

100 Block Construction Project  
Public Meeting Notes  
May 28, 2008 – 5:30 pm  
Emporium Building

This was the fourth and final public meeting about the 100 Block Construction Project before the project goes to bid. The purpose of the meeting was to inform 100 Block stakeholders about phasing and estimated timelines of the upcoming construction project, answer questions, and discuss remaining issues and concerns.

Bill Lyons (City Policy & Communications) began by giving an overview of the project. This is not just a streetscape project, though the streetscape will be much improved. The structural supports that hold up the sidewalk need to be rebuilt, utilities need to be replaced. It's a big, difficult project.

Steve King (City Public Works) announced that the east-side Jackson Avenue ramp will reopen within the next few weeks. King discussed the age of the support structures under the sidewalks (built 1919) and the fact that they have been in dire need of repair since an evaluation was done in the 1980's. For the first time, the city has allocated budget dollars for completing the project. Before construction begins, the city will need to obtain easements from property owners because the construction will touch private property. Title searches are going on now, and we'll start contacting property owners in June.

David Harrell (Vaughn & Melton) walked through the project phases and timelines:

- Phase 1: Manhole installation at Summit Hill and Gay. One lane of traffic will be maintained. Estimated time: 1 week.
  - o Comment: Maintain northbound traffic flow instead of southbound traffic to help businesses.
- Phase 2: Utility work at Gay & Jackson. Includes installation of electrical vault and conduit, manhole. Concrete paving will complete phase. Intersection will be shut down for 3 weeks – 1 month.
- Phase 3: 100 block work. New electrical vault, storm sewer, water line, replacing structural supports, rerouting utility connections to properties, laying down new concrete slab. Pedestrian access will always be maintained. Block will be closed to vehicular traffic for 12 month period (estimated). After the block reopens to traffic, there will still be some construction going on... streetscape improvements.
  - o Question: Is it a fait accompli that the block will be closed to vehicles?
  - o Answer: Yes. There was consensus among attendees at the October public meeting that it was preferable to close the block to through traffic to get the project done faster. Trying to maintain through traffic could extend the length of the project by 6 months.
  - o Question: What will working hours be?
  - o Answer: Daylight to dark, 6 days/week with a later start on Saturdays.
- Phase 4: Intersection work at Gay & Vine. Intersection will be closed, though access to the parking lot will be maintained by making Vine temporarily two-ways. Estimated time: 1 month.

- Phase 5: 200 Block streetscape work. Work will be done one side at a time to maintain northbound vehicular traffic. “Short State” will be permanently removed. Treble Clef parking lot will be reconfigured and repaved. Concrete will be laid in the Fire Street alley. Estimated time: 4 months.

#### Questions and Answers:

- Will water and electricity be shut off during construction? *It may be necessary to shut it off for short periods. These will be rare and very temporary and KUB will give warning.*
- When the Emporium and Sterchi were redeveloped, the City water-proofed the buildings. Concern expressed that when the sidewalks are open, buildings will be exposed to water damage. *The contractor will be responsible for preventing water damage. They’ll have an interest in opening and closing the holes within a short period of time.*
- Did City consider making Vine permanently 2-way? *Yes, Vaughn & Melton looked at this, but there are site distance limitations that make this inadvisable. Are the site distance problems worse than other intersections downtown? Vaughn & Melton did not look at other intersections downtown.*
- What is the latest estimated start date? *Depends on how long it takes to contact property owners and acquire easements, but it will probably be late summer.*
- Has the City considered impacts on business, whether businesses will close because of construction? *Yes, City recognizes that this project could be hard on businesses. We hope no businesses will close during this time. There could be any number of other factors at play that may also have impacts on businesses. SmartFix was supposed to be difficult on downtown, but that has not played out.*
- Would maintaining traffic flow, even though the project might be extended, help businesses? *We don’t think so. In no circumstances could parking or loading be maintained... it would just be through-traffic, and we estimate that would extend project for six months. The costs outweigh the benefits.*
- When will parking on the block be available again? *After the estimate 12 month closure, it will be feasible to allow parking, but there will still be limitations from time to time due to work on the streetscape... landscaping, street furniture installations, etc.*
- Where will businesses and residents be able to load and unload from vehicles? *Loading/unloading will take place at the north and south ends of the block. The 200 block in particular will be set up to accommodate loading/unloading.*
- Are there going to be times when access to buildings will be blocked? *No, the contractor will be responsible for maintaining access to buildings at all times. At times, this may take the shape of a pedestrian bridge. These will be pre-made, so they can be installed quickly, as needed.*
- Will pedestrian bridges be wide enough to accommodate a hand-truck, particularly for moving artwork, and First Friday crowds? *A minimum width will be specified in the contract.*
- Will access to the backside of 100 block buildings from Jackson be maintained? *This project should not impact access to the back alleys from Jackson.*

Mike Fowler (Ross Fowler) presented the streetscape design. The basic design is the same as the one presented at public meeting approximately two years ago. Simple system of street trees, wider sidewalks, parallel parking on Gay. The sidewalks are much larger and the Treble Clef lot is expanded, some accessible spaces added. Where Short-State is now becomes a lawn. Gay Street will be concrete. The street lighting is the same as the rest of Gay Street and dark skies compliant. Planters, trash receptacles, benches, bike racks are included.

#### Audience Questions and Answers:

- Will there be ash receptacles for smokers? *These are not included.*
- What kind of tree species? *Bosque Elm. These do not get overly large but are nice shade trees.*
- Downtown regulatory signage, i.e. parking signs, are cluttered. How can clutter not be replicated on 100 Block? *Wayfinding design and planning project is getting started. This will focus on directional signage. East TN Community Design Center is developing an inventory of regulatory signage downtown and developing proposals for how to “declutter.” Whatever we decide to implement downtown-wide will be implemented in the 100 Block.*
- Will new streetscape features be visible on the 100 Block after the 12 month closure? *No, the street will be reopened when major structural/utility work is complete and concrete slab is re-set, but before streetscape improvements are made. Contractor will keep working on streetscape improvements after traffic flow resumes.*
- Should the tree species be varied in case there is a blight that wipes out members of this particular species? *Consultants discussed the selection with the City’s tree board and arrived at this recommendation.*
- How tall will trees grow? *Approximately 35 feet.*
- Won’t trees near benches pose a problem because of bird droppings? *Birds are everywhere and trees offer more benefit than harm.*

Madeleine Weil (City Policy & Communications) presented recommendations of the Downtown Design Review Board and the steps the City is taking in response:

- 1) Allow individual property owners the option of having glass blocks installed, at the owners expense, as part of the sidewalk renovations at locations where the glass block had historically been installed. This will make the lower levels of the buildings more viable. *City is open to discussing this with property owners. There is a finite budget for the project and the glass blocks are costly. But it may be possible for property owners to cover the costs or share costs.*
- 2) Consider removing the center bulb-outs on both sides of the 200 block to allow large delivery trucks and buses a place to pull over out of the travel lanes. *Businesses favor a large commercial loading zone, particularly on the east side of the 200 Block, to accommodate large delivery vehicles. We’re leaning in the direction of doing this, unless there are particular objections.*
- 3) Have centrally-located parking meter pay stations, rather than individual parking meters which can clutter the streetscape. *We are going to install electronic, multi-space pay stations rather than individual parking meters.*

- 4) Have attractive and purposely placed media centers (newspaper vending machines, etc.). *We are starting a pilot project on Market Square to test the viability of consolidating downtown newspaper boxes into newspaper “condos” or “corrals.” If the project is a success, we’ll expand the program to other areas within the CBID, including the 100 Block.*
- 5) Coordinate the signage on the blocks with the comprehensive signage program for the rest of downtown. *We are about to start a project to design and plan a comprehensive “wayfinding” system for downtown. This will include signage for the 100 Block.*

#### Audience Questions and Answers:

- How can the City help with promoting the block during the project? *The City and the CBID can help with special events, signage, marketing. The CBID board has discussed this and is willing to help.*
- Is 12 months a worst- or best-case estimate for the 100 block closure? *Our first estimate was 9 months, but it was bumped up to 12 to account for contingencies associated with the difficulty of the project, any environmental surprises, etc.*
- When is the Volunteer Ministries center moving away from the block? *The VMC’s day room on the 100 Block will close in October. VMC is confident about this timeline. The supportive housing on the second floor will be maintained.*
- How will emergency response (fire department) be accommodated during construction? *Emergency access will always be maintained. Engineering has and will continue to work closely with the fire department.*
- When the sidewalks are removed, basement-level storefronts will be exposed. How will security be addressed? *This issue will be addressed with property owners prior to construction.*
- Will this project open up the Gay Street Underground for public access and use? *No, this is not part of this project. It may be possible to look at providing for public access as a part of the Jackson Ramps project, which comes later.*
- Who will be the point of contact for residents, businesses, during construction? *We will develop a list of points-of-contact and distribute prior to construction. In the meantime, the point of contact is Madeleine Weil, 215-2680, [mweil@cityofknoxville.org](mailto:mweil@cityofknoxville.org). News about the project will be posted on the city’s 100 Block project website: <http://www.cityofknoxville.org/development/100block/default.asp>*
- What will the pedestrian passages that connect to the buildings look like? *The contractor will have to submit drawings/dimensions for City approval. They will have safety railings but will not be boxed in.*
- Can businesses work with KUB to schedule water/electricity outages at night? *Yes, outages can be accomplished during off hours. Any outages will be very temporary.*
- Could the City work with FedEx and UPS to let them know where they can park while making deliveries? *Yes, the City will work with them.*
- During the project, there may be a need to expand the commercial loading zone on the Gay Street viaduct. Is that doable? *Yes, it’s doable, though we’ll have to work within weight limitations.*

- Can you post on the City's website suggestions for how the neighborhood can play a role? Businesses and residents can work together to do some fun things to help promote the block during construction. *Great idea – yes.*