

Bringing New Light to Greenway Bridge Design

Julie Snow Architects submitted preliminary conceptual designs for the bridges at a recent community meeting; the Park Avenue bridge design is shown here. Refinements and alterations will likely occur as the design moves through the approval processes of the State Historic Preservation Office, the City of Minneapolis, and Hennepin County.

The bridge design team includes Julie Snow Architects; Close Landscape Architecture; ARUP Consulting Engineers; Phil Lindsay, Community Representative; Matthew Reinert, Lighting Designer; Robin Minard, Sound Artist; and Andrew Blauvelt, Graphic Artist.



All kinds of new light will be pouring into the Midtown Greenway, if bridge builders adopt the concept for the bridge replacements at Chicago and Park Avenues proposed by Julie Snow Architects. The architectural firm delivered its preliminary conceptual design on July 11, and there is a growing buzz of excitement over the results. Over the last few weeks, the design has been shared with the community for comment and feedback. Jon Wertjes, the engineer for Minneapolis Public Works who is managing the concept design phase of the project, says that the response to the conceptual design has been overwhelmingly positive.

The City's original \$50,000 design budget for these two

bridges was boosted by the contribution of another \$25,000 from MCW partners Abbott Northwestern Hospital and Target, and \$25,000 from the city's public art budget. This additional funding enabled the City and the County to adopt an enhanced design process. According to Wertjes, the enhanced design process helped bring the community into the project. "The funding partnership worked well, in part because the Midtown Community Works members are part of the community," he explains. "By stepping up to help fund and participate in the design process, they helped to reinforce the community's investment in the Greenway's bridges." Council Member Robert Lilligren is also pleased

with the design process. "I see this bridge design process as a model for how we should approach infrastructure and public art in the City," he said. "This is breaking new ground and is really an exciting partnership."

New Design Approach

Wertjes believes that the Julie Snow team possessed a number of attributes that led to its selection, including a deep interest in the community process, demonstrated expertise, and a broad, multi-disciplinary approach. In developing the design, Julie Snow Architects collaborated with a landscape architect, a graphic artist, a lighting artist, a sound artist, engineers, and a community representative.

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Lake Street Makeover: Designing for Small Business Success

Consider a \$25 million, three year project to repave a major arterial boulevard that carries about 26,000 cars a day, and you can imagine the fears of disruption in the hearts of hundreds of business owners on Lake Street. But just 10 blocks to the north, recent experience with the remake of Franklin Avenue has business owners saying that all of the headaches are worth it.

When Franklin Avenue underwent its streetscaping and rebuilding in 2000, Theresa Carr, director of the American Indian Business Development Corporation, was worried. “We had just opened the Ancient Traders Market, filled with brand new businesses, and suddenly the street was under major construction for four months—it was a huge challenge,” Carr recalls. “We learned that good communication with the businesses was essential. At the end of the project, not a single one of our businesses was lost, and the benefits from the project have been more dramatic than we thought.”

The lessons learned at Franklin Avenue will be critical to making the Lake Street reconstruction and streetscaping a success. Hennepin County will rebuild Lake Street in three phases, from 2005 to 2007. The County has scheduled the next two segments for construction in the following two years. According to Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, “the key to making this huge project a success is active community and business involvement. Between now and construction in 2005, we have committed to engage in an extensive process of engagement and communication to create the best design and mitigate the difficulties of construction.” This public involvement process will follow some of the lessons learned on Franklin Avenue.

Maria Hoyos opened Maria’s Café on Franklin Avenue in January, 2000, and six months later, the street closed down. “What really made the whole project work was good communication,” Maria believes. “We had a



Streetscaping improvements along Franklin Avenue

24-hour question-line we could call, we had regular meetings to talk about the construction and what could be done to improve it for us, and we received written updates regularly—knowing where the project was and what was coming up was really important.” Now, Maria has expanded twice since opening her doors, and she sees many businesses thriving along Franklin Avenue that did not exist before the street reconstruction.

Livable by Design

Carr credits the effective streetscaping design for much of the Franklin Avenue’s revitalization. “We now have wider, more pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, much more lighting, and landscaping that isn’t a hiding place for crime. Little things like flowers make a big difference in livability, and our businesses have translated that into success.” The neighborhood’s engagement with this design process, and their willingness to change their own buildings to integrate with the designs of the street and sidewalks, have led to reduced crime, a livable neighborhood, and business growth. That high standard will guide the Lake Street process, and is another reason for supporting community involvement.

Hennepin County has formed a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) to guide the design, construction management, and com-

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Gail Dorfman



Gail Dorfman
Commissioner

EDUCATION

B.A., Ohio State University, 1981; M.A., Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1983.

BACKGROUND

Gail Dorfman began her career in public service working as the Research Director to the Governor of Ohio. She subsequently served as a legislative aide to Congressman James Burke in Washington, D.C., and as Assistant Director of the Boston, Massachusetts Neighborhood Development Agency. After relocating to St. Louis Park nearly fourteen years ago, Commissioner Dorfman served as a St. Louis Park City Council Member from 1991 to 1995, and as Mayor of St. Louis Park from 1996 to 1999. During her years on the City Council, she worked to promote and participate in the creation of the City's strategic plan, "Vision St. Louis Park"; to establish the grass-roots planning process for the town center (currently under construction); and to encourage beautification and pedestrian friendly development through landscaping, innovative streetscape, and promotion of the arts as an important aspect of civic revitalization. She is currently a board member of Perspectives, a St. Louis Park agency that provides transitional housing and support services to women in recovery and their children. She is also a member of the League of Women Voters of St. Louis Park and Jewish Community Action, and serves on the

Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board and the NRP Policy Board.

Commissioner Dorfman is a former fellow at the Mondale Policy Forum at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.

THOUGHTS ON MCW

"I joined the Midtown Community Works Partnership shortly after I took office in 1999, and I have been consistently impressed with its ability to draw together so many different stakeholders to begin tackling a project of this scale. From the government's perspective, this type of simultaneous partnering with private business and grassroots organizations is a new and exciting way of doing business. Many different visions are at work along the Midtown Greenway, from the many diverse neighborhoods, to the plans for development, to the master plan for the arts and the integration of arts with infrastructure design and construction. But rather than discord, these voices are creating a harmonious, cohesive vision that recognizes and respects the diversity of the many stakeholders. I believe that over the next few years, these pieces will continue to come together to create unified, meaningful development along the Midtown Greenway.

"The participatory process is critical, because it creates a sense of pride and ownership in the entire project. One example of this has been the success of the last two Arbor Day planting events. Many families took part in planting trees and perennials along the Greenway during those events, and their sense of joy and pride was palpable. In the years to come, as those kids ride their bikes along the Greenway, they will pass by the landscaping and think, 'That's my tree!' That kind of community involvement and sense of investment is invaluable, and is the key to ensuring the Greenway's success.

"Hennepin County's interest in the partnership derives equally from the Greenway's role in the regional transportation system, and its unique potential to become a chain of vibrant, exciting communities. In the past, government has tended to look at transit-related work as what happens between the curbs; now, we're broadening our view, and realizing that things such as landscaping, green space, and smart development are not just amenities, but are the kinds of things that really help to build healthy communities. Hennepin County is proud to be part of the work of transforming the Midtown Greenway into a unique urban asset."

Peter McLaughlin



Peter McLaughlin
Hennepin County
Commissioner

EDUCATION

A.B., Princeton University, 1971;
M.A., Hubert Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1977.

BACKGROUND

Peter McLaughlin has been involved in the public sector throughout his adult life, from his work immediately out of college as an aide to the Mayor of Trenton, N.J., to his years as a Minnesota State Representative, (1985-1990), to his current service as a Hennepin County Commissioner (1991 to present). He also has an extensive history of involvement in the business and nonprofit communities, including the Urban Coalition, the Minneapolis Community Business Employment Alliance, and organizations focused on the arts, housing, homelessness, and community development. He is a vigorous advocate of a stronger transit system, including LRT, and currently serves as the Chair of the Hennepin County Regional Rail Authority. Long an advocate of public/private partnerships as a model for accomplishing community development, he is a founding member of the Phillips Partnership and the Midtown Community Works Partnership.

THOUGHTS ON MCW

“The growth of effective strategic partnerships is among the most exciting and dynamic approaches to problem-solving that has emerged during my tenure as a County Commissioner. Through my involvement in numerous initiatives, I have learned the importance of mobilizing the strengths of the public and private sectors, and the community. With any initiative, success requires a clear, bold vision, workable strategies to make the vision a reality, and a deep sense of optimism in the face of barriers and cynicism. The Midtown Community Works Partnership is a great example of the effectiveness of this model. The partnership spans the spectrum of Greenway’s stakeholders—active community members; a strong presence from the various public entities; and enthusiastic and committed representatives from the private sector. As the public sector works to deliver more to its citizens on an ever-tightening budget, we are grateful for the additional talent, enthusiasm, and resources available to us through our strategic partnerships.

“As we work toward revitalizing our south Minneapolis neighborhoods, we must remain mindful that development cannot occur in isolation, and that we must find new and innovative ways

of reconnecting these communities to the broader regional economy. A key component to our strategy is fostering infrastructure and transit-oriented development that remains focused on the needs of the communities it serves. The Hiawatha LRT line, new freeway access to and from I-35W, and improvements to Lake Street are all important to achieving this goal. In addition to its obvious potential as a unique urban asset, the Midtown Greenway also has an important role to play. By providing a connection to the larger regional transit system, for instance, the Greenway will enable neighborhood residents to “reverse commute” and take advantage of employment opportunities in the southern suburbs. I am glad to join with the MCW strategic partners to help work on projects that will realize positive results for the people who live and work in Minneapolis.”

Martha McQuade, who is the project manager for the Julie Snow Architect team, points out that this particular design process was unique because it emphasized the incorporation of art into the bridge design from the outset. “In the past, the process for municipal projects involving art began with an engineer designing the underlying infrastructure, followed by the addition of the art,” says McQuade. “With this project, the art is integrated from the very beginning. The work already in the Greenway and the existence of the master plan for public art paved the way for that to happen, and also helped to guide our work as we began to develop the design.”

Wertjes is excited about the design, which he describes as “fresh, inventive, and integrated with the community process. The design sets the right tone without restricting the possibilities for subsequent bridge designs, and leaves open the door for interaction with new bridges, whether adjacent or elsewhere along the Greenway.” McQuade emphasizes that, on many different levels, the design reflects the community’s involvement in the process.

Seeking Safety and Light

“Early on, it became clear that one of the community’s biggest concerns was making these two bridges safe, and overcoming the entrenched perception that they are dark and dangerous places,” says McQuade. “For that reason, the design strives to open up the bridges and fill the underside with light, creating a welcoming space. For instance, separating the pedestrian path and the vehicle path allows extra light to filter into the area beneath the bridges. At night, the bridges will be lit from below, creating a volume or room of light.”



Julie Snow Architects’ preliminary conceptual design for the Chicago Avenue bridge.

“We also realized that if we could make the bridges attractive places for children to play, we would have really succeeded in our goal of transforming the bridges into safe, community places,” continues McQuade. Working with a sound engineer, the team designed the walls under the Chicago Avenue bridge to curve so that they act as parabolic reflectors, which will allow people under the bridges to experiment with sound and echo. On the Park Avenue bridge, sound tubes underneath the bridge will connect with the green space on Park, creating a similar opportunity to play with sound while simultaneously emphasizing the connection of the street with the Greenway.

Orienting to the Greenway

As McQuade points out, emphasizing this connection is another crucial element of the design. “The original bridges were naturally designed to deflect attention from the railway corridor, and to discourage the public from entering it,” she explains. “With these new bridges, the goal is exactly the opposite. We designed the pedestrian path along both Park and Chicago to dip slightly toward the Greenway, highlighting the connection between the pedestrian activity above and below. At the same time, the

vehicle path rises slightly, alerting drivers to the fact that they are passing over something special, and giving them an opportunity to glance down the Greenway. Finally, under both bridges, the area between the pedestrian and vehicle paths will be a vertical garden, spilling down the walls and reinforcing the connection, above to below.”

Eric Eoloff, Director of Community Relations at Abbott Northwestern, has been a participant throughout the bridge design process, and he is enthusiastic about the result. “I’m excited by the innovation of this design,” says Eoloff. “It achieves the goal of encouraging pedestrians to enjoy the Greenway by day, while also incorporating light underneath the bridges to invite use of the space by night.”

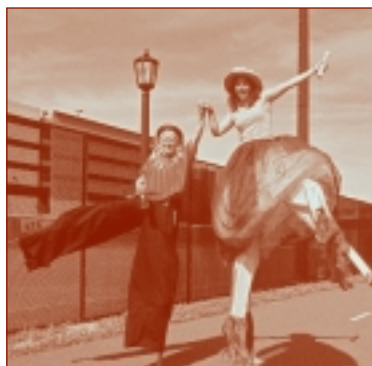
The next step is to submit the design to the approval processes of the State Historic Preservation Office, the City and the County. The architects will continue to refine the design in response to feedback from these entities, with a focus on ensuring that it is buildable, affordable, and continues to reflect community input. Once a final, approved design is complete, County and City engineers will develop construction plans, with construction planned for 2004.

munity involvement in the project. The PAC's workload will be heavy until 2005, and will continue after. Among their tasks will be to help set the project schedule, develop an organizational structure for public participation, develop a traffic management and parking plan for construction, and participate in streetscape planning. The PAC will begin work after Labor Day, and their first task will be reviewing and approving their own goals and objectives.

Ted Mueller, the executive director of the Lake Street Council, is a member of the PAC and believes that business owners will play close attention to this process. "The parking, detour, and special assessment issues will be of vital interest to the Lake Street businesses," Mueller explained. "The key here is for everyone to help build a vision of a new Lake Street that helps businesses and neighborhoods to thrive."

As Commissioner Gail Dorfman notes, "it's a long process, but in the end, only active participation by neighbors and businesses will lead to a successful project. We want this project to be about much more than asphalt—it's about strengthening our communities along Lake Street."

Second Annual Parade of Arts a Success



Nearly 15,000 people turned out on July 4th for the second annual Parade of Arts, and organizers which organizers are calling a great success. Events included the Art Car parade, a Bike Parade along the Greenway, performance art, and art-making events.



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