

Franklin Ave Redevelopment Study Phase II
Public Advisory Committee Meeting
September 23, 2014
Room 24, City Hall

Committee Members: Markos Miller, Christian MilNeil, Jamie Parker, Jon Graback, Elizabeth Hognlund, Sally Oldham, Alex Landry, Hugh Nazor, Kevin Donoghue, Bill Hall, Steve Hewins, Bob Stevens, Mark Adelson, Hank Berg, Chris O’Neil

Staff: Mike Bobinsky and Jeremiah Bartlett, City of Portland Public Services; Alex Jaegerman, City of Portland Planning Department; Darryl Belz, MaineDOT; Carl Eppich, PACTS; Tegin Teich Bennett, Catherine Offenbergl and Laura Riegel, IBI Group; Randall Dunton, Gorrill-Palmer; Carol Morris and Scott Hastings, Morris Communications

Attending: Nir Buras

Meeting started at 6:03pm

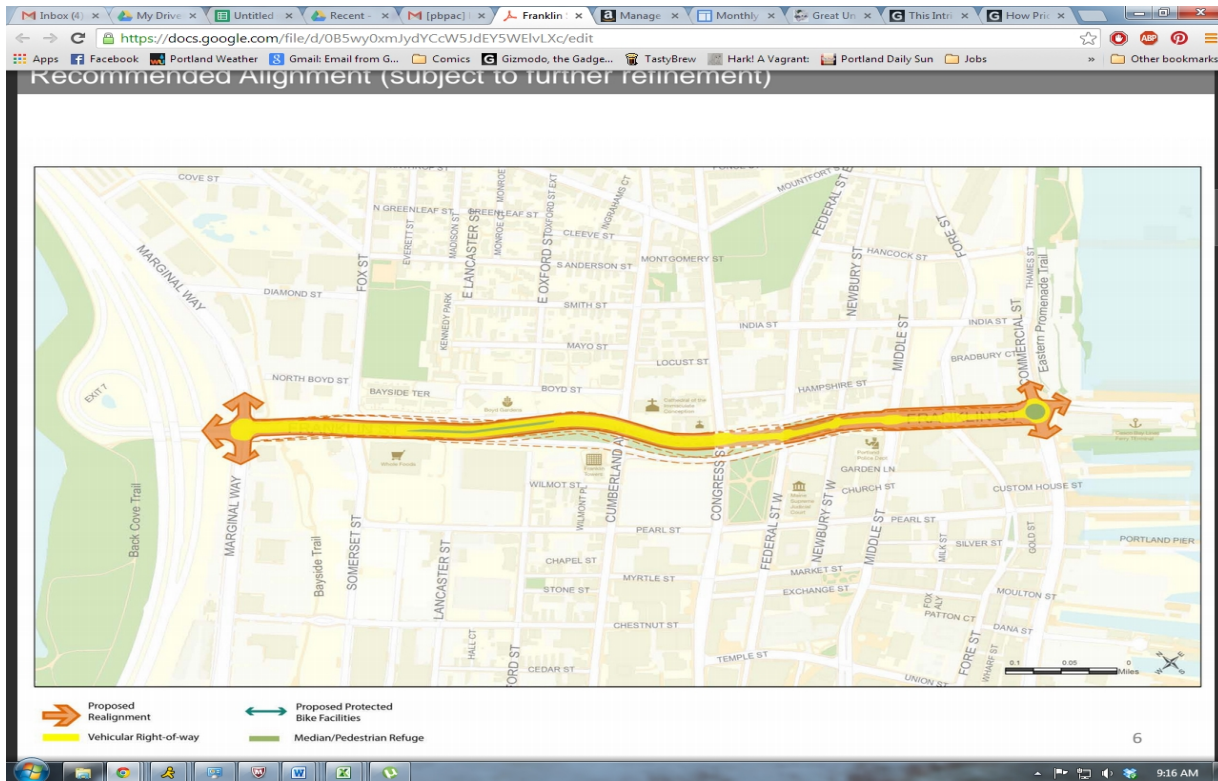
Mike Bobinsky, director of the City of Portland Public Services department, opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. He then introduced Catherine Offenbergl of IBI Group.

Catherine is taking over as project lead from Tegin Teich as has left IBI to join the staff of the City of Cambridge, Mass. There will be a significant transition period to make sure that everyone is up to speed and apprised of all details of the project before Tegin leaves.

Carol Morris of Morris Communications took the floor and reviewed the agenda for the meeting. She noted that this meeting was for the purpose of presenting the preliminary recommendations to the PAC for their input before the upcoming public meeting. After the public workshop, the IBI team will refine recommendations and work to create the draft recommendation report that will be reviewed by the PAC in January.

Tegin Teich then took over to present the preliminary recommendations, beginning with the alignment. The recommended alignment is a hybrid of the three presented earlier in the project, informed by the PAC and public comments (Figure 1). It was noted that there are still some questions about the alignment between Cumberland and Federal Streets and that the PAC would discuss that section separately. The PAC had raised questions about the curve in the alignment on Google Groups previous to the meeting and Tegin explained that this curve was for a number of reasons, including traffic calming, accommodation of future transit, and lining up with the existing curb line. A question had also been raised about the potential for putting an active median “park” in the section approaching Commercial street and Tegin said that the team had moved away from this in interests of narrowing the road width as desired by the PAC as well as the challenges inherent in getting people to activate the space.

Figure 1: Proposed Street Alignment



A cross section of the redesigned road between Marginal and Cumberland was presented, showing a reduction in roadway width of almost 100 feet. It was also noted that the current proposed width would allow for restriping to create dedicated transit lanes should that desire arise, but that that would require a careful change of how bikes use the road.

A question was asked about the 3-foot buffer between the vehicle lanes and the bike lanes.

Tegin answered that this was a painted buffer zone and that there would not be any physical barrier separating the modes for ease of maintenance.

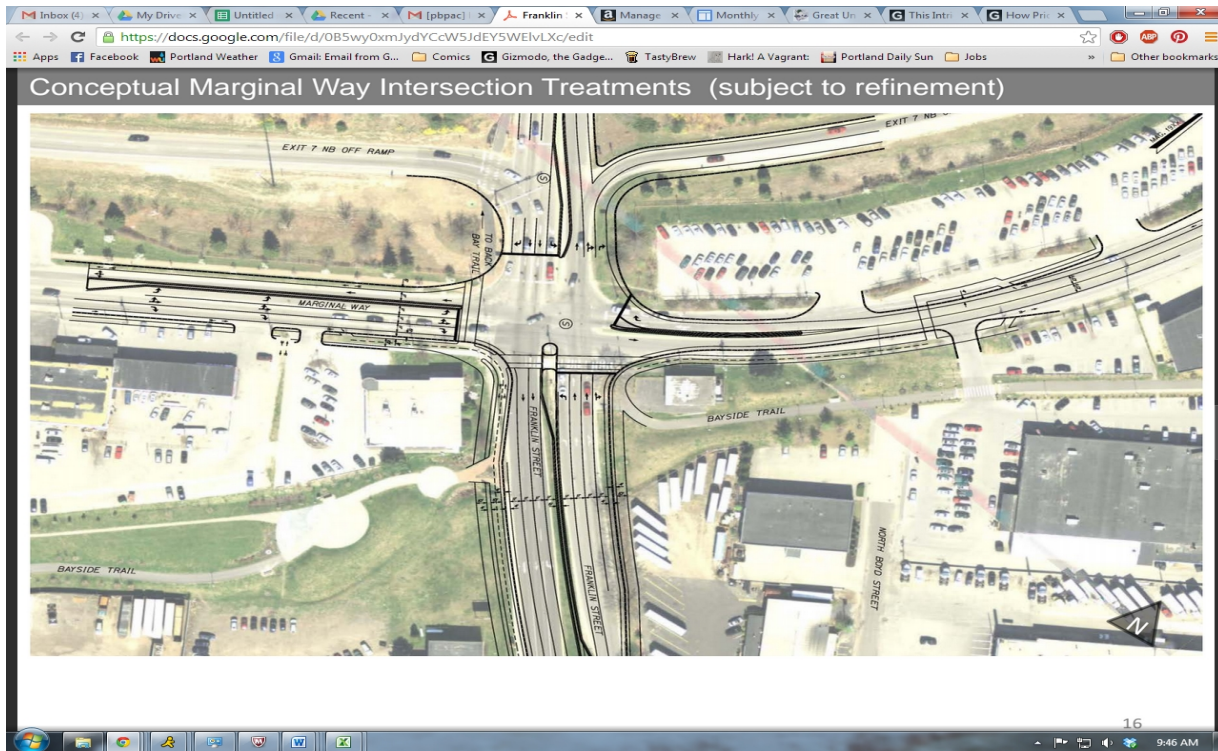
Tegin moved on to transit recommendations. Potential parallel bus routes were presented and the potential for a shuttle running the length of Franklin was discussed. It was noted that the shuttle would likely have limited ridership at least to start but would be a good preliminary step to full bus service on the corridor.

Tegin explained that the team would be recommending 3-4 story limits on redevelopment in the area based on a wide range of feedback, with a focus on certain nodal areas, particularly where Franklin crosses Congress. She recommended that the city undertake a separate process to examine the development opportunities and how they would approach them.

At this point the PAC was asked to provide written comments on the posters hung around the room. These posters dealt with elements of the project where input from the PAC and the public had been sufficiently collected. After the comments were completed, Markos Miller, co-chair of the PAC, provided a brief summary of comments for the group.

At this point Tegin presented the current proposal for the Marginal Way intersection. She noted that the team had found this intersection particularly challenging with its potential to back up onto the highway and its current congestion issues. The biggest change under the current proposal would be that westbound traffic on Marginal Way coming from the East Bayside neighborhood would only be allowed to take a right turn on to the highway (Figure 2). Straight and left turn movements would not be allowed. The study team believed that given the very low traffic volumes using these movements, this could be an acceptable solution.

Figure 2: Proposed Marginal Way Intersection



Carol went to the floor to discuss a meeting the team had with residents and businesses of the East Bayside neighborhood to discuss this intersection. Five different treatments of the intersection were presented to them along with their pros and cons as determined by the consulting team’s analysis. The option presented to the PAC was the one picked by this group as the lesser evil – with the caveat that improvements to Fox were needed to balance the change. It was seen as practical, did not isolate the neighborhood, and safer than the other options.

A question was asked about how bikes would navigate the intersection.

Tegin responded that the details were still being worked out but did point to a two-way cycle track in the proposed intersection that would have all cyclists traveling along Marginal Way to cross on the Peninsula side of the intersection. Cyclists coming from East Bayside on Marginal Way would have to take the cycle track as the straight and left turn movements would not exist.

There was some discussion about how this would affect the traffic that does want to stay on the peninsula. There was no consensus and the team is still working on a recommended route. The consulting team did feel that traffic volumes were low enough that there would not be an undue impact on any one place.

A question was asked why such a dramatic change was required.

Randall Dunton, traffic engineer for Gorrill Palmer, responded that the intersection was already over capacity and that that would only get worse in the future. The remove of the movements in question would remove an entire phase from the traffic signals giving more green time to the other movements allowing traffic to flow easier. It would also allow for the pedestrian crossings to go from double phase to single phase, which is a big improvement for pedestrian safety.

A question was asked if it would be possible to just make the removed movements have very long reds rather than removing them completely.

Randall responded that the real gain came from removing the phase and even a less frequent phase would not see the same gains.

A PAC member voiced some concerns about the fact that two legs of the intersection lacked crosswalks, noting that the desire paths exist around the park and ride corner, showing that there is a demand for crossings there. They also felt that bicyclists would be put in a very bad spot if they were to unknowingly come upon the right turn only movement given that that right turn is onto the highway. They voiced an opinion that maybe the intersection volume would not be getting much worse as they felt the traffic models were overly generous in the amount of future cars they expected.

Another PAC member agreed and noted that were a good number of pedestrians in that area and they would not go all the way around the intersection just because that is where the cross walks are. They felt that drivers already avoided the intersection due to congestion issues and that if you were to further inconvenience them that would lower traffic volumes. They voiced disapproval of the fact that Franklin added two lanes at this point, becoming much wider.

Randall pointed out that the lanes were not carried through beyond the intersection.

Jeremiah Bartlett, City Traffic Systems Engineer, spoke about how he had been working with this intersection for 15 years and how difficult it was. While he agreed this wasn't an ideal solution, he felt it did a lot right; keeping the widening restricted to as close to the highway as

possible, for example. He did agree that the lack of pedestrian accommodations on two legs was a concern that should be revisited. He also noted that anything done with this interchange would have implications for wider areas of the city such as the other I-295 interchanges on the peninsula. While he acknowledged that mode shift was important, he advised the PAC to keep in mind that the increase in development on the peninsula was going to bring more traffic through this already overburdened intersection even if all the new trips generated were to come via a mode other than the single occupancy automobile. He felt that this increase is a realistic outcome for the area.

Markos noted that he was consulted in the early versions of this design and that he liked it for its willingness to think outside the box and make hard choices like removing movements. He did point out the lack of pedestrian accommodations and noted how the PAC has consistently been for improved and pervasive pedestrian service. He was also concerned for the added lanes and overall size of the intersection, adding that it felt the intersection was designed for cars and any bike and pedestrian accommodations were tacked on afterwards rather than looking at it comprehensively.

City Councilor Kevin Donoghue said that he was interested on the hearing more about the pros and cons of inconveniencing the movements rather than removing them. He noted that this configuration would require a lot of signage in order to make it work properly, which would be easier if people were given another option even if it is an inconvenient one.

Darryl Belz of MaineDOT noted that MaineDOT had looked at removing lefts but keeping straight movements in the past and the only way to see real improvements was to remove the phase entirely.

Tegin explained that the next steps for the intersection would involve them making some choices based on the feedback from the PAC and then the public workshop. She also noted that details such as the exact locations of the stop lines were not in the scope of this phase of the project and would have to be determined as part of the design phase.

Tegin presented the options for road alignment in the area between Cumberland Ave and Federal St. The first option did not expand the park at all and provided 22,700 square feet of new developable space. The second option allowed for an added 45-50 foot extension of the park and about 19,500 square feet of new developable land. The third option expanded the park as much as possible (a 75-80 foot extension) and added about 10,000 square feet of new developable land. All of the options are technically feasible. The group was then polled as to what they felt about the options.

The first PAC member felt option 2 was the best as it allowed a compromise between park expansion and development to activate that expansion.

The PAC member representing Franklin Towers said that his constituents were in favor of expanding the park as much as possible.

The next PAC member said that while they have long wanted more development for the India Street neighborhood, they did not feel any of the options adequately did that. Also they felt there should be now potential for development in front of the cathedral. Finally option three gave the best development options along Federal Street near the park, which was the best way to truly activate the park. Ultimately they were in favor of option 3.

The next PAC member noted that previously they had been leaning toward a compromise position but that with the presented options they liked option three the best.

A PAC member asked what the total number of new developable land was for the whole corridor.

Tegin answered that it was around 800,000 square feet.

The PAC member said that while they were in favor of more development, the numbers in question with this alignment issues were small compared to the overall number and so they were in favor of option 3.

The next PAC member was split between options 2 and 3 saying that they agreed there should not be development in front of the cathedral but that a larger park was not necessarily a better park. The development aspect was needed to get more people into the park.

The PAC member representing Portland Landmarks said they were in favor of option 3 for its historical significance and acknowledged that the federal reconnection and adjacent development were important to getting more people into the park. They also noted that while option 3 left a small strip of land for redevelopment on the east side of Franklin, the property immediately adjacent at the corner of Federal and Hampshire Streets was likely to be on the market soon and the properties could be combined.

The next PAC member was in favor of option 3. They reiterated the potential of adding the property at Hampshire and Federal to the new development parcel East of Franklin. They also noted that the reconnection of Federal will run into serious grade issues and that moving the road to the east will give more options for how to deal with that. Finally they felt that Lincoln Park was a real resource for the Bayside neighborhood and it should be made as good as possible for that reason.

The next PAC member felt that expanding the park was whimsy, not practicality and was in favor of improving what was there, and not expanding it. In their estimation option 2 gave the most usefully developable lots and for that they supported it.

The next PAC member was in favor of option 2 due to it having the most possibility for activating the park through new development.

The next PAC member favored option 2 for having a good balance between park and development.

The next PAC member favored a hybrid of 2 and 3 agreeing that the cathedral should not be developed in front of and that grade issues could be a real problem.

The next PAC member also favored a 2 and 3 hybrid for similar reasons. They felt that a compromise between park and development was desirable.

The next PAC member felt that the Federal St. reconnection was the important thing and they could get behind option 2, 3 or a hybrid of the two. If Federal St. was not reconnected, they felt the park would not improve so you might as well go with option 1.

The last PAC member mentioned that she remembered Franklin Park before it was shortened to make way for Franklin Arterial. It was a not a nice place and her mother did not allow her to go there. She did not understand the fixation on the size of the park and felt that at any size the park could be fixed up and made more active. While she leaned toward option 1, she felt that option 2 was the best, as it compromised with the people that wanted an expansion.

A PAC member who had had to leave early had left comments that he supported option 2 because it affords development opportunities to the east and allows for either future park expansion or future development opportunities to the west.

Carol noted that given the feedback, only options 2 and 3 would be brought to the public meeting.

Tegin then presented on the reconnections in the area. IBI recommends full restoration of Pearl and Wilmot streets if property ownership issues could be resolved. For connections across Franklin, the team acknowledged the PAC's desire for full reconnection if possible. Current modeling shows low traffic volumes at Lancaster and Oxford Streets that would not warrant a traffic signal at Franklin. Given the nature of Franklin Street, this led the IBI team to recommend only Bike/Ped connections here. Federal Street was recommended to be a right in right out only connection due to issues with the left turn lane approaching Congress Street. Newbury Street was recommended for a full reconnection.

Jeremiah noted that the challenge at Oxford Street was trying to evaluate what it could be versus what it is now. He explained that the city was undertaking a Bayside Connection study that would evaluate what would happen if Oxford Street was made a fully two-way street. He requested that the study make sure that conditions are left open to allow for future reconnections of streets.

Tegin agreed that this was important and said that the recommendations would not preclude any reconnections from happening in the future.

A PAC member reiterated this position but in regards to Federal Street.

There was some discussion about the reasons against a full reconnection of Federal Street, with the ultimate reason being the conflicts with the left turn lane approaching the Congress Street intersection.

A PAC member noted that they were interested in getting one good reconnection across Franklin and they didn't mind if it was Newbury or Federal Street but were not too concerned if it was both. They felt that Federal was the best option due to its width, connections, and relation to Lincoln Park.

Tegin then presented two options for bike treatments at intersections. The first involved diverting cyclists to the pedestrian crossings at intersections. She noted that they had gotten a lot of push back at previous meetings against taking bike users out of the roadway. In answer to this she presented bike boxes that give a leading space for bikes to use to get into left turn lanes during red lights.

A question was asked if there was any preferences or limits on these options based on intersection size.

Tegin responded that the options presented were most applicable at large intersections but were possible at a variety of sizes.

A PAC member said that they liked the idea of bike boxes for keeping cyclists in traffic but providing a less intimidating way to navigate it.

Some concerns were raised from multiple people about the effectiveness of either option and whether users, both cyclists and drivers, would respect the painted lines.

A show of hands was asked for in favor of separated crossings, bike boxes or "I don't know/other".

Separated: 2 Hand

Bike Boxes: 9 Hands

I don't know/Other: 4 Hands

A PAC member noted their ongoing concern that while at the meetings the language and desires for smaller, more approachable intersections were being expressed while all of the graphics presented depicted large, car-oriented intersections. He noted that time and time again the PAC was presented with images and concepts that showed larger, less pedestrian-friendly roads and intersections, and were told that the end result would not look like that. He felt that this was concerning at best and possibly outright misleading. The only examination of an actual Franklin St. intersection that had been presented was of Marginal Way and it showed an expansion. The PAC member concluded that he could not support the recommendations as

they were being presented.

Markos agreed that there was serious concern that this phase would not properly inform the next step design phase. This was of particular concern given the limited chance for public input in the design phase.

Tegin acknowledged that the graphics had flaws and could do a better job of reflecting the application of concepts to more accurate depictions of the corridor. She noted that while the final report would not design the intersections it would include the team's recommendations on specific topics such as turning radii.

A PAC member expressed concerns about things that are coming up, such as increasing turning radii to accommodate trucks, which would actually make parts of the area worse for pedestrians. They wanted to be clear that it was not just a graphics problem.

Discussion ensued, and the study team will consider how to address these concerns going forward.

Tegin moved on to the issue of parking. She noted that the only existing parking was a limited number of spots on the east side of Franklin between Middle and Commercial Streets. The IBI team felt that adding parking to the corridor increased the need for roadway width and increased bike and vehicular conflicts. Also the number of spots gained might actually be quite small given the space between intersections and the need for turning lanes.

A PAC member noted that they were not coming down either way on parking but that the inclusion or exclusion of parking would have a large impact on the types of development that could go in.

Another PAC member said they were against parking, particularly if the number of spots would be small.

Markos noted that some street parking can be very important to certain types of small retail but that he was not committed to having it.

Tegin noted that it was much easier to not put in parking and then add it than it was to add parking and then take it away.

A vote was taken and nine people voted in favor of not having parking, two voted for having parking, and four were unsure.

Carol reviewed the plans for the upcoming public workshop. It will be held at the Rines Auditorium at 5:30 pm on October 1st. There would be a short presentation and then the public would be asked to go to stations and provide written comment. She told the committee that she would be asking some of them to volunteer to help man stations. Following the public

meeting, a quick PAC meeting would be held to review the public input received. The next PAC meeting after that would be in January, when the team would present a draft recommendations report.

The meeting ended at 8:08 pm.