City Manager Report

Ken Putnam, PE
Transportation Director

I-26 Connector Project Update

Asheville City Council
July 25, 2023

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Key Takeaways

- The Design-Build selection process for sections B & D of the I-26 Connector Project is ongoing with a planned contract award in February 2024.
- The Burton Street Community is the only neighborhood in Asheville to have received an environmental justice population designation from NCDOT for the I-26 Connector Project.
  - This designation resulted in the NCDOT and the City making specific commitments outlined in the 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan.
  - The 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan was sponsored by NCDOT due to the community's environmental justice designation.
- The Burton Street Community has requested additional improvements since the 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan was adopted.
  - If the 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan is amended, NCDOT has determined that Burton Street would no longer be eligible for the environmental justice designation and associated improvements based on current demographics.
- In February 2023, the City Council adopted a resolution supporting the Council-established I-26 Aesthetics Committee's recommendation to invest $5,889,024 in aesthetic enhancements for the I-26 Connector Project, which requires local funding because these enhancements exceed NCDOT's standard level of treatment.
- As part of the action that City Council took to approve the Aesthetic Committee's recommendations, the City Council included a motion in support of neighborhood improvements for the Burton Street, Hillcrest, and Montford communities.
  - NCDOT was notified about the City Council's approval of the Aesthetic Committee's recommendation and support for neighborhood improvements in a letter dated February 15, 2023.

Presentation Purpose

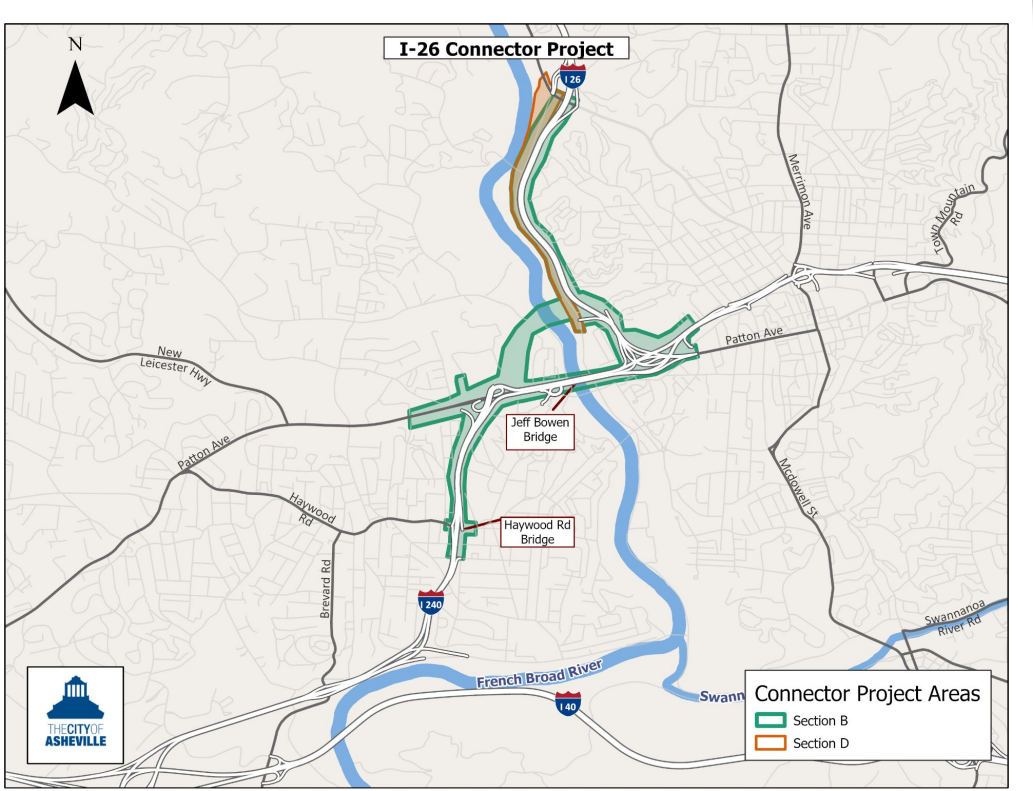
- Provide scope overview of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's upcoming I-26 Connector Project.
- Provide an update on mitigation strategies associated with Burton Street's Environmental Justice designation.
- Provide an update regarding the Aesthetics Committee recommendations specific to the Hillcrest and Montford communities.

I-26 Connector Project Background Sections B & D

- Section B begins south of the Haywood Road bridge and ends at US 19-23 (Future I-26) near Broadway Street.
- Section D (Riverside Drive) begins south of Hill Street and ends at Broadway Street.
- Both sections will be delivered using the Design-Build method.
- The Design-Build selection process is ongoing and three teams have been shortlisted to compete.
- The Design-Build award date has moved from October 2023 to February 2024 in order to give the competing teams more time to prepare their proposals.
- It is anticipated that Sections B & D will take 6 to 7 years to complete.

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I-26 Connector Project Sections B & D



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Burton Street Neighborhood

- NCDOT identified the Burton Street Community as an environmental justice population that could receive mitigation improvements to lesson the burden of the I-26 Connector Project.
    - No other impacted communities in Asheville received an environmental justice designation.
- NCDOT partnered with the City of Asheville and the Burton Street Community Association to identify specific environmental justice mitigation strategies through the 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan.
    - The 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan was adopted by City Council on October 23, 2018.
- NCDOT and City staff have been meeting monthly with Burton Street Community Association leadership to discuss I-26 mitigation strategies since August 2019.
- The Burton Street Community Association submitted an additional improvement request to NCDOT.
    - If the 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan is amended, NCDOT has determined that the Burton Street neighborhood would no longer be eligible for the environmental justice designation and associated improvements based on current demographics.
    - Any additional enhancements in Burton Street would need to follow the City's typical budget development and review process.
    - The Burton Street Community Association also inquired about the federal Justice40 disadvantaged community designation, NCDOT has confirmed that Burton Street does not meet the Justice40 eligibility criteria.

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Burton Street Mitigation Strategies

- The Aesthetics Committee did not make specific recommendations for Burton Street because mitigation strategies were addressed in the 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan.
  - The recommended aesthetics improvements to the Haywood Road bridge will benefit the Burton Street neighborhood as well as West Asheville.

- 27 mitigation strategies were identified in the 2018 Burton Street Neighborhood Plan that included commitments for both NCDOT and the City.
  - The status of key commitments is identified on subsequent slides.
  - The majority of mitigation strategies will be implemented during the overall construction phase of Sections B & D.

Burton Street Mitigation Strategies -NCDOT Responsibility

- Improve existing sidewalks to meet ADA design standards.
  - The ADA improvements have been identified and cost estimates have been prepared.
  - This work will be accomplished with a separate contract in order to provide opportunities for smaller companies to participate.
- Improve sidewalk connections between commercial corridors and include a pedestrian path from Buffalo Street to Patton Avenue that would connect to a future greenway.
  - A preliminary alignment and cost estimate has been prepared for the pedestrian path.
  - This work will be accomplished with a separate contract in order to provide opportunities for smaller companies to participate.

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Burton Street Mitigation Strategies -NCDOT Responsibility

- Install a sidewalk along Patton Avenue to connect a new pedestrian path to an existing transit stop.
  - A multi-use path along the south side of Patton Avenue is included in the preliminary project design for Section B.
- Incorporate a Burton Street history mural on proposed I-26 connector sound wall if one is constructed.
  - Once a final determination is made as part of the design process that Burton Street would benefit from a sound wall, it will only be constructed following a vote from impacted residents.
  - If a wall is constructed, the mural will be painted on a section of the sound wall as part of the landscaping contract after the construction phase.

Burton Street Mitigation Strategies -City Responsibility

- Expand Burton Street Community Center programming to enhance the community garden programming through produce processing and preservation, nutrition education, and a community farmers market/stand.
  - There is ongoing discussion at the monthly meetings including staff from the Parks & Recreation Department regarding community garden programming.
  - Community garden enhancements will be considered for City funding during project construction.
- Conduct a feasibility study to consider a future Smith Mill Creek Greenway through the Burton Street neighborhood.
  - Funding for the feasibility study will be requested by the Transportation Department for a future year in the 5-year Capital Improvement Program.

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Burton Street Mitigation Strategies -City Responsibility

- Implement traffic calming measures on Burton Street and Florida Avenue including improved speed humps and consistent speed limits throughout the neighborhood.
  - A traffic calming project to remove the existing speed humps and install new speed humps on Burton Street and Florida Avenue was completed in December 2021.

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Hillcrest Neighborhood Mitigation Strategies

- The Aesthetics Committee and NCDOT agreed upon the following items impacting Hillcrest, which will be incorporated into the final design of the I-26 Connector Project:
  - Pedestrian connectivity and access will be improved with a new sidewalk from the entrance of the Hillcrest neighborhood to Patton Avenue including pedestrian signals and crosswalks at the intersection of Patton Avenue and the Hillcrest Connector street.
  - A new pedestrian bridge adjacent to the entrance to the Hillcrest neighborhood will provide access to Hill Street.
    - Aesthetic treatments and lighting will be included on the new pedestrian bridge.

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Montford (Riverside Cemetery) Mitigation Strategies

- The Aesthetics Committee and NCDOT agreed upon the following items impacting Montford ,which will be incorporated into the final design of the I-26 Connector Project:
  - The travel lanes adjacent to the cemetery have been lowered eliminating the need for a retaining wall.
  - Pre-construction surveys will be completed and continual monitoring on key monuments will occur throughout the construction phase.
  - New fencing will be installed that matches the existing fencing at the cemetery.
  - Possible tree planting in the right-of-way will be considered depending on the final design.
  - Construction noise will be limited during funerals.

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