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Brookland Transportation and Streetscape Study Responses to Comments on the Draft Report Dated September 2005 March 2, 2006

The following responses were prepared by the project study team (Volkert and Baker) to address public comments. Many items and issues raised have been addressed following receipt of other comments by revising and updating the report. The purpose of this document is to provide responses to specific comments in an effort to ensure and demonstrate that they have been taken into consideration by the study team. It should be noted that the study website has been updated as well to include meeting minutes and presentations, additional resources, and the draft existing conditions report, including this response document. In addition, in recognizing the importance of public input in this process, the study team has included various questionnaire forms on the website (i.e., for residents/customers, business operators, bus riders, and metrorail riders) to facilitate feedback on the report and encourage other comments regarding key issues in the Brookland community. Instructions for accessing the study website are included at the end of this document.

Public Comment: There is no indication of the specific community involvement in the genesis or evolution of the streetscape concepts put forth in this document. How has the project team built consensus for the concepts contained in this document?

Response - Building community consensus and support for various recommendations are key elements of the study process. There have been numerous activities to develop community consensus including meetings with ANC, community walks, community presentations, Ward 5 Transportation Summit, SAC meetings, and presentations at Brookland CDC. At the upcoming public meetings, there will be additional discussions with community stakeholders to develop further community consensus. The final report will reflect the community's input and summarize the public participation process.

Public Comment: Superficial elements have been considered in great detail while more significant issues have been ignored. As one example out of many, the Monroe Street Bridge details the use of timber, vegetation and public art to try and create a beautiful image and artificially make a gateway and transition area, but completely ignores the vertical alignment of the bridge, which is a much bigger problem.

The existing vertical alignment creates significant vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle safety problems, with blind ends and a pronounced hump in the middle: people at the ends of the bridge cannot see approaching traffic over the bridge.

The “washboard” quality of the bridge is also not a very nice transition between east and west. The superficial solutions of timber and plants and railings and extensions and bike lanes and public art are nice, but are “icing on the cake”: they don’t fix underlying problems. Here’s a different approach: fix the vertical alignment, put some nice railings and lights on the bridge and cut out the civic “gee-gaws” and gimmicks as public space band-aids.

Response – There are physical constraints that resulted in the alignment of the Monroe Street Bridge such as clearance requirements for the railroad tracks. It should also be noted that a bridge with less slope could have had greater impact on adjacent properties. However, bridge replacement alternatives that would address the “hump” can remain as a long-term improvement recommendation of the study. Some of the options being considered to enhance safety of pedestrians and vehicles at the “blind ends” such as colored pavements and additional signage are low cost short-term improvements. Other possible short-term bridge improvement options will be discussed with members of the community.

Public Comment: Missing from this study is any notion that there are a range of options balancing aesthetics, economic feasibility, semi-public institutional standards (e.g. PEPCO), DDOT standards, COG policies and Federal DOT regulations. These options pertain to issues that range from the large, intrusive infrastructure decisions (e.g. alternate locations for power lines) to surface details (e.g. color and aggregate mix of paving materials). There are advantages and disadvantages to each set of options. When did discussions of options take place? Who took part? How were conclusions reached? Where is the documentation? There has been no sustained community discussion at this level, nor does there appear to have been any input, let alone recommendations, from the Study Advisory Committee, the members of which have never been identified. It appears that consensus building and an open, deliberate, planned and agreed upon process for proceeding with this study were never adequately performed.

Response - These issues have been presented and will continue as discussion items at upcoming community meetings with respective subject-matter experts. In the meantime, the public is welcome to submit comments and suggestions via the website and e-mail. Recommendations regarding streetscape elements will be limited to those that meet all applicable standards.

Response (cont.) - The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has expanded the Study Advisory Committee membership to ensure an open and participatory process and to encourage involvement of key community representatives, professional organizations, and long-standing institutions within the study area. DDOT staff maintains a list of Study Advisory Committee members who represent the following organizations:

*ANC's
Merchants
CUA Administration
Trinity Administration
Providence Hospital
Hospital for Sick Children
John Paul II and Basilica
Brookland Main Street
Brookland Community Development Corporation
District Government Agencies
Federal Government Agencies
WMATA (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority)*

Public Comment: What recommendations has the Study Advisory Committee made relative to the proposals contained in this document? The lack of acknowledgement of the SAC suggests that it has been by-passed in the development of this study. In addition to the lack of information about the composition of this group, noted above, it appears that the responsibility and role of the SAC, established by DDOT at the beginning of the project, and clearly spelled out in documents distributed by DDOT in September 2004, has not been adhered to. The existence of an advisory group to this study is very important. It appears to have been conveniently forgotten by DDOT.

Response - Involvement of SAC members in the development of study recommendations is an on-going process. The last status review meeting was held on January 11, 2006 (please see response #10 for more details about organizations represented on the committee).

Public Comment: Report Section 1. Introduction: How did the project team arrive at and build consensus for the 12th Street vision (the “could be” points)? Why is there no mention of transportation in this vision statement?

Response - The vision statement for 12th Street included in the draft report represents the initial ideas and concepts. Consensus for the ultimate vision will be reached through further discussions at upcoming public meetings, and public comment forms received by the study team and DDOT. The study team will include discussions of multi-modal transportation impacts and concerns in the vision statement.

Public Comment: Report Section 1. Introduction: “A safe, visually stimulating, pedestrian-friendly environment for business patrons and shopper” suggests that 12th Street is a pedestrian only street.

Response - Discussion of 12th Street was not intended to suggest that it is a pedestrian-only street. A transportation section is included in the study, which will address various travel modes.

Public Comment: Report Section 1. Introduction: Recognition and discussion of the economic feasibility and economic impact would seem to be a major point for 12 Street's success. This should be elaborated on; I'm looking forward to seeing it in the written report.

Response - The study team is in agreement with this suggestion.

Public Comment: Report Section 2. Accessibility: In the "Barriers" section it is interesting that the MBT (Metropolitan Branch Trail) is identified, but not the multiple heavy rail and Metro tracks. This major transportation spine is indeed a potential impediment to connectivity, but the MBT is the least of the issues.

Response - The study team is in agreement with this comment and will address it in the report.

Public Comment: Report Section 3. Evolving An Image: The streetscape models of M Street in Georgetown and 18th Street in Adams-Morgan in the District do not appear to be particularly relevant to 12th Street. Both 18th Street and M Street have largely sacrificed the public pedestrian zone to the automobile. Having lived in Adams-Morgan and having worked in Georgetown the "tactile qualities of landscape elements like flowering trees" on the street do not immediately come to mind.

Response - As the next paragraph in the report suggests, 12th Street will be treated differently from M street or 18th Street.

The following discussion item for which the Study Team expects to address at the next meeting has been identified. Comments are appreciated on this item and will help clarify the wishes for the Brookland Community.

- Catch phrases such as "Main Street", "urban arbor walk" and the creation of an "image" for 12th Street are indicative of the tendency to label the community.

Accessing Brookland Study Website

Go to: <http://www.ddot.dc.gov>

Under Information, locate the item titled "Transportation Plans|Studies and click on Studies; From the list, select Brookland Transportation and Streetscape Study

Click on study website