

# MEETING NOTES

**Project Name:** Morrison Road Improvements Project  
**Meeting Location:** Mi Casa Resource Center – 345 S. Grove St., Denver, CO 80219  
**Date:** March 15, 2022  
**Time:** 4:00pm – 5:50pm  
**Meeting Name:** First Community Advisory Group Meeting  
**Attendees:** Gabriela Serrado, John Lasala, Jessica Fields, Chris Pacheco, Daisy Rocha Vazquez, Paul Casey, Yuridia, Chandi Aldena, Karl Burkhart, Gaby Medina, Esther Rivera, and Janina Calderon

## Project Overview

Morrison Road (Phase 2) is considered part of the Denver Elevate Bond Program. It includes the reconstruction of the Morrison roadway between Nevada and Perry streets, with the design of two plazas. Voting took place in November to make Phase 3 a part of the RISE GO Bond to reconstruct from Stuart Street to Sheridan Boulevard. Phase 2 and 3 are now combined to reduce inconvenience during construction.

In 2016 BuCu West started an effort to develop a streetscape design and plan for all Morrison Road to make it a true destination and serve the community. It began with a vision that included pedestrian plazas. Phase 1, located between Perry and Stuart Streets, has already been constructed. Phase 2 consists of the northern section of the corridor between Nevada and Perry Streets, and Phase 3 consists of the southern section, between Stuart Street and Sheridan Boulevard. We haven't yet embarked on Phase 3, which will be for future conversations.

Several important people and groups, including the Community Advisory Group (CAG), are working on this project. The City and County of Denver Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI) is leading the project, and there are several partner agencies within the city making this project happen. Also, BuCu West is an important stakeholder helping us understand what people want, what businesses need, and what maintenance conversations are currently occurring.

## **Community Advisory Group Roles and Responsibilities**

The role of the Community Advisory Group is to be a sounding board, and will meet four times throughout this project. As community leaders, we are not only looking to you to better understand how some of this will resonate within the community, but we also want to know your thoughts and feelings surrounding this project so that we can make our designs even better. We want to involve the community in the most convenient and respectful way possible.

The design team has developed a public survey and, by June or July, plans to have a broader public event for the project. We would like your thoughts and guidance on the public event and would furthermore appreciate your assistance in distributing and helping us conduct the survey.

Some of the CAG members will be involved in helping the design team get the word out to the extent you are able to. We will have some subcontractors get the word out more directly to help advertise the project.

Lastly, CAG members will join the design team on a site visit in the next 3 weeks to get their perspective on the plazas.

### **What We Have Learned**

We have so far gathered useful information by talking with community members and evaluating relevant data. Back in October 2021, we attended the Chile Fest event and had the opportunity to engage the community and discuss the proposed pedestrian plazas. It was a hot day, so water features were by far the number one preferred feature of the plazas. We have also learned that there are a variety of safety concerns with the Morrison Road corridor. Cars move fast, pedestrians don't feel safe, and it is not a welcoming environment. Additionally, there is not enough shade in the corridor, and the corridor doesn't reflect the character of the community. The design team is aware of tragic fatalities and serious injuries based on traffic safety data and feels that thoughtful street design is the best solution to improve these traffic safety conditions.

As the team gets further into design, there will be certain things we can afford to do and things that may not be entirely within the project's parameters. We need to understand what makes the most sense given the funding we have and how the community wants to use these spaces.

**CAG member** recommends doing a site visit sometime in April and one for the Cinco de Mayo event (May 7<sup>th</sup>).

**CAG member** suggested visiting the site during school traffic to see the dynamics.

### **Project Objectives**

The project aims to improve traffic safety, create a comfortable and welcoming corridor, meet accessibility standards for the corridor, improve the curb ramps to access businesses and spaces through the corridor, and enhance business access and the experience of people visiting local businesses. We want this to be welcoming and comfortable from the Morrison Road streetscape and urban design perspective, and we want as many amenities and shade elements as possible to reflect the community and the cultural heritage element.

We took a look at the "nuts-and-bolts" of street characteristics in context and how wide the street is. We wanted to understand how many cars are on the street and how fast people are driving, and we measured what elements exist on the corridor today and what should exist in the future.

There are many ways we can reduce travel speeds, improve safety, and create a different kind of street. Water quality and placemaking elements are also important and being considered. With this in mind, we want to understand what are some of the things we can add to the design that will help us achieve the project benefits.

Morrison Road today has two travel lanes, two bike lanes, and on-street parking. We are moving the curb in by about 5 feet on either side to remove the bike lanes and add additional pedestrian space behind the curb. The future Morrison Road will have two lanes for cars, one lane in each direction, and on-street parking. Some existing on-street parking will be removed and converted to planting areas and green infrastructure features.

There are two different locations where we have the plazas. We are closing access from the side streets to Morrison Road, and repurposing all that asphalt space to make it into the plaza space. They have unique shapes, but certainly some exciting potential of what those spaces could be.

### **Q and A with Community Advisory Group Members**

**CAG Member** had a question about bike lanes. *If we are taking the bike lanes away, are we including bike lanes in other parts of the neighborhood?*

The Via Verde loop is a network of bike facilities planned for the neighborhood. We have a block within our study area that is part of the Via Verde route. The diagonal nature of Morrison Road makes it a convenient and attractive fast route for people driving and biking. After construction, it will be a slower, calmer street so people can still bike, but there won't be a dedicated bike lane due to space constraints. The idea is to emphasize the other routes in the neighborhood.

We continue to improve our standards about what should be safe and comfortable in a bike facility. In this case, the 2017 Plan calls for shared facilities on the road and prioritizes pedestrians. DOTI is trying to solidify the Via Verde at Stuart and we need to implement Kentucky so that there is a loop around the neighborhood and it is easier for people to get on a bike and get to Morrison.

Pedestrian safety, Vision Zero, and pedestrian comfort are the biggest priority.

**CAG Member:** *What do you think the impact is going to be on other cross streets as alternatives .....especially some intersections where we have high velocity that is close to the school... Kentucky is the one that people use to get to Sheridan. Whenever we are changing the character of the street like what we are looking to do here, it is going to have a broader impact. Sometimes you need to do other enhancements on other streets to make sure they don't experience unintended problems. As we do the design, especially for the southern portion, which is longer and covers a bigger area, we'll flag those impacts and discuss them within DOTI. What else is needed? We looked at the plazas. We know where we are planning to remove access from those streets.*

The volumes, the number of cars at these locations are pretty low today, so we did that analysis to see the impact with the distribution in it, and it is a pretty small number, so we felt okay about that.

**CAG member:** *How much parking is available? How many spaces will be available? Where is the backup parking?*

We are still working on parking. This plot generally shows parking maintained, but we've also shown parking on one side of the street, and not on the other. This is all to do with how we are trying to fit this vision. Based on your input today, we need to make some adjustments. There will be parking impacts to achieve the vision of the planning zones and the sidewalk space, and we also understand that there are impacts on businesses.

The City also has the Westwood/Athmar Park NTMP, which looks at small-scale improvements for traffic calming projects at the local street level. We have close to 40 different traffic calming projects taking place in Westwood. One of the bigger ones is the Custer section of Via Verde Loop voted on by the community. So we will be doing traffic calming from Osceola down to Lowell to Friendship Alley. We are very close to these plazas, and the impact is minimal. We want to continue attaining that sense of calmness.

**CAG member:** *You can't really put the word gentrification out there. That is the frontend problem. The backend is we've been losing a lot of people through displacements since 2014, before these improvements. Those are the people we work with. They are getting evicted, and the prices are going up. It is painful to know these stories. We've done clinics to prevent these evictions. It will be great if all of these improvements are going to make the neighborhood more appealing. But, unless we think about the justice side in terms of people that have been here for many years, multi generations sometimes, their taxes are going up for the older people, they are not making any more money every year. They depend on Social Security. So what I really want to see is projects like this interface with zoning that is going to be on Morrison Road ..... All I'm saying is that there should be something really intentional about the development prospects of housing, that allow for people that were already displaced that can show they've been here for years to return. Which I think the city is now thinking about the right of return. Just to make it more stable so that the people that promoted these changes can enjoy it. A lot of these things came from grassroots organizing. It is like a snake biting its tail. It is a venomous snake. I get to say that.*

It is definitely an issue, and we are trying to work together with HOST to figure out how to make these improvements because this was part of our promise to the community as part of the Bond. Also, we are trying to do the overlay community planning involvement in this area. We know that infrastructure investment such as this one will make the corridor more enticing for redevelopers because they can find relatively affordable large pieces of land. We are also trying to figure out ways to make sure it stays a culturally diverse corridor with mixed incomes.

**CAG member:** *This is not a critique of this project. We want to see good changes and it looks like a beautiful thing. I'm not critiquing the city. My energy goes towards how can we imagine a better way? And that's where my energy goes. This is what Norma would've said and I'm here on behalf of Norma.*

### **Group Discussion**

1. Is the plaza going to be raised from its current level at the street?
  - a. Yes, the plaza will be raised to be at the level of the new & existing sidewalks (about 6")
2. **General comment from DOTI:** They are pushing to get raised walks/speed humps. Fire/emergency has preliminarily agreed  
*NOTE TAKERS QUESTION: is my interpretation of this accurate?*
3. Can we confirm that fire will be able to get through the plaza?
  - a. Yes, the design team will accommodate fire access through Plaza De Artistas
  - b. The design team will study bollards, rolled curb, etc. – Contingent on Fire Dept Approval
4. There appear to be plans for a skate park in the area – where would that go
  - a. No site has been identified – Current thinking is that it will generally be in the area around Phase 2 of Morrison Road. TBD
5. **General discussion in the group:** Where Via Verde trail is on Morrison Road, it will require that there is no parking adjacent to that stretch of trail to allow for a wider (12') sidewalk.
  - a. The Bike shop would like parking – The City and design team will study moving the trail segment to the north side of Morrison Road
6. How many People park in front of Azteca?
  - a. Stakeholders believe many people working and using the businesses across the street park on this block
7. Question about if it makes sense to provide parking in front of the plazas
  - a. The design team and City want to reduce parking in front of the plazas to:

- i. Give more space to the plaza area
  - ii. Keep the width of the street at a minimum (two travel lanes) at these zones for Pedestrian crossing
8. **General Comment:** There is a desire to maximize parking along the length of Morrison Road to service the businesses and not interfere with their operations:
  - a. The City and design team will study the plan to ensure businesses have parking
    - i. Need to accommodate – planting and green infrastructure per city standards – Tree lands and water quality zones are needed and will be designed to allow space to exit a parked car when they are adjacent to parking
    - ii. Need to meet sight triangle requirements and standards, including tree placement
    - iii. Currently, parking on the street creates a hazard at intersections with cars blocking the views
    - iv. Constituents: Its difficult to see at intersections w/ cars parked currently: please maximize visibility
9. Does Re:Vision require a curb cut?
  - a. Potentially no – The design team will evaluate the need for this curb cut: There is a desire to put parking on this side of the street.
10. There are lots of concerns with the Lowell intersection:
  - a. Does traffic need to go south through Lowell?
  - b. Desire to keep on-street parking Meade Street to Lowell – Many businesses here
  - c. Should there be a median at Lowell to block through traffic?
  - d. The left turns at Lowell could potentially be restricted
  - e. The double turn lane off Alameda onto Morrison Road creates a high-speed transition to Lowell – This is why Alameda is a cut-through
  - f. There are drag races in this area
  - g. Response – The design team will evaluate the Lowell intersection for safety and pedestrian/ traffic movement: it is important to note that if we restrict movement at one street, it could adversely impact another
11. Lowell vs Nevada – Where should a sign for crossing be installed?
  - a. Some expressed favor of Lowell
12. Question as to whether or not people will use the on-street parking in front of Ernie’s and Old wheels (and any business with off street parking).
  - a. The design team to evaluate further
    - i. The trade-off is: Where there isn’t parking the street gets more green infrastructure and planting and vice versa
  - b. Can there be both green areas and parking – Potentially – the design team will evaluate this
13. Are Bus stops going to or be able to move?
  - a. Potentially
  - b. Requires further study and coordination with RTD
    - i. RTD puts stops where there is demand
    - ii. The stop being close to the market is advantageous
    - iii. Lowell intersection could be too far for transfers to bus routes on Alameda Street
14. Via Verde Trail
  - a. Where is the crossing?
    - i. People should cross where the sign is
    - ii. There will be a 12’ wide sidewalk where the Via Verde trail is on Morrison Road
    - iii. The design team and City is assuming two RFB signals can be provided at the crossings

- iv. There is some interest in keeping bikes and pedestrians on opposite sides of the street
  1. Street will need to accommodate pedestrians on both sides regardless of which side the trail ends up on
  2. The design team can evaluate markings/paving to define zone for bikes and peds
15. **General comment:** BuCU representative is interested in seeing examples of streets that have business, but provide parking off street or not at all
16. How will the project accommodate trucks and deliveries to existing businesses?
  - a. Classing of trucks is an issue
  - b. Proposed design will meet emergency and fire truck requirements – anything above that could be a challenge
  - c. Will be a business-to-business issue
17. Parking in general: The challenge is a question of convenience vs. safety. While parking is convenient and necessary, it can create safety issues.
  - a. This needs to go to the community to evaluate which is a priority (convenience vs. safety)
18. **General Comment:** Potential to evaluate grants for infrastructure from an equity perspective
19. **General Comment:** The final drawings will show specifics on new and existing utilities and infrastructure

#### **PLAZAS:**

20. If the plazas can be made to be safe and feel safe, some elements of play should be considered
21. The plazas should have a lot of flexibility built in.
  - Desired elements (beyond the earlier public engagement plans)
    - Convenient outlets on the ground or low on poles for events and vendors
    - Small stage potentially
    - Smaller, intimately scaled spaces
    - Street vendors
22. How does the group see the difference in the plazas?
  - a. -Plaza Tejido – A popular plaza in Mexico
    - i. Selling of fabrics, textiles, woven elements, etc.
    - ii. Street vendors
    - iii. Tejido – maybe calmer and less active
23. A cross-street sign or gateway could be great to help calm traffic and define that the plazas are the heart of the district
24. Can look at using painting on the ground and murals on the streets to calm traffic and provide art / community
25. What is the best way to incorporate art?
  - a. Currently there is a pattern in the district using tile, stone, brick etc with engraving etc.
  - b. A hands-on community approach is desired
26. Seating needs to be realistic – for all ages
27. Plazas and public realm should be nostalgic feeling – reflect the culture
  - a. For example: Westwood Park Shade structure
  - b. Ensure there is proper lighting – Color and vibrancy are okay, but most importantly, it needs to be safe.