

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

June 1, 2015

MEMO TO: Ruffin Hall, City Manager
FROM: Ben Canada, Capital Improvement Program Manager
SUBJECT: Budget Note 06 – Potential Investments in the Proposed South Park Heritage Walk

In October 2014, representatives of the South Park East Raleigh Neighborhood Association (SPERNA) shared with City Council a vision plan for a South Park Heritage Walk capital investment. Council received the report as information and requested that staff review and respond to the vision plan. This memorandum provides background information, summarizes the city staff's review, and provides options to advance this proposal.

Background

In FY2009, City Council appropriated \$50,000 to SPERNA to develop historic documentation for East Raleigh. SPERNA led this project, collaborating with North Carolina State University (NCSU), Shaw University, Richard B. Harrison Library, and area residents. The report was prepared by NCSU faculty and students, who documented the history of the South Park neighborhood and gathered input from community stakeholders. Periodically, throughout the project, SPERNA and NCSU faculty and students reached out to city staff for selected information.

At the October 7, 2014 Council meeting, representatives of SPERNA presented a report to Council titled *South Park Heritage Walk Project*. The report includes historical context of the South Park neighborhood and a vision plan for future infrastructure and cultural investments. These potential investments include streetscape improvements, park improvements, and new historic and cultural assets along 2.6 miles of roadway and park trails.

City Staff Review

Staff have reviewed the South Park Heritage Walk proposal and offer these reflections.

The proposal is considered a "vision plan." It provides historical context and ideas for future capital investments. Generally, for a project to compete for funding, a vision plan needs to be further planned and programmed to advance the concepts into a detailed plan with defined construction elements, estimated costs. Additional work is also needed to coordinate steps with other city plans and state agencies. Options to fund additional planning are summarized below.

City-funded projects follow specific processes for public engagement. While the NCSU faculty and students who drafted the proposal engaged the community, staff recommend that if the proposal becomes a city project, the city's public engagement process be followed to supplement their efforts. This includes broadly advertising meetings, involving all impacted stakeholders, and holding public hearings.

Once project managers complete a public process and more planning work, components of the proposal would be better defined. At that time, staff could assess the proposal's costs and benefits, as well consider tradeoffs with other projects competing for city resources. While the

Heritage Walk has not been planned fully enough to provide an accurate cost estimate, based on the cost of other streetscape and parks projects, implementing the full vision would likely require several million dollars.

Options to Advance the Proposal

Should Council wish to further explore development opportunities with this proposal, there are a range of options committing different levels of city resources.

Option 1 – Include the Heritage Walk vision plan in public engagement processes for funded projects.

Public engagement processes have begun for the Moore Square project, and will be conducted for the upcoming improvements to John Chavis Memorial Park. Staff can introduce components of the Heritage Walk proposal into these public processes, in which stakeholders will provide input on park programming and priorities. This option ensures components of the Heritage Walk vision plan are considered, though does not ensure those components are implemented.

This option does not require additional funding. In May 2014, City Council approved \$12.6 million in two-thirds bonds for Moore Square. The 2014 parks bond package allocates \$12.5 million for John Chavis Memorial Park.

Option 2 – Council selects components of the Heritage Walk vision for additional planning.

City Council could select components from the Heritage Walk vision to pursue and appropriate funds for planning and programming. For example, one option could be to plan the Chavis Way portion of the proposed walk connecting Moore Square to Chavis Park (see p. 53 of the report). Another option would be to fund only the historic signage and related smartphone application containing oral histories (referenced on p. 46 of the report).

This option would produce a more detailed plan for the selected components, including cost estimates for implementation.

The cost of individual components varies greatly depending on the scale and construction. Should Council express interest in selected components, staff is prepared to develop cost estimates.

Option 3 – Appropriate funds to complete a feasibility study and plan all the feasible components.

The first step in programming and design would be to complete a feasibility study. The feasibility study would examine each proposed component for restrictions on use, ownership, consistency with other city plans, and development regulations relating to stormwater management, zoning, and parking. Staff would also conduct a public engagement process. The feasibility study would produce cost estimates for all feasible components, and prepare the city to design and implement the project.

Staff estimate that \$250,000 would be a sufficient amount to complete a feasibility study and plan the proposal's feasible components.

Potential Funding Sources

Should Council wish to fund additional work on the proposal, there are several options. City Council might consider some projects in the Proposed Capital Improvement Program a lower priority, and could reprogram funding from another project to support this study. Also, should Council choose to increase the property tax rate and fund the targeted economic development infrastructure program, this could be an appropriate project. Lastly, project savings are available to cover some additional planning efforts. While the accumulated project savings are

available, appropriating savings for this proposal leaves less funding available for other needs that Council may consider. This would also leave less funding available for unanticipated needs and next year's capital process.

Other Considerations

City Council might consider taking no action at this time, so that staff can study how to incorporate this vision plan into existing Strategic Plan initiatives. The Heritage Walk vision may complement the Economic Development and Innovation key focus area, which includes an objective to "Establish a strong economic development program that utilizes strategic policies and a comprehensive tool kit of resources to strengthen Raleigh and encourages business investment in all parts of the City." The proposal may also complement the Arts and Cultural Resources key focus area, which includes an objective to "Protect, enhance and develop unique places that reflect the City's character, history, and values." Over the next several months, city staff will begin developing detailed plans to achieve the Strategic Plan initiatives.

There may be more funding opportunities in the future to support this proposal. Once planned, some components may be eligible for federal grants. The project could also be included in a future transportation bond package. The vision plan includes significant streetscape improvements, including new sidewalks, intersection improvements, signage, tree plantings, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements.

If you or Council Members have additional questions regarding the Heritage Walk proposal, or would like to see additional details, please let us know.

