



# Community Development Department

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## MEMORANDUM

Redevelopment Authority Citizens Committee meeting of October 6, 2014  
Regional Transportation Commission meeting of October 8, 2014

**TO:** Redevelopment Authority Citizens Committee and  
Regional Transportation Commission

**FROM:** Lee Plemel, Community Development Director  
Patrick Pittenger, Transportation Manager

**DATE:** September 30, 2014

**SUBJECT:** Action to recommend to the Board of Supervisors acceptance of the conceptual design of the Refresh Carson downtown plan for Carson Street between William and Fifth Streets to allow staff to continue to develop more detailed design elements of the plan.

The purpose of this item is to provide a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors regarding the conceptual design for proposed Carson Street improvements through the downtown area from Fifth Street to William Street. The recommendations from the Redevelopment Authority Citizens Committee (RACC) and Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) will be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors in November (tentatively November 6, 2014), at which time the Board will approve a design concept with which staff can proceed with more detailed project design. The purpose of the conceptual design approval is to establish the basic street alignment—including lane configuration, bike lanes, and parking—before moving on to more detailed design elements.

The Board of Supervisors approved a Plan of Expenditure on April 17, 2014, and implemented a one-eighth percent sales tax on May 1, 2014, to fund the projects within the Plan. The sales tax proceeds may only be used on projects within the Plan. The Board of Supervisors approved a tentative project schedule on May 15, 2014, which outlined the planning, design, and construction schedule for the Downtown Carson Street project along with the other projects in the Plan.

Following is the Downtown Carson Street project description from the adopted Plan of Expenditure:

### **Downtown Carson Street**

*The downtown corridor segment would be developed generally in accordance with the Downtown Envision Plan prepared in 2006 and extend along the corridor from Fifth Street to William Street, which could include reducing Carson Street to*

*one through lane in each direction, adding bike lanes, and adding a turn lane at intersections. The parallel parking originally proposed would be significantly reduced in scope and generally limited to handicap parking and loading, which would reduce traffic conflicts and allow for better traffic flow. As a result, wider sidewalks would be constructed allowing business access to the area for outside seating for cafes, displays, and public events. Another component of the downtown project would include improvements to Curry Street from Musser to Washington and include improved parking, improved pedestrian access, street furniture such as benches, themed lighting, and directional signage.*

City staff conducted a public open house on September 16 to present the design concepts, answer public questions regarding the project, and solicit public comments. Written comments will be forwarded to the Board of Supervisors in November.

Attached are the graphics showing the conceptual design. The graphics focus on the core area between Musser and Telegraph Streets to show the general concepts that will be applied from Fifth Street to William Street. The design concept would continue to the south of Musser Street on the west side of Carson Street and transition back to five lanes (four lanes plus turn lane) south of Fifth Street. New sidewalk improvements are not anticipated on the east side of Carson Street in front of the Capitol Building and Legislative Building, though City staff will work with the applicable State agencies to develop a plan for improvements in front of the Capital grounds.

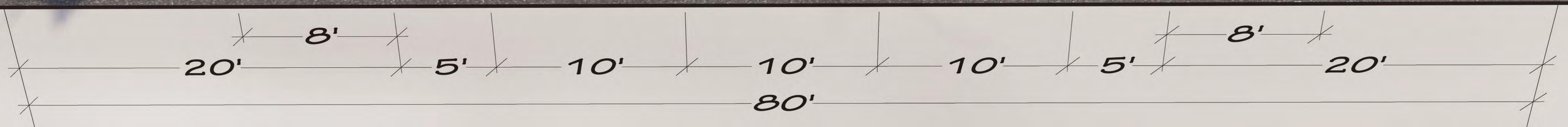
The proposed three lane concept would continue north of Telegraph Street to Washington Street. Carson Street would transition from three lanes back to five lanes between Washington Street and William Street. Details of these designs will be worked out in the next phase of design.

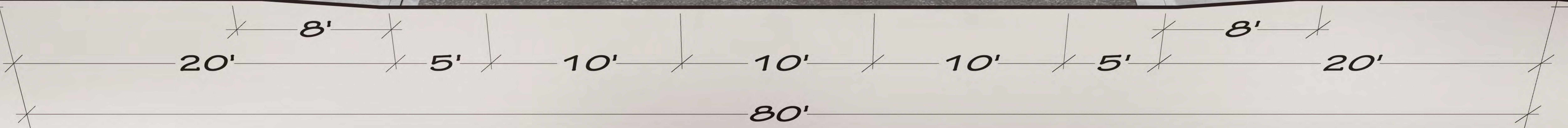
Staff is seeking recommendations from the RACC and RTC to the Board of Supervisors regarding the general design concept. The public may also make public comment at the meeting and are encouraged to submit written comments to be included in the recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. Written public comments may be submitted to the Transportation Division or Planning Division, or emailed to [planning@carson.org](mailto:planning@carson.org).

If you have questions regarding the conceptual designs, you can contact Lee Plemel in the Community Development Department at 283-7075 or [lplemel@carson.org](mailto:lplemel@carson.org), or contact Patrick Pittenger in the Transportation Division at 283-7396.

Attachments:

- 1) Conceptual downtown graphics
- 2) Frequently Asked Questions
- 3) Downtown project schedule

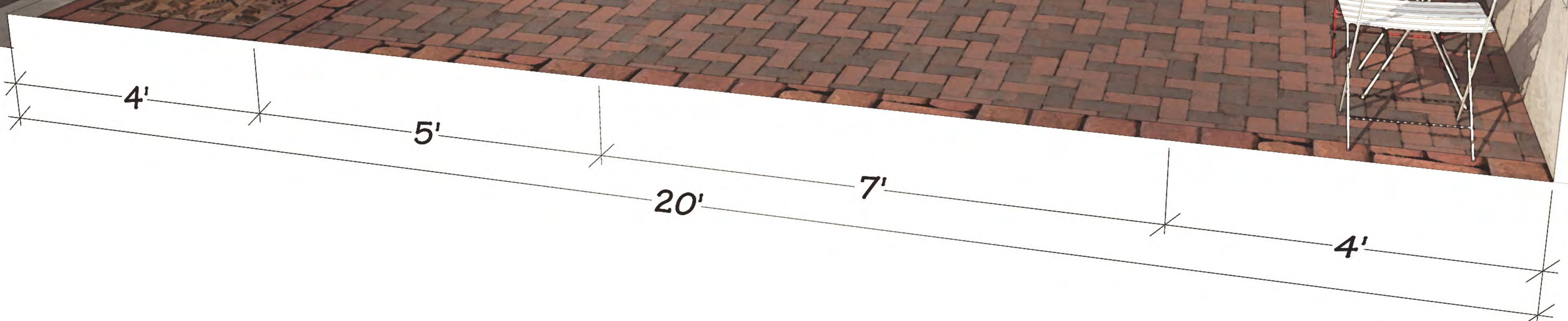


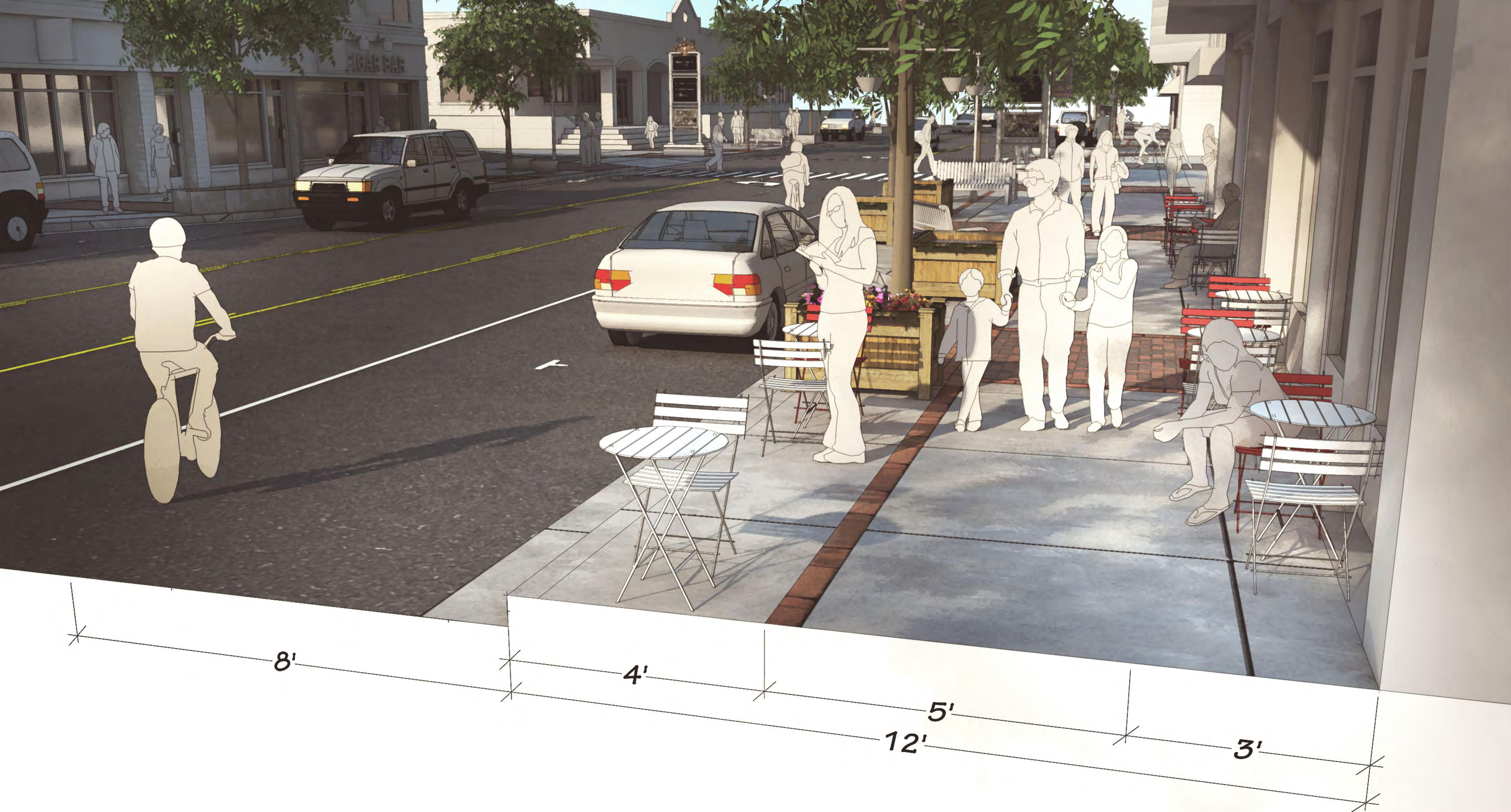














8'

4'

5'

12'

3'



# **Downtown Carson Street Project**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What are the limits of the Downtown Carson Street project area?**

The project includes improvements to Carson Street from Fifth Street to William Street. The conceptual plan is to have three lanes (one lane each direction plus a continuous center turn lane) between Musser Street and Washington Street, transitioning back to five lanes between Washington Street and William Street. Between Musser Street and Fifth Street, improvements on the west side of the street will be consistent with the downtown core area, with two north-bound travel lanes remaining as is in front of the State Capital and Legislative grounds.

### **2. Has there been an analysis of the anticipated impact that the redesigned Carson Street will have on traffic around Carson City?**

Yes, multiple analyses were conducted over the past several years (2007, 2012, 2013) as it relates to the project. Analyses were conducted for existing (base year) traffic conditions as well as forecast years 2020 and 2035 with projected growth. All of the analyses indicated that a redesigned Carson Street could function well at today's traffic volumes and in future conditions.

### **3. Won't a reduction in through lanes on Carson Street cause traffic volumes to exceed available capacity?**

No, current traffic volumes on Carson Street are at historically low levels not seen since the early 1970's. Traffic volumes are now less than half of what they were in the early 2000's. Much of the traffic has already been diverted to the Carson City Freeway as evidenced by a decrease in traffic on Carson Street and an increase in traffic on the freeway over the past several years.

### **4. Doesn't the freeway need to be completed before the Carson Street project is built?**

No, the traffic analyses that have been conducted, in conjunction with the declining traffic volumes over the past few years, indicate that the project could be implemented today without any significant adverse effects to the traffic flow through downtown. However, it is expected that the freeway will be completed within approximately a year of the Carson Street project.

### **5. What if Carson City experiences significant growth in the coming years, won't the additional traffic cause congestion downtown?**

No, the City has made substantial improvements on many parallel facilities to Carson Street including Stewart Street and Roop Street as well as Curry Street further south. These roadways have ample capacity to absorb potential growth in north-south traffic and will have reduced traffic levels upon freeway completion. Additionally, any growth will be incremental and changes to traffic patterns as a result of the Carson Street project will be well established by that time.

6. Will there be bike lanes on Carson Street?

Yes, bike lanes are included throughout the entire Carson Street design on both sides of the street from Fifth Street to William Street. This provides extra maneuvering space and buffers for cars and pedestrians in addition to providing dedicated lanes for bikes.

7. Will traffic be diverted to west side streets like Division Street?

Yes, but the diversion is expected to be minimal, resulting in approximately a 10 percent increase to existing traffic on Division Street and well within capacity levels of the parallel streets.

8. What will the speed be on Carson Street?

The speeds of vehicles on Carson Street are expected to decrease, though the posted speed limit is expected to remain at 25 MPH. The decrease is expected with the design and the reduction of lanes. This is desirable from a safety perspective and also for encouraging a business-friendly environment. It has a minimal impact on the overall vehicle travel time through the downtown.

9. With wider sidewalks as part of the design, will there be parking on downtown Carson Street?

Yes, the design provides for pockets of parallel parking throughout downtown Carson Street in addition to the parking that is available now on most of the east-west intersecting streets. The additional parking is being designed to provide sufficient space for large vehicles with easy access and could also be used to accommodate potential JAC transit service or deliveries.

10. How will the Carson Street design impact the traffic signals?

The signal timing and coordination between traffic signals on Carson Street is expected to improve. There is already significantly less traffic on Carson Street than in previous years and the new design provides for shorter pedestrian crossing distances, reducing the amount of time necessary for pedestrians to safely cross the street.

11. Will Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) funds be used to finance the project?

No, the project will be financed with a combination of revenues from the recently approved one-eighth-percent sales tax and utility funds.

12. What will be achieved with the redesign of Carson Street from a transportation perspective?

The Carson Street project will provide for a much safer and accessible environment for pedestrians and bicyclists with wider sidewalks, a decrease in street crossing distance, and dedicated bike lanes. It will transform Carson Street into a truly multi-modal facility with the inclusion of the bike lanes and the potential to accommodate transit service in the future. Operationally, traffic will flow more efficiently under the improved design with recalibrated signal timing and coordination to better reflect the scale and traffic patterns of the roadway.

13. Will turn lanes be provided at every cross street?

Yes, a left-turn lane will be provided at every cross street, and right turns may be made freely at every cross street. Dedicated right turn lanes will be provided at the north and south ends of the project where the street transitions from four to two lanes.

14. Do the medians and mature trees in the medians have to be removed for the Carson Street project?

There are several reasons to remove the medians as part of the Carson Street reconstruction:

- The medians currently provide the majority of landscape space on Carson Street north of Musser Street. With the wider sidewalks, the trees will be removed from the center medians—where they only shade cars—and replaced with trees in the sidewalks on both sides of the street where they will shade pedestrians.
- With the reduction in travel lanes from four to two, the medians pose a barrier to emergency services vehicles as they travel down Carson Street as vehicles pull over or in the event of a traffic accident. The continuous turn lane down the center of the street allows emergency vehicles to move freely down the street, or allows other vehicles to continue in the event of an accident or vehicle breakdown in the travel lane. The City's emergency services departments support the concept with the continuous turn lane down the center of Carson Street.
- The addition of medians to the current design would reduce the sidewalk widths by the corresponding width of the median, reducing the ability to place amenities within the sidewalk area.
- The existing trees in the medians are near the end of their expected life span for urban street trees in their environment in the center medians. Urban trees in such environments typically do not reach full maturity and have a limited lifespan.
- The medians and landscaping will need to be torn out whenever water and sewer line replacements occur within Carson Street, which could be at any time due to line breakage regardless of any improvements to Carson Street. The water and sewer lines in Carson Street are more than 50 years old and are overdue for replacement as part of regular system maintenance.
- Any rebuilding of Carson Street, regardless of lane and sidewalk configuration, will require the medians and landscaping to be removed. While they could be rebuilt in such a scenario, the grades of the street will need to be modified whenever the street is rebuilt due to decades of pavement buildup. The removal of the medians during construction will also provide additional roadway space allowing for Carson Street to remain open during construction, which will allow continued business access during construction, and will accommodate easier snow removal.

15. How are pedestrian and vehicle safety issues being addressed?

The three lane design greatly improves pedestrian safety in the downtown area. To cross the street, a pedestrian currently has to cross a distance of approximately 65 feet and would only have to cross a distance of 40 feet in the proposed plan. The reduced number of travel lanes also makes crossing much safer for pedestrians. The shorter crossing distance—therefore shorter pedestrian crossing time—also allows more flexibility in the timing of light signals to accommodate vehicular

traffic going both north-south and east-west. The proposed design will have minimal impact on vehicular safety.

16. What are the economic benefits of the project?

Similar projects to reduce vehicle travel lanes and widen sidewalks in downtown areas have occurred throughout the country over the last decade in communities of varying sizes and continue to be implemented and expanded. Though economists cannot predict specific impacts on any given project, such projects have been documented to result in economic benefits in many communities, including decreased commercial vacancy rates, increased retail sales revenues, increased tourism, increased property values, and the public investment has led to private investment well beyond the public investment. Studies have shown that business generally benefit from such improvements with two exceptions: gas stations and fast food restaurants, for which sales are correlated with traffic volumes. However, traffic volumes on Carson Street have already gone down significantly and will continue to go down once the freeway is completed regardless of any improvements made or not made to Carson Street. The purpose of the proposed improvements is to create a destination to attract potential customers to businesses.

17. Will the proposed improvements cost the City more to maintain than existing improvements?

Long-term maintenance of the vehicle travel lanes would be reduced due to the reduction in travel lanes. Regular maintenance of the additional sidewalk area, e.g. sidewalk cleaning and landscape maintenance, will increase. The Board of Supervisors has indicated that they expect downtown property owners who will benefit from the improvements to help pay for the maintenance of the improvements so the general Carson City taxpayer does not have to pay any increased maintenance costs. Once a general project concept is approved, more detailed design work will begin to develop maintenance cost estimates. The City will then work with the property owners to develop a maintenance plan that they agree to, possibly through a Commercial Area Vitalization District that assesses the property owners for the costs. How maintenance costs are going to be paid must be worked out before the project is approved by the Board of Supervisors.

18. Will the State pay their fair share of the sidewalk and landscaping maintenance costs?

Approximately 30 percent of the Carson Street frontage between Fifth Street and William Street is abutting State property. The conceptual plan does not include additional sidewalk improvements in front of the Capital and Legislative grounds, but the City will work with the State to determine appropriate improvements in front of State properties. The City cannot assess the State for any maintenance. However, the State has always provided a high level of maintenance for landscaping and sidewalks in front of their properties and it is expected that will continue. Private property owners will not be expected to pay for the State's or City's share of improvements.

19. What sidewalk furnishings are included in the plan? Will art be included?

Street trees are included in the plan along the length of the corridor. The number of furnishings that can be provided with the project depends on more detailed design considerations to stay within the allotted budget, but it is generally expected that benches and/or planter walls for sitting will be part

of the amenities, along with lighting. No art is included in the plan, though the design will provide space for future art as funding is raised through various arts organizations.

20. How much will the project cost Carson City residents?

The Carson Street improvements are to be paid with the one-eighth-percent sales tax adopted in April 2014. The one-eighth-percent sales tax costs a household \$12.50 for every \$10,000 in taxable purchases. It is estimated that approximately 40 percent of all sales tax revenues is paid by non-Carson City residents. Water and sewer lines in Carson Street—which are more than 50 years old and overdue for replacement—will be replaced using Utility funds that are budgeted for such projects.

21. Are improvements to Curry Street in the downtown area being proposed?

Yes, pedestrian improvements on Curry Street will follow completion of the Carson Street improvements so that construction is not occurring on both streets at the same time. The Curry Street project will be smaller in scope than the Carson Street project, and a separate design process will occur after the Carson Street project is completed.

22. Why is the City only improving the downtown area when other commercial areas could use improvements, as well?

Plans for commercial corridor improvements include the entire length of Carson Street from the north end at the freeway to Spooner Junction at the south, as well as William Street and Highway 50 East from Carson Street to College Parkway/Fairview Drive. The downtown project is just the first of several corridor improvement projects. The downtown project will include the most “intensive” reconstruction and improvements. Other corridor improvements will be broken into specific project segments and will generally include sidewalk connections, bike lanes, and landscaping. The remainder of the corridor improvements will be phased over several years.

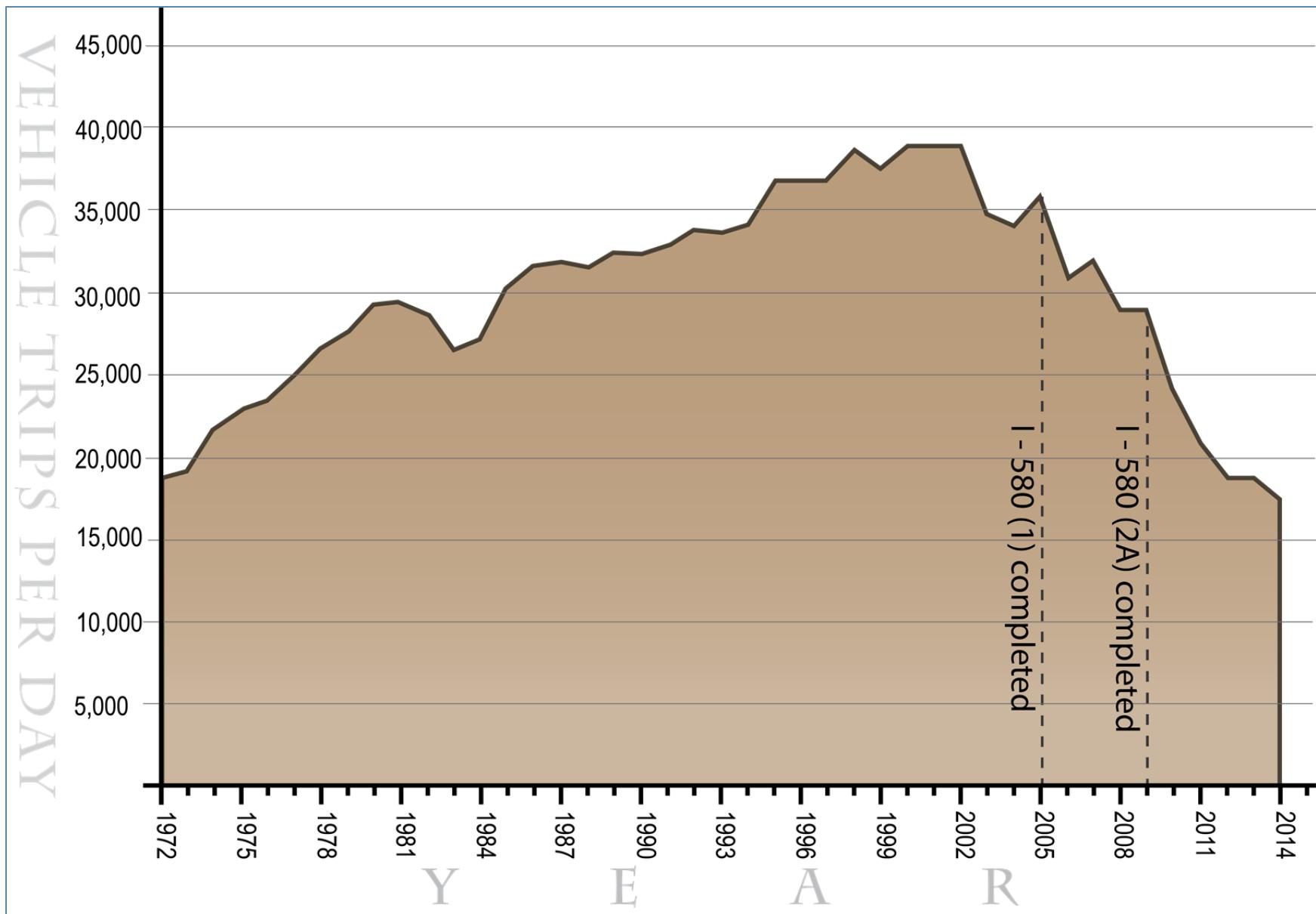
23. Will the public have any other opportunities to provide input on the design?

Yes, this phase of conceptual planning is just the beginning of the design process on which the City will be seeking input. Once a conceptual design is approved, more detailed design will begin. This will include looking at sidewalk paving treatments, tree placement, parking placement, and other specific design elements. City staff will work with individual property owners and businesses to identify specific needs on a block-by-block basis. Plans will also be brought to various public forums throughout the design process.

24. What is the benefit of having parking on Carson Street?

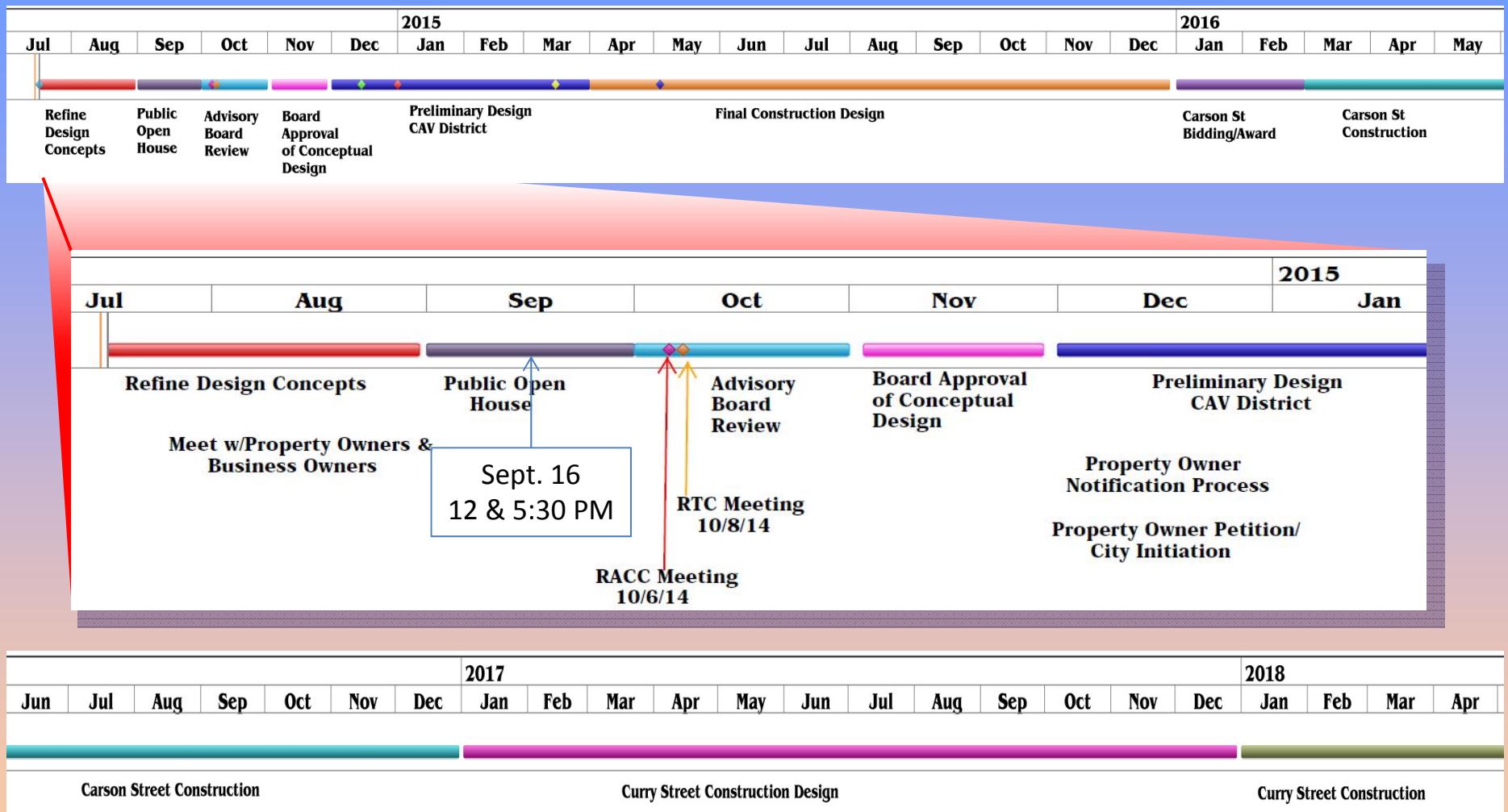
Parking in a downtown area not only provides additional parking spaces for potential customers, it helps show visitors that there is activity in the area to encourage visitors to stop and check things out. The parking spaces can also be used for loading zones, passenger drop off, or seasonal “parklets” depending on the specific needs on any given block.

# Carson Street Historic Average Daily Traffic Counts



Measured 150 feet north of Ann Street

# Downtown Streetscape Project



- Sales Tax Funds: \$6,850,000 Utilities: \$2,110,000
- Oversight: Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) & Redevelopment Authority Citizens Commission (RACC)