

Detroit River International Crossing Study
Local Advisory Council/Local Agency Group Meeting
Notes
March 31, 2010, 7:00 p.m.
Southwestern High School

Purpose: To review the progress of the Detroit River International Crossing Project.

Attendance: See attached.

Discussion:

Introductions/Agenda

Mohammed Alghurabi asked those in attendance to introduce themselves beginning with the LAC/LAG members and then the observers. He reviewed the agenda and then introduced Linda West and Libby Palackdharry of Detroit GreenWorks Solutions.

Ms. West explained that the GreenWorks Solutions program which has been funded by a federal grant, is to begin May 1, and will run for two years. Its goal is to teach weatherization and urban farming skills to individuals residing in five Detroit zip codes in the southwest Detroit area. Upon inquiries from those present, she noted that there were other programs in other zip codes also involved in job skills training.

Public Comments

Q: A Delray resident stated he was one of a very few residents who would be left alone on a block after others were relocated. He said he didn't understand how MDOT could leave people so isolated. He asked several neighbors who came with him to stand.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi asked that the gentleman speak with an MDOT Real Estate staff member who was present to answer questions. He went on to say that while the footprint of the project is known with some specificity, there are always changes in final design. Also, the right-of-way acquisition process may take into account special circumstances.

Meeting Notes

Mr. Rosen took exception to how his comments were summarized in the previous month's notes. He said his intent was to record that the DIFT Project Manager had been unresponsive in the question/answer session and that he hoped that would not set a precedent. He characterized the notes as a "whitewash."

Mohammed Alghurabi responded that as a project manager, he can attest that it takes time to build a relationship with the community.

Community Benefits Coalition (CBC) Update

Tom Cervenak reported that a town hall meeting sponsored by the Southwest Detroit Community Benefits Coalition held March 23rd had over 100 attendees. Bridging Communities has about 40 applicants interested in the 26 homes in the first phase of development for DRIC relocatees. The meeting provided those in attendance with information about their rights and options under relocation.

There was discussion about where the first homes should go. Generally, most support building in the block east of Holy Cross, but others want to see the homes more dispersed. The Michigan State Housing and Development Authority (MSHDA) will have the final say.

Scott Brines greenways should connect across the railroad tracks, east and west, and to the waterfront, Ft. Wayne and parks.

Gerardo Evangelista of Bridging Communities said he had begun to meet with potential home owners.

Ms. Leonard said she strongly recommended that the CBC meet with both the Detroit Planning and Development Department and Planning Commission. Mr. Bendzick said he would like minutes of any meeting with the City. Ms. Leonard said Scott Brines should find out the intent of the City with respect to Delray.

Mohammed Alghurabi said it was MDOT's intention to continue cooperating with the City and CBC to work through issues including planning, zoning and aesthetics related to the project.

Update on the DRIC Reporting Requirements to Legislature

Mohammed Alghurabi provided update of information related to the DRIC that must be provided to the Michigan Legislature by May 1, 2010. That includes the responses to the Request for Proposals of Expression of Interest (RFPEOI) intended to engage the private sector in Public/Private Partner (P3) to build all or parts of the DRIC. Also, MDOT must provide an investment grade traffic forecast. Approximately 20 entities have responded to the RFPEOI. Mohammed Alghurabi said he would report what he could at the next LAC meeting. Meanwhile, he has been providing informational presentations to groups on the substance of DRIC and P3s.

By June 1, 2010 the Legislature intends to take action regarding the DRIC. There are three components of the legislation that is pending action: allowing for P3 entities, allowing tolling, and allowing MDOT to enter into a contract(s) with the Canadian government. He said that after that there would be a greater ability to addresses on the ground issues with greater specificity.

Q: Tom Cervenak asked how the bridge would actually be built.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said the plan is to have it done through the P3, based on specifications prepared by MDOT and Transport Canada. Forming a public-private partnership is a lengthy process. The bridge specifications cannot be so restrictive that the hands of the private sector developer are tied. The private sector developer will make recommendations and the Partnership will have approval authority.

Q: John Bendzick noted that the federal government will have the say on the plaza.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi noted there are two parts to the plaza, with the federal government responsible for the central area that serves federal functions and MDOT having control around that area, where there will be ancillary facilities/functions such as toll collection, duty free and the like.

Q: Ms. Leonard asked Mohammed to define “economy of scale.”

R: Mohammed Alghurabi did so.

City of Detroit Team II Update

Mohammed Alghurabi said John Baran of the city of Detroit sent his regrets he could not attend the LAC meeting but would be at the next one. Mohammed said that Team II is the mechanism to advance matters involving the City, such as Fort Wayne, water and sewer lines, other utilities and the like. MDOT had a meeting with the Team II in March and was now trying to set the next meeting.

Mohammed noted that preliminary engineering on the I-75 mainline is advancing.

Q: John Nagy asked if direct discussions had been held with Mayor Bing’s office in light of the Neighborhood Stabilization Plan published in the newspaper, which shows Delray outside the areas designated for stabilization.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said he was trying to meet with the Planning and Development Department next. He felt that both Planning and Development Department and the Planning Commission had been on board with housing redevelopment in Delray.

Gateway Project Update

Mohammed Alghurabi reported on information received from Victor Judnic, Manager of the Gateway Project for MDOT.

1. There has been no movement in MDOT’s lawsuit since the appellate court affirmed the circuit court decision that DIBC must complete the Gateway Project as originally designed.
2. DIBC has filed new lawsuits against the U.S. and the Canadian governments in the past week.
3. Mr. Judnic has received no recent comments or complaints from the community regarding the truck traffic. The Springwells signal is operating well.

4. MDOT has illuminated the Bagley Street cable-stay pedestrian bridge, and it is very impressive at night. It is important to note that the bridge is CLOSED until May 5th.
5. The new ramp from southbound I-75 to Vernor Highway should be open to traffic by the end of April.
6. There will be a Cinco de Mayo celebration on May 5th at 2PM at the new pedestrian crossing/plaza located at 21st and Bagley.

Other LAC/LAG Business

Mohammed Alghurabi asked if there were any other LAC/LAG business before moving to public comments. There was none.

Additional Public Comments

Q: Terrence Kennedy asked when the public will have an opportunity for input on bridge design. He favored an arch bridge, saying the arch bridge design has been advancing. He was concerned the bridge design would be obsolete as soon as the bridge is built.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi reiterated that the bridge would be built to government specifications and that the Partnership would have the final say, with public input on aesthetics. He said the conclusion leading to the Preferred Alternative was that only cable-stay and suspension bridges could span the distance across the Detroit River.

Q: A gentleman asked of the 20 responses to the RFPEOI how many were local?

R: Mohammed Alghurabi responded that MDOT had not yet had a chance to review them all yet, but that information would be forthcoming.

Q: Mr. Rosen asked how long a P3 would be involved . . . indefinitely?

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said likely 30-40 years.

Q: Mr. Rosen then asked why even go with a P3 . . . greater flexibility?

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said yes, and it does not tie up MDOT's ability to spend money on other projects.

Q: Mr. Rosen suggested electrification of cables to prevent corrosion.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said MDOT has access to that kind of information through the expertise of bridge engineers.

Q: A gentleman said it was important to hold discussions both with Mayor Bing and with the School Board, about the announcement that Southwestern High School is to be closed. There can be no community in Delray without a school.

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said for now the focus was meeting with the City through Team II and getting resolution there first.

C: Simone Sagovac reported that CBC had met with the Planning Commission and the City Council. CBC has not yet held the discussions related to planning and zoning for all of Delray.

Q: Glenn Plummer asked whether there is a federal commitment to the project and how the federal government fits into the funding picture?

R: Mohammed Alghurabi said there is strong federal support or we would not be where we are. The Record of Decision is the federal action that allows the project to go forward. The funding scenarios are complex and he referred Mr. Plummer to the Partnership website, where there is a table with potential participations:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdot/MDOT_RFP_DRIC_RFPOI_posted_308737_7.pdf.

He continued by saying that by May 1, 2010, information will be provided to the Michigan Legislature on the 20 responses from the private sector on participating in the DRIC.

Following some discussion of Riverside Park, the meeting ended at 8:45 p.m. The next meeting was announced as April 28, 2010, at 7:00 p.m. at Southwestern High School.