

Comments on Patterson and Grove Streetscape Improvements, Final Review

UDC 2017-011

Nicholas Smith

I'm writing to oppose this project as presented because it does not fulfill the conditions as part of receiving approval at conceptual review. Given the lack of change on key issues of safety, I urge the commission to reject the project as presented until the applicant brings forward a plan that meets the conditions approved at conceptual review.

On July 18, 2016, Planning Commission approved Conceptual Review for this project with 8 conditions as recommended by the Urban Design Committee, including the following, which all came from staff recommendations:

- (1) That the applicant consider ways to increase pedestrian right-of-way and sidewalk width throughout the corridors
- (2) That the applicant address bicycle accommodations within their streetscape plan
- (4) That the applicant work with the Transportation Engineering division to establish a complete streets vision for the project.

Today this project is before you with the following staff recommendations (emphasis mine):

- That the applicant **further** consider ways to increase pedestrian right-of-way and sidewalk width throughout the corridors
- That the applicant **further** consider bicycle accommodations within their streetscape plan
- That the applicant work with the Transportation Engineering division to establish a complete streets vision for the project **when the time is appropriate**

It seems not much has happened on these three points. Looking at the new project:

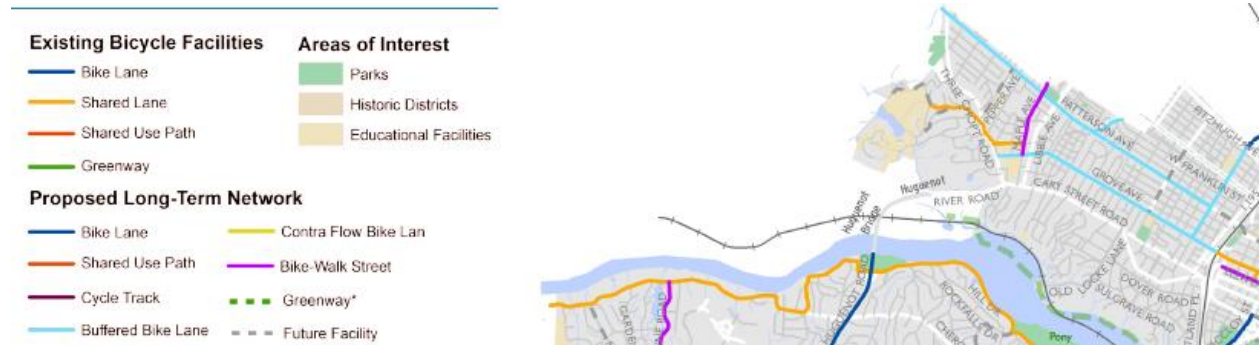
1. There appears to be no increase in the pedestrian right of way in these busy commercial districts.
2. There are no accommodations for bicycles beyond the change of some, though not all, of the instances of the words "bicycle rack" in the conceptual plans into "bicycle bollards".
3. There is nothing even inching towards complete streets in this plan.

I wrote to you in July supporting this plan by suggesting you not condition anything more than the staff recommendations. I felt they were an appropriate compromise that would help promote safety, alternative transportation and business, as people walking and biking tend to stop at businesses more than those who drive and tend to spend more money at each occasion.¹

¹ "The Complete Business Case for Converting Street Parking Into Bike Lanes: An annotated, chart-filled review of 12 studies from around the world." CityLab. March 13, 2015. <http://www.citylab.com/cityfixer/2015/03/the-complete-business-case-for-converting-street-parking-into-bike-lanes/387595/>

My letter, attached below, made the case that still exists for these changes. Grove has only 10,000 vehicles per day, well below the number that requires two travel lanes in each direction. Patterson is not much more, and though there may be some minor delays during rush hour, it is important to remember that traffic in a commercial corridor during rush hour is likely to scare away customers who will want to avoid the area, while extra vehicle traffic and travel lanes will scare away people walking and biking.

Further, as I pointed out in my previous letter, the Bicycle Master Plan lists Grove and Patterson as streets that are to get buffered bike lanes:



The BMP, released in 2015, listed Grove as having a buffered bike lane in the “Short Term (2-4 years)”. That makes this project the perfect opportunity to install this lane; if we don’t do it now we won’t be looking at improvements again here for years.

These bicycle and pedestrian accommodations are needed for safety and encouraging people to walk and bike. They will attract business. They will calm vehicle traffic. They have been in city plans for years. And they were supported by these bodies, the Urban Design Committee and the Planning Commission, and staff from Planning Development and Review.

If conditions of Planning Commission approval are to mean anything, they need to have some sort of teeth. Too often have we seen the city push through a project with conditions, the conditions not be adhered to, and the applicant telling the commissions that they must approve the project because there is no more time or money. Approving projects like these after no work has been done to satisfy conditions requested of it is the textbook example of a moral hazard, which will just lead to it happening again.

Sometimes a project not following conditions needs to be rejected or conditions will not be followed in the future. This is one of those times, and even better, insisting on these changes will make our city better and even save lives. Streetscape improvements are great. I love trees. But we can’t let the need for beautification and car capacity bury reasonable safety improvements requested by this committee that are already city supported.

Please send this project back until it is ready.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Smith

From: Nicholas Smith [mailto:telso314@gmail.com] **On Behalf Of** Nicholas Smith
Sent: Wednesday, July 06, 2016 2:07 PM
To: Onufer, Kathleen M. - PDR
Subject: Comments on UDC 2016-26

Hello Ms. Onufer,

Could you please pass the following comments to the UDC. Thank you.

I'd like to thank the city for proposing streetscape improvements on Patterson and Grove. These will help make the neighborhood more inviting and pleasant to be in for everyone, which will help businesses, raise property values and increase safety.

I would like to encourage the UDC to recommend approval with all staff comments. Staff has made careful and considered recommendations that will further improve the plan and neighborhood. In particular, given that the intent is to enhance this area as a walkable local business district, the plans should provide for a complete street that safely and comfortably accommodates all users.

Plans should discourage high-speed car through traffic and reclaim some of the four travel lanes (and two parking lanes) on each street for people walking and biking in the district, especially as sidewalks are sometimes narrow and Patterson and Grove are both designated in the Bicycle Master Plan as calling for buffered bike lanes, while Maple is designated as a Bike-Walk Street, things the staff report highlighted. Grove, in particular, has no more than 10,000 vehicles per day (VDOT 2015 AADT), and so could easily accommodate just one travel lane in each direction with only a slight decrease in Level of Service at peak hour -- it's worth remembering that a reduction in Level of Service here means "cars going more slowly through a pedestrian business district", so is actually desirable. Patterson, at no more than 15,000 AADT, would also be fine, with the worst case scenario being that some through car traffic may move to Broad or I-64, which is actually a good thing. Besides slowing car speeds, this reallocation of space will better reflect the use of the neighborhood.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this item.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Smith