



# France Avenue urban design workshop

7:00 pm, 7 July 2013

Public Works Community Room, 7450 Metro Boulevard

## Meeting notes

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- 1 Wayne Houle (City Engineer) reviewed the status of the pedestrian improvement project.
- 2 Michael Schroeder (consultant) reviewed the input provided from meeting participants during meeting one. The summary is attached at the end of these notes.
- 3 Michael Schroeder reviewed a set of draft principles for urban design for France Avenue. While not every aspect of the draft was review, several key elements were identified and discussed. In particular, meeting participants were encouraged by terms and phrases that would seem to set a different direction for the evolution of the corridor. The idea of France Avenue as a “people magnet,” the focus on mobility beyond cars, and the notion of “pools of human activity” were seen as important statements embodied in the draft principles.
- 4 Michael Schroeder reviewed a set of drawings depicting broad directions for urban design, noting the ways in which the draft urban design principles might be found in the concept drawings. As a part of the presentation, he noted conditions demonstrated in a set of drawings that were first shared during meeting one.

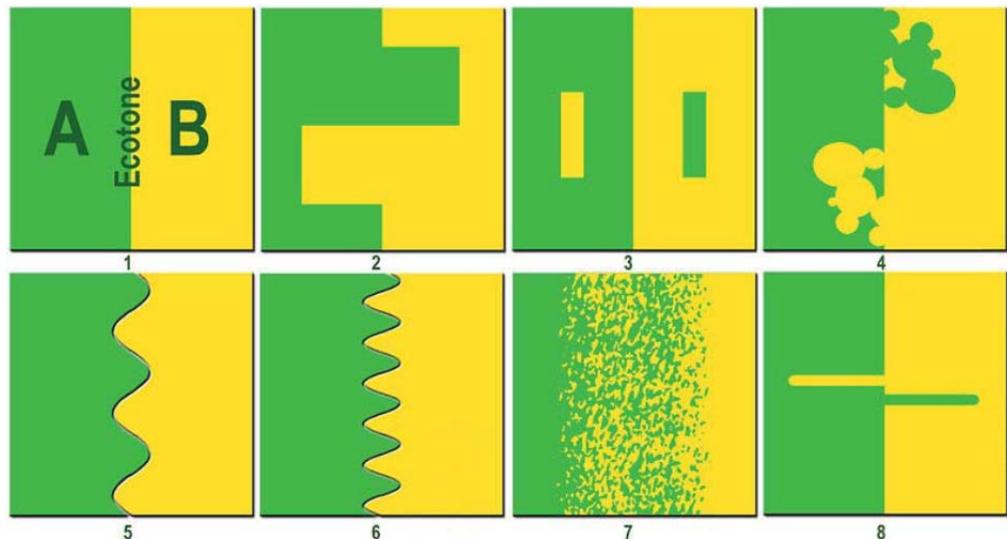
It was noted that the urban design concept needed to direct attention to things other than a pattern of trees in boulevards, sidewalks, and street lighting. Michael Schroeder reminded meeting participants that, during the first meeting, he noted the desire to first think about the corridor in ways that did not rely upon things,” but rather to focus on ideas (the urban design principles).

The patterns demonstrated in the drawings highlighted three precincts that characterize underlying patterns of development and the potential for recognizing unique corridor character and allowing for new development that might perpetuate those patterns. The drawings also reflected streetscape strategies recognizing the desired evolution of the public realm as part of the pedestrian improvement

project. The strategies expand beyond the “things” (trees in boulevards, sidewalks, and street lighting) to include the following:

- Employ elements capable of establishing a consistent, scale-appropriate, and compelling identity along the length of the corridor;
- Vary a family of streetscape elements to recognize the differing character of each of the three corridor precincts;
- Encourage the creation of visible activity spaces as key components of private sector development that results in the sense of “pools” of human activity;
- Develop a streetscape for crossing streets to draw non-motorists to France Avenue, particularly at enhanced intersections;
- Determine appropriate locations for a limited number of special streetscape features to mark the corridor, to bridge France Avenue to the rest of the community, and to highlight significant destinations;
- Focus on elements that encourage human activity but lend a sense of France Avenue to motorists; and
- Encourage the creation of private realm landscapes that link development to the street, creating places accommodating human activity at the margins of parcels.

To reinforce the notion a streetscape that interacts across the public/private boundary, Michael Schroeder noted the following diagram (diagram credit: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:C3%89cotoneLamiotCommons4.jpg>):



Comments offered by meeting participants included the following:

- People use France Avenue as a way of reaching Centennial Lakes for a walk or run or people or families going to Byerly's.
- Pedestrians become safer and result in more pedestrian activity.



- Blocks without sidewalks are an issue.
  - Have property owners been engaged? For example, at US Bank—have they considered eliminating their drive-up tellers?
  - Tavern of France is a unique feature of the corridor (one of the “pools” of human activity). Is there a way to encourage other property owners to create outdoor space related to France Avenue?
  - This concept is appealing because it encourages people to walk—it encourages activity. Bike paths need to be considered.
  - How can this process be advanced with zoning/ordinance changes? They are necessary because the improvements extend beyond the public right-of-way. Michael Schroeder noted that the process of updating the comprehensive plan is approaching (we’re halfway through the current time period). It’s not just about fixing the plan (there are reasonable and supporting elements in the current plan), it’s about implementation of the broad directions of the plan. Michael Schroeder noted that, in the comprehensive plan, France Avenue is highlighted as a “grand avenue,” a policy direction supported by this urban design effort.
  - It is important that early dollars—those dedicated to the current pedestrian improvement project—be invested wisely so that other actions follow logically.
  - The Chamber indicated that it is excited by the plans and will encourage their members to participate.
  - This part of Edina—the France Avenue corridor—is seeing increasing diversity. The community needs to continue encouraging this and make the place more welcome (more walkable, safer).
  - France Avenue as a transit corridor should be considered—a way to get to and from jobs on France Avenue.
  - The current focus is directed to three intersections (66<sup>th</sup> Street, 70<sup>th</sup> Street, and 76<sup>th</sup> Street). More funding is needed to elongate the project area.
- 5 The next meeting will be scheduled for mid-August. An announcement will be sent in advance of the meeting.

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# France Avenue urban design workshop

## Meeting notes

Page 4



# France Avenue urban design workshop

7:00 pm, 22 April 2013

Public Works Community Room, 7450 Metro Boulevard

## Meeting notes

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- 1 Wayne Houle (City Engineer) introduced the project and described the general process for considering further urban design for France Avenue. The currently planned pedestrian improvements for the corridor were outlined.
- 2 Michael Schroeder (consultant) noted the purpose of the urban design workshop process was an outgrowth of the France Avenue pedestrian improvements project, that the intention was to work with stakeholders to define issues and directions, and then articulate a series of statements that would guide further evolution of France Avenue. He suggested this process would not result in a definitive plan, but rather would establish a series of guiding principles. He further noted that this process would not resolve or address every issue; it would focus on areas of agreement so that progress might continue. Areas of disagreement (always possible on public improvement projects) would be address in the context of agreed upon directions for change (that is, the guiding principles will provide focus that allows areas of disagreement to be resolved).
- 3 Michael Schroeder reviewed a brief PowerPoint highlighting a definition of urban design, noting in particular that urban design is not simply things added to the public realm.
- 4 Chuck Rickart (consultant) reviewed the planned pedestrian improvements for France Avenue.
- 5 Michael Schroeder briefly described the context for urban design. A series of mapped contexts were displayed, although focus was not directed to them. The maps indicated a breakdown of conditions present along the France Avenue corridor that might suggest appropriate directions for urban design thoughts.
- 6 Michael Schroeder introduced a workshop session directed to gaining input from those present through responses to four broad areas of inquiry. A meeting participant asked if this would be an appropriate time to share some of her thoughts about the corridor, noting that France Avenue should be a full use street, that this is



a huge regional destination, that people don't think of walking of France Avenue, that the environment is critical, that the corridor should have flair (art bus stops, murals, sidewalk poetry), and that this is someone's neighborhood.

a. Participants were asked to describe the character, qualities, or experience of France Avenue today, using single words. Responses included:

- Dangerous
- Bland
- Functional
- Busy
- wide
- Fast
- Concrete
- Boring
- Potential
- parking lots
- Linear
- Congested
- Wall
- Avoidance
- uninviting
- Vast
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b. Participants were asked to describe the character, qualities, or experience of France Avenue as they would like it to be in the future, using single words. Responses included:

- Safe
- Welcoming
- Artistic
- Friendly
- Character
- Walkable
- Memorable
- Sustainable
- Greener
- Connected
- Coordinated
- Accessible
- Human-scale
- Multi-modal
- Accommodating
- Premier
- Fabulous France
- Destination
- Bike-able
- Identifiable
- Permeable

c. Participants were asked to think about the corridor from the perspective of a neighbor (a stationary observer like a resident, an employee) and a traveler (a dynamic observer like a motorist, a transit user, a restaurant patron or movie goer, a shopper) to identify the most significant issues for the corridor. Responses included:

- Not attractive, a "concrete river," it reverberates
- Daunting
- Feels unsafe, even if it's only the perception
- Hard to cross, hard to move along it for pedestrians
- Maintenance loses to winter
- No buffer, no separation
- Street crossings are not safe
- Interfering signage
- Moving from place to place is tiring
- Can only walk on one side of the street (76<sup>th</sup> Street to north)
- People don't visit the Promenade
- This is the corridor of innovation
- Navigating France is difficult, especially for first time visitor
- Doesn't accommodate transit users
- Potential is in tact
- Northern end is unsafe
- Could use some wayfinding
- No welcoming signage



- d. Participants were asked to highlight those “things” that make people remember or think about France Avenue—those things that lend a sense of identity to the corridor. Responses included:
- What happens on either side of France Avenue—school, pool, then movies, shopping, dining—it’s conducive to movement
  - Places to go, people need to be seen
  - Great assets along the entire street; need to safely connect some of the dots; it needs to be bike and pedestrian-friendly
  - Not much is vacant or for lease—people come here
  - Not quite frenetic, but just right (better than San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles); it’s the best of both worlds; busy but not too busy; shopping but not overload
  - Gateways, skyways, world-class health facilities, amazing retail, world-class office, parks, and parking
  - Multi-use
  - Nature fascination
  - Solution to ‘A’-Minor Arterial—this should become the model
- e. Participants were asked to share their ideas about the France Avenue that they would like to see in the future, considering ideas for both the public and private realms. Responses included:
- A walking tour of innovation
  - Able to walk at a steady pace along the corridor
  - Facilitate other modes, park at Southdale, cross streets to pleasantly get to Centennial Lakes
  - Get rid of parking lots to get people to walk
  - Connectivity—make it work for people who want to spend five hours here
  - Local circulator—use as a pilot
  - All season accessibility
  - Health, innovation, the threshold at the skyway
  - Lighting at the right scale—special and big
  - Don’t let it be just a through corridor
  - Make use of the wasted space (like the medians on York and some on France)
  - France Avenue is the connector—from 50<sup>th</sup> and France to Southdale
- f. Participants asked about other streets of similar scale with good urban design solutions. Discussion of similar streets suggested Cretin Avenue, Fairview Avenue, Lyndale Avenue, and Glumack Drive.
- 7 The consultant team will assemble the responses and begin formulating a series of draft statements and concepts that might form the basis for an urban design



France Avenue  
urban design workshop

Meeting notes

Page 7

France Avenue  
urban design workshop

Meeting notes

Page 4

direction. That will be the focus of a meeting with the ETC, likely in a similar format to this workshop.

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France Avenue  
urban design workshop

DRAFT 9 July 2013



Corridor element	Public Realm	Interface	Private Realm
<b>Identity</b>	Use the public realm to establish a singular identity for the corridor and a strong sense of a continuous public realm, but one that allows itself to be extended along one of the community's primary north-south connector streets.	Use elements that establish an enduring and endearing identity for France Avenue, with a scale that matches the opportunities of the corridor.	Recognize the subtle character changes of development along the corridor by defining precincts that help organize the private realm.
<b>Function</b>	Balance the available public realm to accommodate all reasonable modes of movement, and encourage borrowing from the private realm when adequate facilities cannot be accommodated within the right-of-way.	Design buildings and intersections to create spaces of activity and interest for pedestrians and focal points that mark a motorist's journey along the corridor.	Allow development to be directed by forces of the market, but shaped by an orientation to the street, particularly at intersections so the activities of a building can be extended to the life of the street.
<b>Connection</b>	Establish a continuous character for France Avenue that is firmly anchored at each end of the corridor.	Recognize the crossing streets as part of the fabric of France Avenue that brings activity to the corridor and link resources of the district to nearby neighborhoods and the rest of the community.	Provide a pedestrian connection between every building and France Avenue that complements the character and qualities of the public realm, but with distinctions that allow the connection to be unique to the building.
<b>Accommodation</b>	Direct attention to the experience of the pedestrian in order to encourage a latent desire to move along the corridor by modes other than by car.	Design the interface as a place of value rather than a place of neglect (eliminate the idea of a landscape-only setback).	Let development along the corridor to evolve, bringing a diversity of experiences along its length without being prescriptive about use and resulting in compatibility without uniformity.
<b>Health</b>	Employ elements that encourage healthy human use of the corridor and responsible treatment of limited right-of-way.	Open buildings to the street and provide public realm connections that encourage walking along the corridor; infuse the corridor with enticements that draw human activity to the public realm.	Promote the creation of significant tree canopy that extends as near the street as possible and stormwater management that becomes an inviting part of the landscape.
<b>Innovation</b>	France Avenue demonstrates the most forward-looking practices in public transportation and state of the art treatments in public space design and amenities.	Conceive of the interface as the ecotone of France Avenue—a place that is neither field nor forest, but provides a place for the life of the street.	Incorporate art as a thought process in the design of sites and buildings; encourage development that sustains itself through years of use.