

**Waterbury Planning Committee
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 29, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

Committee members in attendance: Maggie LaMarche, Steve Balderson, Keith Thornton, Cheung Chan, Dave Caris, Dick Kirsner, Marcia Martin, Jackie Romp, Ann Conover, Andrea Corcoran

Guests in attendance: Bill Green, WNA President

Committee members absent: Mary Jo Healey-Meeks, Bryan Shiffler, C.J. Stephens, Betsy Shelton

City Staff in attendance: Kyle Larson and David Dunn, Neighborhood Planning
Gary Fox, Traffic and Transportation Engineer
Jason Van Essen, Planning and Urban Design

Traffic and Safety

Grand & Polk Pedestrian Crosswalk – Gary Fox addressed the concerns regarding the pedestrian crosswalk at Grand & Polk. Gary announced the Grand Avenue corridor has recently received a traffic safety study that focused on elderly drivers and pedestrians. This was a joint study between the City of Des Moines, Iowa Department of Transportation (IDOT), and Iowa State University’s Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE).

The study indicated that the intersection of Grand & Polk would benefit from an “enhanced crosswalk.” An enhanced crosswalk includes larger pedestrian crossing signs that, when activated by a pedestrian, flash high intensity LED lights around the perimeter of the sign. There are also additional signage warning drivers to yield to pedestrians. This enhanced crosswalk has been implemented at a few key intersections in Des Moines with success, including the intersection at 26th & University near Drake’s campus. Gary indicated that this enhanced crosswalk could possibly be installed this year, but is more likely to be installed next year. Gary said that the second option for improving the Grand & Polk crossing would be the installation of a full traffic light at the intersection.

The last and least feasible option is the pedestrian overpass. Gary mentioned that there are three such structures in Des Moines, all located at elementary schools. These structures are expensive to construct and maintain. There are also questions whether or not they are adequately utilized once installed. Gary’s recommendation would be to install the enhanced crosswalk and then follow up with an assessment of its effectiveness.

Excess I-235 Right-of-Way at 56th & Pleasant – Gary mentioned that the disposition of excess right-of-way by IDOT would likely not occur until after the I-235 project is completed. The construction phase of I-235 is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2007, but final details such as landscaping will likely continue into 2008. Therefore the exact timeframe for this excess right-of-way being disposed of is still unknown.

Gary indicated that IDOT’s process for disposing of any excess right-of-way is to sell it at fair market value, which is determined by a property appraisal. IDOT will first offer the sale of the land to the previous owner. If the previous owner is not interested or no longer available, then the land would be offered to the City of Des Moines before being put up for bid on the open market.

The future of this site is important to Waterbury and the planning committee has discussed it on several occasions. The majority opinion continues to be that the land should be left as open space with the future trail passing through the site and potentially be planted with low maintenance, native grasses and trees.

Vintage Street Signage – Vintage street signage is something that has been mentioned as a possible special project for Waterbury. Gary mentioned that this has not been done in any other neighborhoods in Des Moines. However, the City would likely support this effort with some limitations. Due to standards set for emergency response purposes, the signs would have to remain a reflective green/white color scheme like other street signs and remain in the same locations in the intersections.

There is some potential for the signs to have design enhancements and aesthetically pleasing poles. The City would install the signs, however funding would need to come from private sources. Gary suggested that the neighborhood look into retailers such as TAPCO or other companies that carry a variety of vintage styled signs and poles. This would eliminate the need to have a sample model sign prepared.

Sidewalks – The sidewalks along 56th Street are situated directly adjacent to the street. In order to move this sidewalk back from the street, the sidewalk would have to be completely reconstructed, including the building of retaining walls, removal of several trees, and purchasing additional right-of-way.

The City has painted a white line on the street a few feet away from the curb as a traffic calming method to visually narrow the road in an attempt to slow traffic and buffer the adjacent sidewalk. Reconstruction of the sidewalk would likely fall under the City's New Sidewalk Construction Process, which the City and property owners would share the cost equally.

Another issue was the lack of sidewalk on Ingersoll west of 56th St between 56th and Grand. This would also fall under the City's New Sidewalk Construction Process, which the adjoining property owners would agree to share the cost of the construction with the City. This would likely be a difficult sell since the adjoining properties on the north side of Ingersoll are double frontage lots with the houses fronting onto Waterbury Circle, which already has sidewalk.

Traffic Calming at Ingersoll & Polk – Gary also addressed the idea of traffic calming methods to slow traffic and prevent motorist from running the stop sign at Ingersoll & Polk. Gary mentioned that traffic calming methods such as traffic circles or roundabouts would be difficult to construct at this intersection. Additional right-of-way would need to be acquired and the Waterbury Garden would need to be removed in order for this to be possible. Due to the complexity and cost of the project it is unlikely that the City would support its implementation.

Historic Housing in Waterbury

Jason Van Essen, Senior City Planner spoke in regards to the question of Waterbury's historic potential. Jason began by describing the difference between a National Historic District and a Local Historic District. The National Historic District is a designation that is granted by the State and Federal government that recognizes the historic and cultural significance of an area. There are no restrictions that are tied to being a National Historic District unless federal funds are being used. Nationally listed districts or properties are allowed to make changes to their property as they would if they were not listed.

The Local Historic Listing recognizes a district or properties as historically or culturally significant just as the National Historic Listing, however the Local status takes historic preservation one-step further. When a district or property is listed locally, the property owners are required to submit an application to

the Historic Preservation Commission before they are allowed to make exterior modifications to the property. This includes such changes as window, siding, or roofing replacement or even when a fence is constructed or replaced. This level of recognition allows the historic features that are significant to be protected by requiring a review by the Historic Preservation Commission.

The process of becoming a historic district or property typically begins by hiring consultant with a background in historic preservation to research the area. The historian will research the entire history of the area to determine what historic significance that areas or individual properties may have. Through this research, the historian can determine if the historic significance meets the criteria standards for becoming a historic district or property.

The historian may find and recommend that individual properties are eligible or a series of properties that should be listed as a historic district. In the past, these surveys have cost between \$10,000 to \$20,000. If Waterbury were to pursue a historic survey, it is likely that individual properties or possibly a district would be eligible for National Historic Listing.

Closing Comments

Keith commented that in the minutes from last meeting that trees and reforestation was not listed as the #1 priority for the special project. Kyle and Dave indicated that they felt the tree and reforestation issue was a major issue and therefore it deserved its own strategies and should be dealt with as a separate issue within the Waterbury Plan. Starting April 19th, committee members will also begin to review initial drafts of the plan based on the discussions and input from the committee and the SWOT results from the neighborhood meeting.

Next Meeting:
Thursday, April 19th, 6:00 pm at the
Armory Building, 602 Robert D. Ray Drive