



SUMMARY

Community Workshop #1: Existing Conditions

September 6, 2014, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Grace United Methodist Church, 3362 E. Balch Street, Fresno

Approximately forty residents and members of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) gathered at the Grace United Methodist Church on a Saturday morning to review the work to date on the Ventura Kings Canyon (VKC) Corridor Revitalization Plan, to express concerns relevant to the project, and to discuss design ideas for improving the Corridor. The Ventura Kings Canyon Corridor Revitalization Plan is funded by a Caltrans' Environmental Justice Grant, and is being guided by the Fresno County of Governments (FCOG) and the PAC, which includes staff from the City of Fresno (Planning and Public Works Departments), FAX (Public Transportation), and Caltrans. The consultant hired by FCOG to develop the Plan is the firm PlaceWorks, along with their technical team of Fehr & Peers; Blair, Church & Flynn; and Team Better Block, as well as their community outreach team: Ventura Kings Canyon Merchants Association (VKCMA), Southeast Fresno Community Economic Development Association (SEFCEDA), Fresno Center for New Americans (FCNA), Centro La Familia Advocacy Services (CLFA), and Sigala Inc. Development and Consulting Services.

The workshop began with a welcome from Pastor Juan Saavedra of Grace United Methodist Church, who then handed it off to John Hykes, Project Manager at PlaceWorks. Mr. Hykes introduced the consultant team and PAC, described the purpose of the Ventura Kings Canyon Corridor Revitalization Plan, and summarized the existing conditions of the project area. Robert Hananouchi, Associate at Fehr & Peers, described the existing conditions related to transportation and circulation along the corridor. Rosie Dudley, Assistant Project Manager at PlaceWorks, then provided a brief overview of the public input received thus far, including over 70 stakeholder interviews conducted by the outreach team. Ms. Dudley emphasized that there would be many opportunities for public input going forward in the process; at which point, she paused the presentation to address questions and comments from the audience, which included (*Responses are italicized*):

- The BRT changes seem to be less helpful for shopping on corridor. *This is an opportunity for better bus service.*
- When BRT comes, will it remove other buses? *Yes.* This will be an issue for older residents.
- There are more speed traps on VKC than in other areas of the city, which may be profiling.
- The term "corridor" makes it sound like a place to get through when we should be focused on making this street a destination for shopping and services.
- What is the timing of this Plan? *6 months.*
- Will this Plan will translate into actual improvements? *Yes, the demonstration project will result in temporary improvements and the plan will identify the priority improvements and potential funding sources.*
- There are perceptions of crime. Look for opportunities to address.
- Think about ways to make it more attractive for walking. Because there are too many modes on the street (bikes, BRT, cars, peds), consider moving bike facilities to adjacent corridors. *We can consider; VKC can be a complete street.*
- There needs to be more anchor businesses. Make this a retail destination.



Following the question and comment period, Mr. Hykes continued the presentation with an overview of potential improvements that could be made along the Corridor, such as striped crosswalks, additional street trees, and traffic-calming features. He also described one element of the project, called a demonstration project which will be a temporary installation of improvements at one location on the corridor built by the team and local residents and merchants. After the presentation, members of the community got into small groups and went on a walking tour from the church, at 4th Street and Balch Avenue, to 7th Street and Ventura Avenue. Consultant team members and FCOG staff facilitated the four small groups, encouraging everyone to point out and discuss aspects of the Corridor that they like and did not like, as well as their suggestions for improvements.



After the walking tour, everyone regrouped at the church for refreshments, live music performed by Pastor Saavedra. A representative of each small group shared highlights with the entire group:

Group 1

- Use drought-tolerant street trees.
- There is a lack of crosswalks, and those that are there are not very visible.
- There is a need for wider sidewalks.
- There are access issues for the disabled.
- There is a need for banners on lamp posts.

Group 2

- [Group #2 had similar observations/suggestions as Group #1]
- There is a need for more trees.
- Improve pedestrian crosswalks.
- There are no ADA crosswalks in certain areas.
- The benches are good, but they are not in the shade.
- There are utility boxes in the way of the sidewalk.

Group 3

- The medians should have trees and not rocks.
- The sidewalks need to be wider and there should be more pedestrian islands.
- There is a concern about safety for all modes of transportation. Maybe there could still be 2-travel lanes, but make sidewalks and bicycle lanes safer.
- The cleanup of property is the responsibility of property owners.

Group 4

- There are empty spots for banners on the light poles. Add banners that focus on the Fair and high school events.
- The palm trees are good tree for the medians.
- Make sure trees are maintained.
- The sidewalk shade trees must not block the sidewalk or create safety issues.
- The sidewalks need to be wider.

Group 5

- The sidewalks are narrow and don't feel safe.
- Barking dogs are a concern.
- The landscaping impedes the sidewalk.
- The bars on businesses make the area feel unsafe.
- There are no awnings on businesses; these are needed.
- There is no unified theme or style.
- Graffiti is a problem.

Two children, who participated in a kids' activity during the meeting, presented what they would like to see on their streets. The report back was translated in both English and Spanish.



The facilitators recorded the following highlights from their group discussions during the walking tour:

- ◆ Trees have been cut down leaving empty tree wells in the sidewalk zone, which creates a safety hazard for pedestrians walking down the already narrow sidewalk.
- ◆ Neighbors should plant trees on private property to increase the tree canopy in the area, providing more shade.
- ◆ Medians with trees are nice and should be consistent down the corridor. Shrubs are dying in medians.
- ◆ There is a sign visibility versus tree conflict.
- ◆ Vacant space is not being used.
- ◆ Introduce speed bumps or other traffic-calming features.
- ◆ Diagonal parking along VKC would increase parking, but may be dangerous when cars back out of parking spots into traffic.
- ◆ Utility obstructions are not attractive and impede travel for strollers and people in wheelchairs.
- ◆ Bus stops need benches, canopies, and trash receptacles. Lots of people use the buses.
- ◆ Existing crosswalks are faded and need to be more noticeable. Cars at the traffic signals stop in the crosswalk, but maybe if the crosswalks were more visible, then they may stop earlier.
- ◆ Locate bulbouts where curb is painted red because you can't park there anyway and shortening crosswalks would be helpful for pedestrians, especially the elderly.
- ◆ Lighting should be combined with banners.
- ◆ Trees are a good design element because they make people feel more comfortable and will encourage them to get out of their cars to walk around. There is concern with having enough water to support, considering the drought.
- ◆ Wheelchair ramps should not be angled diagonally into road (into traffic), but instead toward the crosswalks.
- ◆ Widen sidewalks by narrowing the traffic lanes, but only if it's safe for drivers.
- ◆ VKC is dangerous for all modes of transportation, including drivers.
- ◆ There is a desire for more grocery stores and less fast food; although some want more fast food franchises on the west end of the Corridor.
- ◆ City's grass strips on the side streets are wide, but the sidewalks are narrow.

At the meeting's close, Executive Director of SEFCEDA, Jose Leon-Barraza raffled off ten prizes, which were gift certificates from the following local businesses: El Palacio Furniture, La Vaquita Market, Super Store Furniture, El Paso Furniture, Los Panchos Restaurant, Korina Bakery, Wells Fargo Bank, Leon Properties, and Ernie's Bakery. All participants who submitted comment cards were eligible to win a prize. The participants were thanked for their participation and the meeting ended with Pastor Saavedra and his sons' live music. Going forward, the consultant team and FCOG staff will consider concerns that were vocalized during meeting, as well as the suggestions for improving the Corridor. Public involvement will continue to be a focus of the project.