

Richmond Connects Steering Committee

MEETING SUMMARY

September 26, 2023 | 10:00 am to 12:00 am | Teams

ATTENDEES

Lucy Bolin, City of Richmond Office of Equitable Transit and Mobility (OETM), Intern

Anna Bon-Harper, OETM Intern

Chenice Brown, OETM, Community Outreach Specialist

Jessica Dimmick, EPR (Richmond Connects Consultant Team Project Manager)

Bryan Epps, City of Richmond, Office of Sustainability

Jakob Helmboldt, DPW, Pedestrian and Trails Coordinator

MS Khara, DPW

Brandon King, OETM

Dironna Moore Clarke, OETM

Atiba Muse, OETM

Ray Roakes, City of Richmond, Department of Planning and Development Review

Amy Robins, Liaison for Councilmember Stephanie Lynch, District 5: Richmond Central

Kelli Rowan, OETM

Thomas Ruff, Timmons Group (Richmond Connects Consultant Team)

Mike Sawyer, DPW, City Transportation Engineer

Brad Shelton, Michael Baker International (Richmond Connects and Electric Vehicle Action Plan Consultant Team)

MEETING SUMMARY

Kelli Rowan provided a copy of the meeting presentation to the Steering Committee in advance of this meeting. This summary documents the key points of discussion, action items, and next steps.

To obtain a copy of the meeting presentation, email Kelli Rowan at Kelli.Rowan@rva.gov.

Project and Schedule Update

Since the last meeting in July, two new tasks have been added to the Near-Term Action Plan development process:

1. Project Development of Recommendations – this task will develop concepts for the recommendations that were high level in the public survey.
2. Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper Project Design - this task will identify projects that can be implemented immediately using lighter materials and potentially installed in a temporary fashion.

The Action Plan is now scheduled to be completed by the end of December 2024. The long-term scenario planning effort has been pushed into 2024 to allow the Richmond Connects team to focus on the development of recommendations for the Near-Term Action Plan.

Outreach Update

Phase 4 Survey on Draft Recommendations

The Phase 4 Engagement period has concluded. Phase 4 was the big push to share and get feedback on the draft recommendations for the Near-Term Action Plan. The draft recommendations were shared with the public through 17 different surveys. Each survey covered an area of the city and included 8-16 recommendations. The surveys asked respondents if they



agreed with each recommendation, and which 5 recommendations they think are most important. The surveys were open from July 7, 2023 through September 15, 2023.

The Richmond Connects team spent the past two months going out into the Communities of Concern to get as many paper survey responses as possible. The team conducted over 120 different outreach activities, including canvassing community events and conducting pop-up outreach events at community markets, schools, bus stops, and stores.

As of 9/26, the team collected 8,391 survey responses, and there are still about 200 more paper survey responses to be entered. 7,934 of the responses were collected online. The responses exceeded the team's overall goal to collect 6,794 responses (representing 3% of Richmond's population). The team also set a goal for each survey to collect responses representing 1% of the population in each area. So far, the responses have met this goal in 14 of the 17 areas. The team anticipates that all areas will meet their goal after the input of the remaining paper surveys.

As expected, the online survey respondent demographics are not representative of the overall Richmond population. The team is currently examining the representation and sample size of the results. The team will make adjustments so the results for "all Richmonders" are weighted to be representative of the overall city population demographics. The results will also be reported to identify recommendations that certain demographics (e.g. respondents under age 25, Black/multiple race respondents, low-income respondents, etc.) supported more strongly.

The results are still being processed. Based on the results to date, the Richmond Connects team shared some preliminary findings:

- Adding seating, shelter, and amenities at bus stops was a highly ranked recommendation in almost every area. It was the #1 ranked recommendation in Downtown(including Gilpin) and Broad Rock/Walmsley.
- Improving sidewalks and filling sidewalk gaps was a highly ranked recommendation in all 9 areas where it was on the survey.

Focus Groups

The Richmond Connects team held a day-long focus group session on Friday September 15th with 21 residents who represent Communities of Concern. The focus group participants reviewed and prioritized over 200 strategies to address the citywide and programmatic (non-mappable) needs.

The focus group participants worked in two groups to identify the top five strategies for each of the 11 Investment Need Categories and categorize the remaining strategies into low, medium, or high importance. In some instances, the participants suggested combining two or three strategies into one. Participants could write their own strategies if they saw a need that was not adequately addressed by the existing strategies. The focus groups resulted in a list of top 5-8 non-mappable recommendations for each Investment Need Category.

The Advisory Committee will review these ranked recommendations at the next Advisory Committee meeting, which will be held in October 2023.

Steering Committee Discussion

Bryan Epps said he is a proponent of closing streets to cars. He asked if any of the draft recommendations included closing streets to cars aside from Cary Street. Kelli Rowan and Chenice Brown responded that there was one other recommendation to close a street to cars – Baker Street in the Gilpin neighborhood. Generally, Gilpin residents did not support the recommendation to close Baker Street to cars. Gilpin residents said closing the street to vehicles would make it harder for the residents to bring back groceries and other things. Gilpin residents also wanted to make sure they could leave the neighborhood quickly, and closing the street to cars would make it harder to get out.

Bryan noted that it is important to emphasize how a street closure can enhance connectivity and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, so that the benefits of the recommendation are understood, not just taking away access for cars.

Amy Robins noted that business owners in Carytown expressed concerns about the recommendation to close Cary Street to cars, and that the businesses desired more engagement. The Carytown Watermelon Festival was the worst weekend for the Carytown businesses. Amy noted that Carytown is walkable, and the community is interested in increasing safety at the pedestrian crosswalks. Amy suggested considering a lighter, quicker, cheaper solution to improve corner clearance and pedestrian visibility in Carytown. She noted that from an equity lens, streets in Southside where there are no sidewalks should be

prioritized. Amy noted that the media news stories shared the link to the West End survey, not the link to the landing page for all the surveys.

Process for Action Plan

Kelli Rowan briefly reviewed where we are in the Richmond Connects process. We have developed draft recommendations, and are at the stage of determining which recommendations should be moved forward into the Action Plan. The draft recommendations include about 140 hard infrastructure mappable recommendations and about 200 strategies for addressing citywide and programmatic (non-mappable) needs. The Action Plan will contain about 50 well-defined infrastructure projects and 50-60 strategies for the non-mappable needs. Kelli presented a draft framework that the Richmond Connects team is proposing to determine which projects and strategies are selected for inclusion in the Action Plan.

For the mappable recommendations, the proposed framework examines several components: public priority based on the survey results, Community of Concern priority, engineering readiness and feasibility, and general magnitude of cost. A potential additional criteria could be if the project represents an investment in a Community of Concern.

For the recommendations to address non-mappable needs, the Advisory Committee will review the results from the focus group at their next meeting and make changes to the prioritization based on their perspectives representing professionals and the general public. The Richmond Connects team will then use a combination of the Advisory Committee and focus group priorities to select the top 3-8 strategies for each Investment Need Category. The Action Plan will detail the implementation steps for each of the top strategies, including partners and funding.

Steering Committee Discussion

The Richmond Connects team asked the Steering Committee to provide their initial reactions to the proposed framework.

Dironna Moore Clarke indicated that she would like to see some examples and test cases of how the proposed framework would work. She suggested evaluating the recommendations according to the proposed weighting, and then consider recalibrating the proposed weightings.

Amy Robins inquired about the recommendation to close Cary Street to cars and the impacts to the neighborhood and businesses. She asked how the proposed scoring framework would take into account support or opposition from the businesses and residents.

Kelli Rowan showed the framework criteria, one of which could include a Yes/No criterion for if the recommendation is an investment in a Community of Concern. The Carytown recommendation is not an investment in a Community of Concern. Kelli also explained how the Richmond Connects team is developing more defined concepts and examining their feasibility, including discussions with City DPW staff to make sure the recommendations are implementable.

Jessica Dimmick shared that the Richmond Connects team has also been considering the level of public or community support in the readiness assessment discussions. Some of the recommendations have been identified in prior efforts, and the team is documenting if public or community support for the recommendation has been voiced outside of the recent survey.

Next Steps

- The Richmond Connects team will evaluate the draft mappable recommendations using the proposed framework.
- The Steering Committee will review the results and provide feedback.
- The Advisory Committee will meet in October to review the strategies for the non-mappable needs.
- The Richmond Connects team will draft the Action Plan, which will undergo one final round of public review.

NEXT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

The next Steering Committee is scheduled for Tuesday November 28, 2023, at 10:00 AM.