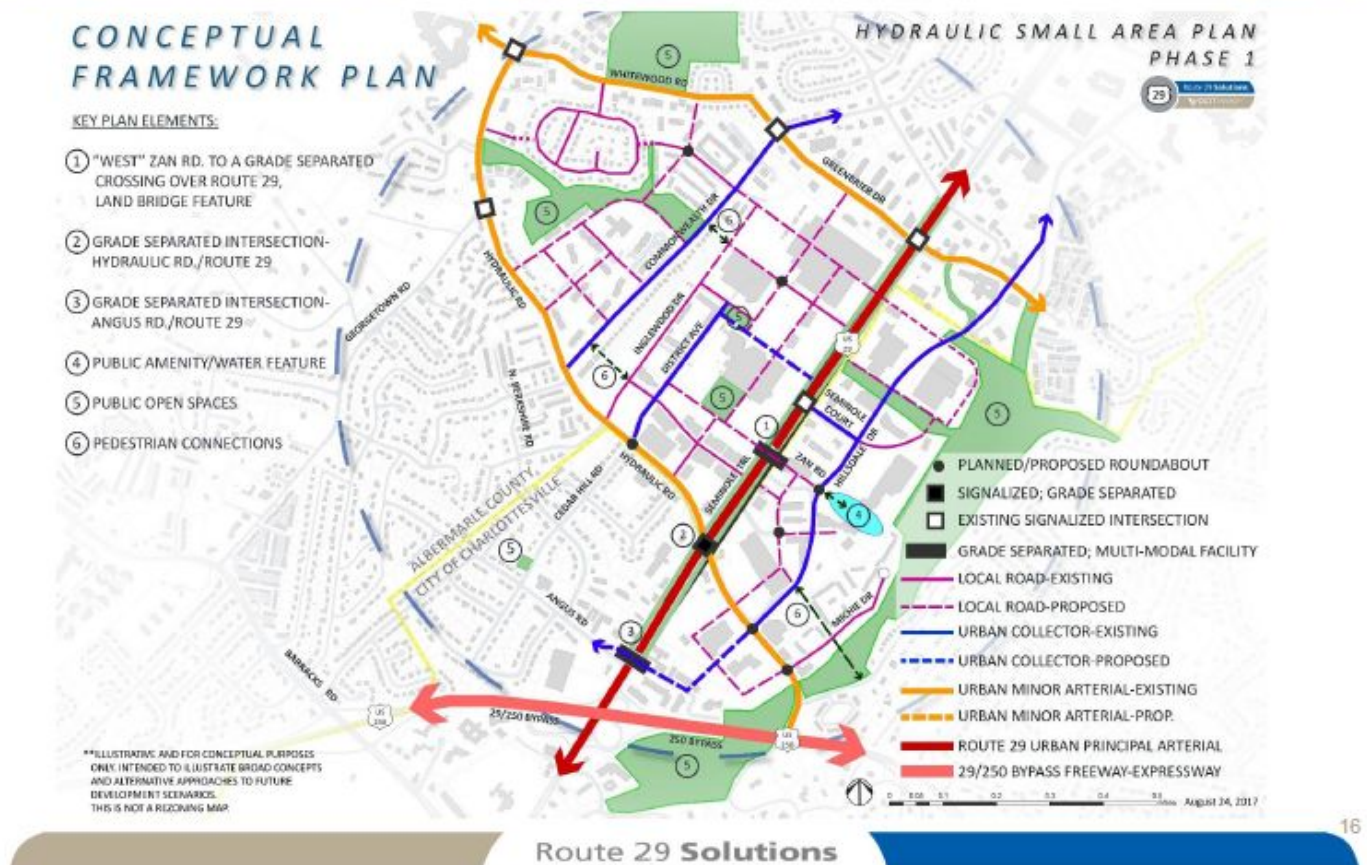


Hydraulic area redevelopment and transportation plan moving forward
written by Newspack Team | August 24, 2017



A draft conceptual plan to guide the future development of the area around the intersection U.S. 29 and Hydraulic Road was shown this week to the public and government officials.

Three meetings in all were held this week for the small-area plan. The second public meeting for the project was held on Wednesday. An advisory panel saw an update Thursday afternoon and the Albemarle and Charlottesville planning commissions met to review the plan at a joint meeting that night.

"The idea is to hand off the land-use plans to the two planning commissions in September or October," said Chip Boyles, the executive director of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission.

Boyles said the idea is to create a "vision statement" for Hydraulic Road to make it more pedestrian friendly, more of an employment destination and to create a mix of housing types.

The study is intended to inform redevelopment of the area around the intersection as well as come up with a new traffic configuration.

The small-area plans also could become a model for collaboration between the city and the county. Three of the quadrants of the intersection are in Charlottesville city limits and the fourth is in Albemarle County.

Ultimately any of the transportation projects recommended in the plan would have to qualify under the

Virginia Department of Transportation's Smart Scale process, which ranks submissions according to how they address congestion, promote economic development and other factors.

"Certainly we want as much multimodal capability within the study area as possible, specifically to get across U.S. 29," said Sal Musarra, a project manager at Kimley-Horn. "We would have bike and pedestrian crossings without any interaction with traffic at Zan Road and the same at Angus at U.S. 29."

One of the ideas is for the intersection at U.S. 29 and Hydraulic Road to be converted to a grade-separated interchange, but the exact details are yet to be worked out. Boyles said that discussion will continue through the spring as the deadline for Smart Scale approaches.

Whether a grade-separated interchange ultimately is built will determine how engineers will decide to incorporate pedestrians and bikes, Musarra said.

City Councilor Kathy Galvin insisted that any change at the Hydraulic intersection must include ways for pedestrians and bikes to cross U.S. 29.

"If the only thing that gets funded at Hydraulic has no bike and pedestrian crossing, then we have totally failed in this effort," Galvin said.

The plan encourages a pedestrian connection that would be built between Stonefield and Commonwealth Drive. It also shows a series of new local roads designed to increase walkability and to promote smaller block sizes.

No new roads are shown going through the Meadows neighborhood, which consists of mostly single-family homes. The land use map called for this to be "legacy residential."

The draft plan calls for high-density residential to eventually be built where Stonefield is located. That development opened in November 2012.

"The plan is the vision and the direction," Musarra said. "It doesn't undo what's on the ground there today but says that at some point at time when those [properties] are ready to redevelop, let's think about them in a different way."

The area currently occupied by Seminole Square is designated for office and institutional use. The property owner is not happy with that change.

"We are adamantly opposed to anything that limits the use to just one type," said David Mitchell, construction manager for the Great Eastern Management Company. "It should be a mixed-use commercial corridor with the possibility of residential and commercial office space across the entire area. It worries us that our property could be limited based on this unrealistic concept plan."

Mitchell said the market and not planners should determine what happens with the land in the future.

Musarra said it could be that the area goes underneath a form-based zoning code rather than the current use-based zoning. He said the land-use designations are a way to encourage development and not dictate it.

Galvin said big box retail stores across the country are closing as more and more people shop online.

"Brick and mortar retail is doing poorly," Galvin said. "I think this is being proactive. Things have got to change."

Mitchell said there will always be the need for some retail.

"At the end of the day, I like to try my shoes on first," Mitchell said.

Boyles said the plan can be used to determine where government investment can go to spur development.

"Structured parking, a water feature, roads and sidewalks," Boyles said. "You can identify those so it's not lost to the City Council and the Board of Supervisors."

Mitchell said the future of Seminole Square might be altered if the city can implement the Meadow Creek Valley Park which is directly to the east within Charlottesville.

One planning commissioner wanted to make sure the Rivanna Trail was included in the plan.

"That trail is going to be even more highly-used once you have those bridges in place," said city planning commissioner Jody Lahendro.