

CITY OF ALAMO HEIGHTS
CITY COUNCIL
October 24, 2023

A Work Session of the City Council of the City of Alamo Heights, Texas was held at the Council Chambers, located at 6116 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas, at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, October 24, 2023. A teleconference was held via Zoom.

Present and composing a quorum were:

Mayor Bobby Rosenthal
Mayor Pro Tem Blake M. Bonner
Councilmember Lawson Jessee
Councilmember Karl P. Baker
Councilmember Lynda Billa Burke
Councilmember John Savage

Also attending were:

City Manager Buddy Kuhn
Assistant City Manager Phil Laney
Assistant to City Manager Jennifer Reyna

Absent:

City Secretary Elsa T. Robles

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Mayor Bobby Rosenthal opened the meeting 8:37 a.m.

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Item # 1 Mayor Rosenthal read the following caption.

Discussion of City Beautification Project ideas and initiatives.

TBG Partners Samantha Whitney and Elaine Kearney presented Open Space Visioning for the City of Alamo Heights. She stated they had taken ideas and initiatives desired by Council from the work session in August and put together a new project scope.

Ms. Whitney described the vision for Ogden Lane and Broadway. She stated there was an opportunity to create a landscape buffer and breathing room around Merit Coffee to reorient Ogden Lane to meet Broadway at more of a 90 degree angle. Council could consider focusing on this area, to beautify with landscaping, add signage/wayfinding and make it a safer intersection for both cars and pedestrians.

To accomplish this, TBG Partners suggests realigning Ogden Lane to create an elongated sidewalk zone in front of Merit Coffee and south of that intersection to reclaim space currently used as parking spots to establish wider sidewalks. Additionally, add a new crosswalk across Broadway as a safer pedestrian link between Merit Coffee and Bird Bakery. Ms. Whitney shared the cost would range from \$500,000 to \$800,000 including contingency.

Ms. Whitney noted the graphic presented did not include the idea of a fully signalized traffic light. If that were to be considered, it would cost an additional ballpark of \$500,000. Other possible upgrades Council discussed during the previous work session were, to add a beacon light to the existing pedestrian crosswalk/school crosswalk and potentially add another beacon or signal to create a mid-block crossing between Cambridge and the shopping center where Merit Coffee is located. Ms. Whitney stated that would be an additional cost of roughly \$110,000 and noted the presentation included TBG Partners' base recommendation.

Mayor Rosenthal stated having one lane coming off of Broadway and one lane going on to Broadway, it would be hard to make a left turn to cross Broadway. Cars going south could stack up if they didn't have their own right turn lane.

Ms. Whitney noted this is how the graphic was drawn, without a turning lane, but it could be studied further if Council desired. She reminded Council TBG Partners are not traffic engineers, but what was being represented was leaning toward the comprehensive plan diagram. Ms. Whitney added WGI Engineering reviewed the diagram as a courtesy for flow and safety, but there is always room to reconsider the design.

Councilmember Karl P. Baker questioned the cost of \$500,000 for a traffic signal. Ms. Whitney explained they had consulted with WGI Engineering who has been supporting the city on the Broadway project. She stated those numbers were coming from a lot of the recent work on the Broadway project and was the dollar amount associated with a traffic signal.

Councilmember Baker commented there are different ways of establishing a traffic signal and spoke about the component of costs that are oftentimes included in new traffic signals and added it was important to break those costs down. He asked about looking at into a pedestrian crossing like the one located at the junior school on New Braunfels, the equivalent of a traffic light that stops traffic when a pedestrian is trying to cross.

Ms. Whitney stated the location Councilmember Baker was speaking of was a mid-block crossing not an intersection. In consulting with WGI, the cost would be about \$75,000 to create that type of pedestrian crossing. In studying this intersection with WGI, their recommendation was tailored to establish the appropriate tool for that location. She added the task from the previous work session was to consolidate Council's ideas, put them into a diagram, and provide a rough estimate of costs.

Ms. Whitney continued to review their vision for the area by Merit Coffee which was to enlarge the area around the store front to give it more breathing room and add a buffer between the porch and the street. She noted the parking spaces up at the "nose" of the building would be removed to allow for a safer sidewalk zone, outdoor seating, and a landscape buffer to separate pedestrians from the street.

Mayor Pro Tem Blake M. Bonner shared it was dangerous and difficult to get to Bike World or other commercial properties in the area while riding a bike or walking and desired better connectivity between these properties. He stated he did not see the crosswalk to the north benefiting the schools, but more so benefiting the businesses who could possibly share in the cost.

Ms. Whitney noted that cost sharing with businesses was a good point and stated this had been discussed during the last work session. The current crosswalk for school kids is closer and the need is to make it safer. She addressed Mayor Pro Tem Bonner's point about bicycle safety and stated she would later review an excerpt from the city's comprehensive plan drawing of the Broadway corridor which identifies opportunities to reclaim some space on Broadway north and south of this location. It would help make a more cohesive, connected segment on this corner.

Ms. Whitney focused on other areas of interest around the city pool. She spoke of consolidating lighting and power, adding landscape and irrigation to the pool parking lot, adding striping for on street parking where appropriate, and doing other improvements like accent paving, signage and wayfinding to really beautify the pool area. She shared other ideas to create a seating area, a walking trail to cross Argo and link to the dog park. Ms. Whitney noted on the map where there was a potential to create a lawn for the first phase and then upgrading to a play area later on. What she reviewed would be another total dollar amount with contingency built in around \$1.4M to \$2M.

Ms. Whitney reminded Council they wanted to make these beautification improvements in phases, this would be phase one to include focusing around the pool parking lot and create links that connect to the dog park. Looking at a pocket play area, with a lawn could cost about \$350K to \$750K. Depending on Council's the priority areas, costs could be higher or lower.

Mayor Rosenthal inquired what the cost would be if only Phase 3 – irrigation would be done. City Manager Buddy Kuhn stated it was estimated to be around \$20K.

Councilmember Lawson Jessee stated he would not phase this, but would lower the target value design for this project and only phase in the playground since it can potentially cost half a million dollars by itself. He proposed a more cosmetic approach at the ballpark which would be more cost effective and agreed, if everything got irrigated, it would make a difference towards landscaping.

Councilmember Lynda Billa-Burke also agreed, but noted the city has to be a good steward and not overwater since residents have been asked to conserve water due to the ongoing drought. She suggested using native Texas plants and trees for landscaping.

Councilmember Baker commented the focus should be on creating spaces that the community will use, as opposed to just places that would look nice.

Councilmember Jessee stated he went through a breakdown of cost for each item. The parking lot/landscaping could cost anywhere around \$100,000. He agreed it sounded expensive, but stated it would be worth it to put shading and landscaping around the parking lot, and possibly add a basketball hoop for kids to play. Councilmember Jessee commented the goal is to create a sense of space and make the parking lots look and feel nicer.

Ms. Whitney stated one thing that can be done, is to simplify the landscape palette and make the landscape a little bit more intensive along Viesca to create more of a streetscape. Using trees to create a canopy, shades cars parked in those lots for long stretches of time. She stated Viesca essentially becomes the spine of the whole master-planned area. It can include a walking trail connecting pedestrians all the way across the parking lot by establishing upgrades that allow people to safely walk across. She referenced potentially remodeling the concession stand as an

added piece to increase the public realm around those areas and improve the sidewalk around the pool.

Council discussed adding a small soccer field to the area and creating trails from neighboring streets/communities to connect to the pool/ballfields. Mayor Pro Tem Bonner agreed this would boost usage of dead space. Council spoke about the food & beverage concession at the pool. Councilmember Jessee stated a new lease agreement was forthcoming in the next couple of months before a tenant proposed a new concession stand design.

Councilmember Billa Burke asked if the city had a designated department to maintain these areas. Mr. Kuhn stated the City's Parks department is responsible for the upkeep of these locations. If needed, additional funds could be allocated during the budget process if Council desired.

Mr. Kuhn asked TBG Partners what the timeline would be for getting a schematic design together if Council decided to move forward. Ms. Whitney stated they could put together a proposal/timeline and move pretty quickly under contract. Each phase would have its own timeline associated with it and would span into next year when documents would be reviewed and design would start. She stated the project would be a little bit more complex at Ogden because of the traffic, they would still want a civil engineer on this project and someone to support electrical and any kind of structural pieces for shade structures, and any kind of site walls or retaining walls.

Mr. Kuhn stated, ideally, if TBG Partners and the City get through the design work to start when the pool closes next fall, the project will align with the \$1.5M in ARPA funds that need to be committed by December 31, 2024. He commented these are big picture things, but if some items are pulled back and depending on Ogden, there is enough money to do both, at some level to do all of this phase, and probably Ogden depending on what Council wants to do. He suggested omitting the playground equipment for now being that it is very expensive and focus on landscape and irrigation.

Councilmember Jessee suggested targeting beautification efforts with minimal cost. Mr. Kuhn commented there are parking issues at the pool and at the ball fields all the time. People don't park there because they don't want to park on the dirt, but if it's marked better, and a tree or two would be add, it may make a difference. Councilmember Jessee suggesting making the parking lot with decomposed granite like the one at the dog park versus using asphalt.

Ms. Elaine Kearney shared an observation. She stated there are a lot of assets in the pool/ball park area that draw people; however, it is very disconnected. She added the de facto landing is the parking lot and everyone's first experience. She suggested prioritizing to connect the community centric assets that are already there, so that more people will feel safer coming on foot. This will enhance the sense of community that is already there. Ms. Kearney stated the parking lot could modestly be upgraded to make it a nicer experience for the people using it.

Mr. Kuhn stated wayfinding signage is essential to this area to connect everything together; the dog park, the bike park, the pool, and ball fields. He added it will help with direction, but also make the area look nicer.

Council discussed creating a timeline for design to implement all phases except the playground equipment. Ms. Whitney stated TBG Partners would tweak a few things as discussed and incorporate all phases into one project by designing it all at once. She noted construction would be done in phases and the playground equipment would be left for a later time depending on the cost. Ms. Whitney advised TBG Partners would put a proposal together with timelines and phases to begin establishing the budget.

Ms. Whitney continued with the presentation focusing on an excerpt from the city's comprehensive plan of the Broadway corridor as drawn by Overland Partners. This was being presented as an additional piece for Council to consider. She stated the purpose of the slide was to discuss bike connectivity/improvements to the areas surrounding Ogden and looking at what it might cost to road diet the North segment to Albany and the South segment to Austin Highway. She discussed the current status of both sides of Broadway noting there is striping out of the curb line which looks like on street parking, although it's not. Ms. Whitney noted those areas could be reclaimed for planting trees and adding beautification. Additionally, reclaiming the extra lane on the west side of Broadway, up to Austin Highway, could also be used to plant trees, add landscape, signage and wayfinding. Beautification could be from Austin Highway up to Albany. She stated they put together some rough numbers to both of those segments for enhanced landscape zones, street trees and wider sidewalks.

Mayor Pro Tem Bonner had concerns with low hanging branches from trees and any long-term impacts on trucks commuting on Broadway. Ms. Whitney answered there are design parameters to keep in mind to keep visibility and intersections clear. TBG Partners would pick the right species of trees that won't get too large and keep away from those intersections to keep visibility high.

Councilmember Baker asked Mr. Kuhn if the City could use money from the bond proceeds to invest in beautification. Mr. Kuhn stated the bond money was specific to the Lower Broadway/Loop 368 project; however, he would inquire with the Bond Counsel for their legal opinion.

Mr. Kuhn stated staff had been studying the mid-block crossing at Broadway and Rosemary. College Blvd and several areas were explored, but staff agreed this was the best location to establish a mid-block crosswalk. He stated Street Maintenance (S&P) funds could be used to fund this project as part of repaving the next portions of Broadway. Staff proposes to use push-activated, solar-powered signals and create a center pedestrian island and curb realignment. The cost would be \$16,500. Additionally, the speed limit would be reduced to 25 mph in this area.

Councilmember Baker suggested using a signal like the one at New Braunfels by the junior school. He noted it would be an ideal solution that doesn't need an island since the traffic stops when a pedestrian presses the button to cross.

Mr. Kuhn stated he didn't think S&P funds could be used to purchase a traffic signal and added staff would check to see if there were existing poles in the area that could be used to hang lights. Mr. Kuhn re-stated this was the best location to put the crossing; however, per city engineer Freese and Nichols, a center island is needed to comply with ADA regulations and provide a place of refuge to protect pedestrians from traffic. He commented staff would continue

working on finding a solution and study the type of traffic system suggested by Councilmember Baker.

In closing, Ms. Whitney thanked Council and stated they had the information they needed to update the plan and move forward. She stated they would bring the updated project scope back to Council in the near future.

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With no further business to consider, Mayor Pro Tem Bonner moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:37 a.m. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Jessee and passed by unanimous vote.

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS 13th DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2023.



Elsa T. Robles, TRMC
City Secretary



Bobby Rosenthal
Mayor

