

81 AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION: ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Located within Edmonton's Old Strathcona neighborhood, 81 Avenue between 104 Street and Gateway Boulevard is a collector roadway with commercial buildings along both sides.

As part of the City's Neighbourhood Renewal Program (NRP), 81 Avenue from 104 Street to Gateway Boulevard is anticipated for reconstruction in 2025.

The project's primary goal is to address deteriorating road and sidewalk conditions and provide preventative renewal measures to maintain the safety of all users.

As part of the reconstruction works, the City identified opportunities for improvements to the public realm and pedestrian experience through sidewalk widening, streetlight replacement and the addition of street furniture and landscaping.

The Concept Plan

The Concept Plan offers an opportunity to realize the potential of the avenue. Its development was guided by City policies, technical requirements and stakeholder feedback.

The Engagement Process

The engagement approach focused on engagement with key stakeholders (i.e., property and business owners) at the ADVISE level of the Public Engagement spectrum to help inform the concept design. Broader engagement with the general public was determined to not be required for this project, as there were no meaningful opportunities for the public to influence the design of the reconstruction project.

Property owners with properties and buildings along 81 Avenue were identified as stakeholders for the project. In addition, project information was shared with the Old Strathcona Business Association (OSBA) and the Queen Alexandra Community League.

Two rounds of engagement were held. The first round introduced the project, gathered ideas and perspectives on the project's opportunities and potential, and sought input on what would be possible and preferable along the avenue. Based on the first round of engagement, the City created a draft Concept Plan that they then presented to the stakeholders during the second round of engagement.

Results

During the first round, the City reached out to stakeholders to present the overall project and to receive feedback on ideas and preferences that could be integrated into a concept plan. The draft Concept Plan was developed based on input gathered during the initial engagement held in March and April 2023. The plan was presented during the second round of meetings in July and August 2023.

First Round: Project Introduction and Input into the Concept Plan

March and April 2023

What we heard from stakeholders in the first round included the following:

- Property owners welcomed the improvements and were cautiously optimistic that the changes would create a vibrant street attracting more people
- Patios, bike racks and pedestrian-friendly features were supported
- Parking was considered a valuable asset, and the City was encouraged to retain as much parking as possible; and
- Social disorder and vandalism were prime areas of concern.

Second Round: Feedback on the Draft Concept Plan

July and August 2023

In developing the draft concept plan, the City considered:

- Stakeholder input;

- City policies and plans; and
- Technical feasibility and requirements.

Overall, the Concept Plan was supported by stakeholders. Feedback included:

- Support for the overall design, particularly the replacement and widening of the sidewalks, resulting in a friendlier pedestrian realm
- The importance of additional lighting, especially the heritage lighting consistent with current streetlights in Old Strathcona
- A preference to include electrical infrastructure to enable lighting in trees and on patios
- Enthusiasm for the street to be reconstructed to better accommodate storefront patios and seating areas
- Agreement that trees and planters, if maintained, would add to the ambiance and warmth of the street
- A strong desire to maintain both accesses into the Bulk Barn/Shoppers Drug Mart property

Specific areas of conversation included:

Parking

Stakeholders valued parking spaces, especially in front of their tenants' business operations. They also appreciated the curb bulb-outs that would make the avenue more friendly to pedestrians and the patio space created in the plan. Stakeholders acknowledged that there would be tradeoffs with the new plan and wondered how many stalls would be removed in the area to accommodate patios and bulb-outs.

The tenants understood that parking stalls would be reduced. While the plan worked to maintain as much parking as possible, a combination of accommodating patio space, curb bulb-outs and replacing angle parking with parallel parking contributed to a decrease in parking spaces. Once a more detailed design is complete, the City will have a better estimate of how many stalls will be removed.

Placement of trees

Participants welcomed additional trees in the area and acknowledged that they would create a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere. Some expressed concern that the trees may screen their signage, interfere with passengers getting in and out of vehicles, or potentially clog up chiller intake(s). While City policy identifies a requirement for trees along the avenue, the City will consider these concerns when the exact locations for trees are determined.

Taxes

Participants were pleased that no local improvement tax or tax increase was associated with this project.

Bioswales

While planters were welcome, participants wondered if environmentally friendly bioswales had been considered. Bioswales are vegetated, shallow, attractively landscaped depressions designed to capture, treat, and infiltrate stormwater runoff as it moves downstream. Although the team liked the idea of bioswales, the

landscape architects noted bioswales within the furnishings zone would hinder access to and from the parked cars in the parking lanes.

Construction schedule

Construction is anticipated to begin in 2024. The Contractor will develop a detailed construction schedule, pre-construction communications plans with stakeholders and identify any road and sidewalk impacts or disruptions. The City will ensure that the construction project manager is in regular communication with the stakeholders throughout the construction period.

Patios

Stakeholders were excited about the new patios and improvements to existing patios. Some expressed concern over the permitting process required to serve food and beverages on their new patios. The team met with the City's permitting group in late August to discuss the project and will continue to work with them as the new patios are developed.

Next Steps

The project team is developing the preferred Concept Plan based on stakeholder feedback, City policies and plans, technical feasibility and requirements. The preferred concept plan will be shared on the project webpage at edmonton.ca/81Avenue.