

Department of Planning & Development Review
Staff Report

To: City Planning Commission
From: Land Use Administration
Date: April 21, 2014

Ord. No. 2014-88: To declare public necessity exists and to authorize the acquisition of certain fee simple interests, permanent easements, and temporary construction easements for the public purpose of constructing multimodal transportation and drainage improvements along Forest Hill Avenue between its intersection with Hathaway Road and its intersection with the Powhite Parkway.

PETITIONER

City of Richmond

LOCATION

Forty-six (46) properties along Forest Hill Avenue, between Hathaway Road and Powhite Parkway

PURPOSE

Forest Hill Avenue is scheduled for multimodal improvements. This ordinance would authorize the acquisition of property and easements necessary for the construction of the proposed improvements.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATION

Forest Hill Avenue is an urban minor arterial road serving regional traffic and the surrounding neighborhoods and the surrounding businesses. It connects two major limited access highways, the Powhite Parkway and Chippenham Parkway and includes a significant business corridor. This project will provide a safe, multi-modal corridor for all users and improves livability.

The project is funded through coordination with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) using primarily Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP) funds. These improvements were designed by Stantec Consulting Engineers and construction plans for the project have been developed and received location, character and extent approval from the Planning Commission on May 20, 2013.

Forest Hill Avenue within the project limits will be improved to include 2 - 11' foot travel lanes in each direction, a 12' foot raised landscaped median including left turn lanes, designated 5' bike lanes (continuation of the US 1 bike route from Fairlee Road to Hathaway Road on both sides), curbs, 4' sidewalks (both sides), pedestrian crosswalks, and a closed storm sewer system that will improve drainage along Forest Hill Avenue as well as in adjacent neighborhoods. The total project cost is estimated at \$12,700,000.00.

These improvements require additional right-of-way, temporary easements, permanent easements and utility easements from forty-six (46) parcels, as part of the project. These acquisitions are shown in the plats prepared by Stantec Consulting designated as DPW Dwg. No. O-28559, sheets 1 to 9. Utility companies require their own easement documents. The estimated cost of

the acquisition is approximately \$250,000.00. The project construction is scheduled for fall of 2015. In addition, the project cost is 100% reimbursable.

The Department of Public Works recommends approval of the proposed ordinance that would authorize the acquisition of property and easements for the completion of the proposed road improvements.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Site Description

The affected right-of-way is along Forest Hill Avenue from Hathaway Road to the Powwhite Parkway, a distance of 0.74 miles. The roadway is currently a four lane, undivided principal arterial roadway with roadside ditch and no bicycle or pedestrian facilities.

Proposed Use of the Property

The proposed improvements that will necessitate the property and easement acquisition will widen and improve Forest Hill Avenue from Hathaway Road to the Powwhite Parkway, a distance of 0.74 miles. The plans would retain two travel lanes in each direction, but would add a landscaped median and bike lanes, planting strips and sidewalks on each side of the road. The speed limit along the subject corridor would be decreased from 40mph to 35mph.

Master Plan

The subject right-of-way is located in the Huguenot Planning District as defined by the citywide Master Plan. The majority of the properties located adjacent to the corridor are designated in the Single-family (low density) land use category, with the exception of the Willow Oaks Country Club, for which the Plan recommends Institutional Uses, and the commercial area near Hathaway Road, for which the Plan recommends Transitional Office and Community Commercial uses.

In the 'Significant Issues' section for this district, the Plan acknowledges that "increasing traffic along Forest Hill Avenue threatens the long-term viability of owner-occupied single-family residences fronting on Forest Hill Avenue between the Forest Hill and Stratford Hills Shopping Centers and the Powwhite Parkway" (page 195). The Plan also recommends that "recent streetscape improvements along Forest Hill Avenue should be expanded in order to encourage a stronger pedestrian presence along what has traditionally been a corridor catering to the commuting motorist" (page 199). In the 'Transportation' subsection for this district, the Plan recommends widening Forest Hill Avenue from four to five lanes between the Powwhite Parkway and Hathaway Road (page 202).

The Transportation chapter of the Plan designates Forest Hill Avenue as a Principal Arterial Roadway, defined as a "major route for carrying high traffic volumes originating in areas not conveniently served by interstates or freeways; generally with four to six moving lanes, sometimes with a median but not limited access" (page 40). The Transportation and Roadway Improvements map also designates the corridor as a bike route, and the accompanying text notes that those roads so identified on the map have been chosen "as the most efficient, safe and appropriate locations for shared motor vehicle/bicycle traffic. These routes are appropriate for designation either through signage or delineated bike lanes" (page 38). The Plan further states that "routing systems for both cycling and walking

should be just as important to the City's transportation network as are the roadways that support motorized travel" (page 38). To that end, the Plan advocates a policy to "construct new roadway segments that include bikeways and sidewalks" (page 38).

The Community Character section of the Plan designates Forest Hill Avenue as a Principal Arterial Image Corridor, and states that "image corridors are key transportation corridors that have the ability to form an impression on travelers passing through the City" (page 110). The Plan goes on to say that "enhancement of the City's image corridors conveys a positive impression of the City to encourage visitation and investment" (page 110).

Surrounding Area

The properties adjacent to this section of roadway lie primarily in the R-2 (Single-Family Residential) zoning district and are developed with single-family detached residential dwellings. The Willow Oaks Country Club is also adjacent to the roadway near its intersection with Powwhite Parkway. There is a pocket of 5 parcels at the intersection of Forest Hill Avenue and Melbourne Drive that are located within the RO-1 (Residential/Office) zoning district and are improved with office buildings and a Masonic Lodge. At the western edge of the subject corridor at the intersection with Hathaway Road are shopping centers located in the B-2 (Community Business) zoning district.

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