday's, etc or more upscale dining options*
 - *Starbucks or coffee shops – places for everyday items and where people can gather*
 - *Hardware store*
 - *Medical Services – clinics, private practice physicians*
- Do you consider there to be a parking problem along Lorain Avenue? *Parking is an issue and would be for any new businesses. Some of the businesses east of 135th have lots behind (ex. Der Braumiester) but many are limited in terms of what they can provide for customers, or do not provide any customer parking.*
- *Additional Comments from the group:*
 - *Signage is generally bad (neon, old, deteriorated)*
 - *Shutters and bars on windows hurt the community and the character of the commercial district*
 - *Weeds, panhandlers, lack of property maintenance, and graffiti are problematic*
 - *A standard should be established for consistent property maintenance, signage (nice blade or monument signs), landscaping, screening etc.*

Group 4: Quality of Life

- Do you see yourself staying in the neighborhood in the future? *Yes, all of the attendees in the group have been long-term residents of West Park – many for 40 years or more.*
- If so, what influences your decision?
 - *It's a good place to be and don't want to move.*
 - *Good access, highways are close*
 - *Can walk to church*
 - *Have a nice park*
 - *It's changing, but it is accessible to everything*
- If not, why and what might change your mind to stay?

None of the members plan to leave the neighborhood, but did offer thoughts regarding the general environment and quality of life improvements that would affect their decisions should that be the case:

 - *More stores / options*
 - *Better signage (don't like a lot of the existing signage)*
 - *Standards / zoning regulations for businesses and enforcement*
 - *Car lots need to be maintained – screening from the sidewalk, landscaping and their relationship to Jefferson Park should be assessed*
 - *Updating and maintaining deteriorating businesses and buildings*
 - *There were discussions of Wendy's being rebuilt – is this still a possibility?*
 - *Marc's is the smallest and least attractive of their stores in the area*
 - *There is a difference between what retailers are willing to invest in this market – there is a noticeable difference between how chain stores will invest in urban, city neighborhoods versus the suburbs*
 - *More trash cans are needed – the existing ones are constantly overflowing*
 - *Consideration should be given to creating community gardens on vacant lots*

- Do you consider the neighborhood to be safe? Lorain Avenue? *Overall, the neighborhood is safe based on crime statistics, but there is a perception that it is not by some.*
- What would make you feel safer?
 - *Residents would like to see more police patrol around Jefferson Park in the summer when there are a lot of kids out playing*
 - *Lights on the playgrounds stay on later than the park is supposed to be open – it is believed that this encourages people to be there too late and hang around*
 - *More lighting in strategic places would be helpful – one example would be in Jefferson Park where the large, open field is located.*
 - *Improved safety with the schools as kids come and go through the neighborhood in the mornings and afternoons*
 - *Jay walking / people walking in the street – students to and from schools as well as along Lorain Avenue for both safety and consideration for other drivers / walkers*
 - *The Normandy corner of Lorain and East 140th could be improved / cleaned up*
 - *The group felt that many places feel unsafe because of:*
 - *Pan handlers*
 - *Unsafe activity / environment (ex: apartments on 143rd)*
- What do you think would play a role in strengthening the neighborhood's identity?
 - *The neighborhood should stay true to its roots and family oriented, but many are nervous it won't as it continues to evolve.*
 - *There is a distinction between the roles of long term residents versus newer and younger residents (particularly home owners) in terms of their dedication to preserving the neighborhood's strengths and civic involvement.*
 - *Neighborhoods continually evolve, and residents have seen the high and low points in the history of West Park. Recently, there are both good and bad things that are taking place, and it is the hope that through this process the positives are strengthened.*

Following the break-out sessions, the attendees reconvened to share their ideas and thoughts. The audience was reminded that this is the first of stage of a larger planning process, and their continued input and support will be greatly appreciated. The following comments and questions were discussed as the meeting concluded:

- The recommendations that will result from this planning process will be incremental in nature. It is understood that there is a financial reality to implementation, and a phased approach will be determined so that improvements can begin as soon as possible.
- It was hoped that through partnerships with the City, RTA, etc. there may be opportunities to begin addressing such problems as the lights at Jefferson Park or the underside of the railroad overpass before this process concludes.
- Residents asked about the potential to begin a grass roots effort to begin clean up and painting at the railroad bridge. There is the possibility that some of this may be possible. The railroad bridges are technically owned by the rail companies and any improvements to them is more challenging.
- The ownership of the embankments adjacent to the railroad bridge will be investigated. It would be nice to be able to improve them and eliminate some of the overgrowth that exists today.
- It would be nice to see a series of zoning and business district standards put into place along Lorain Avenue. Previously, the area was not a part of a formal neighborhood-

based design review district. However, with changes made at the City, it is now included within a greater area-wide design review district which will help to improve standards.

- Bellaire Puritas Development Corporation will continue to post information regarding the development of the plan online, and will ensure that residents that attended this meeting be informed of upcoming meetings. It was asked that the attendees continue to help involve the rest of the community in the process by talking to neighbors, letting others know when upcoming meetings are announced, etc.