

February 1, 2023

Lance Wilbur
Director, Community Development
Municipality of Anchorage
Via email: lance.wilbur@anchorageak.gov



RE: Spenard Road Rehabilitation design comments

Dear Mr. Wilbur,

We are at an important decision-point in the design of Spenard Road from Benson Blvd. to Minnesota Dr. We are reaching out to you and the project team because important improvements must be incorporated into the design as we move forward.

The Spenard Community Council (SCC) has consistently advocated for improvements along the road corridor as identified in the Spenard Corridor Plan (SCP), see attached comments dated 2/2/22 and 5/4/22. Since the 35% design alternatives analysis was released in February 2022, the SCC is pleased to learn the preferred alternative includes a lane reduction through the Minnesota Dr. intersection (referred to as a second option with one receiving lane northbound from Minnesota Dr.). However, no other responses have been acknowledged or addressed to the SCC and our community members.

As the project team moves into the next phases of design, the SCC continues to urge the following priority improvements to the Spenard Road design:

- **Reduce the design speed of the project and the posted speed limit to 20-25mph.** SCP Goals 8 and 10 focus on the accommodation and safety of non-motorized transit, and SCP Policy 5.16 (Roadway classification and vehicular speed) calls for the design of the Central and North sections of Spenard Road for low vehicle operation speeds. Without a buffer separating non-motorized travel from the driving lanes, the speed limit reduction is necessary and will improve safety without adding to congestion. Much of this section of the road is deeply curved; in fact the section from West 36th Avenue to Minnesota has been historically known as “Dead Man’s Curve”. There is no possibility of taking the curve out of the road (we are not asking for that), but the sightlines are very short and going at higher speeds will be dangerous no matter what changes happen to the road itself.
 - The need for urgency: A pedestrian was killed at a hit and run on Spenard Road south of this design area on 1/23/23. When speeds are 30mph, pedestrians have a 40% likelihood of dying. When speeds are 20mph, pedestrians only have a 10% likelihood of dying, making all the difference for the individuals and families affected by these unnecessarily dangerous collisions. We need to design our roads for speeds that do not kill.
- **Reduce the width of driving lanes.** The SCC requests that the design includes an 11-foot center turn lane as detailed in the Spenard Corridor Plan, SCP Policy 5.10. An ideal cross section of the street would be 8 foot multi-use paths, 2 foot gutters, 5 foot bike lanes, 11 foot driving lanes and an 11 foot center lane, allowing for 1 foot shoulders on either side.

- **Include 5-foot wide bicycle lanes.** The current design of 4-foot bicycle lanes should not include the 2-foot gutter pan as a safe, year-round bike lane. A winter bike handlebar is about 2 feet wide, making the buffer between vehicles inadequate. Reducing the center turning lane to 11 feet allows for a 5-foot bicycle lane. Without a speed reduction, this design requires a buffer or a separated bicycle facility.
- **Continue bicycle lanes through the Minnesota Dr. intersection.** The current design has the bicycle lanes terminating onto the multi-use pathways somewhere between Minnesota Dr. and McCain Loop. Minnesota & Spenard is one of the most dangerous intersections in Anchorage, which is exactly where safe crossings for people on foot and bike are most needed. With the future design for Spenard Road from Minnesota Dr. to Northwood Dr. to likely include a lane diet following the northern sections, this current phase must provide continuous bicycle access through the Minnesota intersection in anticipation of this final segment of Spenard.
- **Winter maintenance must be factored into design.** Spenard Road is a vital connection for residents year-round and snow is a problem for everyone: the Municipality snow removal and maintenance crews, vehicle traffic and especially pedestrians and bicyclists. We do not want to see snow storage in bicycle lanes or on sidewalks, but instead recommend modeling snow storage in the center turn lane within sections to also support slowing down traffic as has been successful in other cities. Anchorage has done this successfully for years to accommodate Fur Rendezvous activities, proving it can be done within the Municipality.

The Spenard Corridor Plan lays out a vision for the corridor to be a model for our city and a place to experiment by creating a safe pedestrian and bike network. Currently, the design falls short of meeting these goals, but our recommendations are intended to meet these goals within the plan. If the project team choose not to follow the adopted plan guidance, please provide explanations for these decisions.

Sincerely,

meg mielke
Spenard Community Council President

2/7/23
Date

Vote: 8 in favor, 0 opposed.

CC: Dave Bronson, Mayor
Anchorage Assembly
Brad Coy, Traffic Engineer
Aaron Jongenelen, AMATS Coordinator
Alex Read, DOT Project Manager
Melinda Tsu, MOA Project Manager
Joe Taylor, Lounsbury Project Manager

Spenard Community Council Resolution

2022-06

A Resolution on Spenard Road 35% Design

WHEREAS, the Spenard Community Council (“SCC”) is an organization representing the interests of the residents of the Spenard area of Anchorage; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of community councils is to provide a direct and continuing means of participation in local government and local affairs; and

WHEREAS, the 2040 Anchorage Land Use Plan designates Spenard Road as a “neighborhood center” and “main street corridor,” and with overlays for growth-supportive features including “transit-supportive development” and “traditional neighborhood features;” and

WHEREAS, the AMATS Non-Motorized Plan identifies Spenard Road as a priority bicycle network with a separated bikeway in the section from Minnesota Dr. to Benson Blvd., and as a secondary pedestrian network corridor; and

WHEREAS, the Spenard Corridor Plan identifies the transportation projects that interface with land use to meet the vision and overarching goals to make Spenard a vibrant model for the region and business district, and a place that is grounds for experimentation and a place to call home; and

WHEREAS, the Spenard Corridor Plan identifies Spenard Road as a primary non-motorized network and identifies priorities for the Central District of Spenard Road to include enhanced connectivity for non-motorized travel and public transit improvements; and

WHEREAS, Spenard Road is the anchoring roadway that connects our neighborhood and is a foundation for neighborhood identity, and this redesign should prioritize improvements for safety, connectivity, and accessibility within Spenard; and

WHEREAS, the Spenard Road 35% Design Study was released with a preferred alternative, including 3 driving lanes, narrow bicycle lanes, and multi-use pathways;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Spenard Community Council recommends the following improvements to the proposed design to meet the overall goals in the Spenard Corridor Plan (SCP) and for the community:

- **Continue the three-lane alternative for the full section from Minnesota to Benson.** We support a three-lane alternative with a narrow center lane, and this design must extend south of 36th Avenue. A five-lane alternative at Minnesota is unacceptable and is unsafe for non-motorized users where it is most important for them to have inherent safety - at intersections, particularly busy ones, and it removes any non-motorized infrastructure and reduces sidewalks to 4-feet, not meeting ADA standards. This reduction in non-motorized transit infrastructure is in direct opposition to the Spenard Corridor Plan.

- **Reduce the design speed of the project and the posted speed limit to 20-25mph.** SCP Goals 8 and 10 focus on the accommodation and safety of non-motorized transit, and SCP Policy 5.16 (Roadway classification and vehicular speed) calls for the design of the Central and North sections of Spenard Road for low vehicle operation speeds. Without a buffer separating non-motorized travel from the driving lanes, the speed limit reduction is necessary and will improve safety without adding to congestion. Much of this section of the road is deeply curved; in fact the section from West 36th Avenue to Minnesota has been historically known as “Dead Man’s Curve”. There is no possibility of taking the curve out of the road (we are not asking for that), but the sight lines are very short and going at higher speeds will be dangerous no matter what changes happen to the road itself.
- **Reduce the width of driving lanes.** By reducing the speed, the driving lanes can be narrowed, including the center turning lane, to provide more width for non-motorized facilities. An ideal cross section of the street would be 8 foot multi-use paths, a 1.5 foot gutter, 5 foot bike lanes, 11 foot driving lanes and an 11 foot center lane, allowing for a 1.5 foot shoulder on either side. See SCP Policy 5.10.
- **Prioritize design for the ease of use and safety of people walking, biking, and using transit.** SCP Policy 5.6 prioritizes a safe, efficient, and walkable pedestrian system, including excellent sidewalk facilities, enhanced pedestrian crossings, and ADA accessible active transportation routes. Residents who rely on non-motorized and public transit are more vulnerable to injury and death in the event of a collision involving a motor vehicle. Collisions rarely happen when all involved are vigilant and undistracted on a clear day. Studies show that designing a road that takes into account the humanity of all users in inclement conditions and assumes that one or more parties will be distracted or unaware reduces injuries and fatalities.
- **Include 5-foot wide bicycle lanes.** The current design of 4-foot bicycle lanes with a 1.5 foot gutter pan does not make a 5.5-foot bike lane for safe, year-round facility. A winter bike handle bar is about 2 feet wide, making the buffer between vehicles inadequate. By designing the road to a speed of 20-25mph, it is possible to reduce the driving lanes or turning lane to enhance the non-motorized facilities. Without a speed reduction, this design requires a buffer or a separated bicycle facility.
- **Incorporate access to cross streets in the design.** Recent development, such as along Chugach Way and 34th Avenue, and improvements to the non-motorized network along 30th Avenue need to be incorporated into the design based on increased use in these areas. Successful examples of this are along McRae Rd.
- **Include safe and ADA compliant pedestrian crossings between traffic lights.** ADA requirements for pedestrians at crosswalks should be adhered to, such as audible signals for those with hearing impairments. Again, there are the curves which makes it extremely hazardous for people to cross anywhere other than at Benson Blvd. or 36th Avenue. An example in the Municipality is the crosswalk in front of Turnagain Elementary School on Northern Lights Boulevard; a red traffic signal instead of a flashing crosswalk sign alerts drivers to come to a complete stop to allow pedestrians to cross.
- **Integrate public transit into the design.** Spenard is a “Transit Corridor,” so it should include bus turnouts, improvements at transit stops, and ways for passengers to safely cross Spenard Road throughout the corridor to get on and off the bus including but not limited to the crosswalk recommendations listed below. Planning for a future Transit Hub per SCP Policy 5.18 should also be included in this design. Refer also to SCP Policies 2.12, 2.13, 3.20, and 5.1.
- **Winter maintenance must be factored into design.** Spenard Road is a vital connection for residents year-round and snow is a problem for everyone: the Municipality snow removal and maintenance crews, vehicle traffic and especially pedestrians and bicyclists. We do not want to

see snow storage in bicycle lanes or on sidewalks, but instead recommend modeling snow storage in the center turn lane within sections to also support slowing down traffic as has been successful in other cities. Anchorage has done this successfully for years to accommodate Fur Rendezvous activities, proving it can be done within the Municipality.

- **Explain decision on alternatives based on concrete criteria aligned with the Spenard Corridor Plan.** As outlined in these recommendations, the current design appears inconsistent with the goals and policies of the SCP.
- **Improve design with lessons learned from the northern section.** Just because it was done on the northern side does not mean it was done right?

Resolved, this 4th day of May 2022.

meg milke
Spenard Community Council President

05/31/2022
Date

Vote: 12 in favor, and 2 opposed.

Spenard Community Council

1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100
Anchorage, AK 99503
SpenardCC@gmail.com

February 2, 2022

Spenard Road Rehabilitation Team

Sean Baski, DOT PE, Project Manager
Travis Holmes, DOT, PE, Project Engineer
www.spenardroad.com
Via email: spenardroad@dowl.com

RE: Spenard Road Rehabilitation design comments

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the Spenard Community Council, hereby provide our comments for the planning of the Spenard Road Rehabilitation (Benson to Minnesota) while it is early in the planning stage. Our council has been advocating for years to make this section of Spenard safer and better connected throughout our community. We support slowing down vehicle traffic without causing congestion, providing protected bicycle lanes, and wide sidewalks to provide better accessibility for all residents.

Rather than selecting a road cross section, below are broad comments to capture our vision for the roadway related to the Spenard Corridor Plan and throughout the years. This is a multiyear project that will have profound implications for the neighborhood, the Spenard community and the users of the road. We have been meeting with a group of our membership, concerned citizens and stakeholders. These are our suggestions which we would like to see taken into account and addressed by the planners and engineers:

- **Speed limit:**
 - We would like to see the speed reduced to 20-25 mph. Much of this section of the road is deeply curved; in fact the section from West 36th Avenue to Minnesota has been historically known as “Dead Man’s Curve”. There is no possibility of taking the curve out of the road (we are not asking for that), but the sight lines are very short and going at higher speeds will be dangerous no matter what changes happen to the road itself.
 - We would like the planners and engineers to consider how to reduce the overall travel by vehicles on Spenard. We want it to be a road that will encourage people to slow down and think of it in terms of the community and what we have to offer, such as our local businesses, and not as a quick cut through.
- **Road Diet:**
 - We support three lane alternatives and would like to see an alternative with protected bike lanes and wide sidewalks. Creative solutions might involve a two

driving lane alternative with a median in sections, such as what has been done on West 9th Avenue and the southern section of Spenard Road. We would like this considered in the design along the corridor.

- We recommend a narrower 11-12' center turn lane so as to free up extra space for the pedestrian and bike accommodations on the sides of the road.
- **Bicycle facility:**
 - We need to increase the width of the separated bike lanes. Even at 4.5 feet, the bike lane is too narrow (especially for fat tire bikes and including the gutter pan) for safety reasons. The reduced size of the turning lanes will make it possible to have wider bike lanes and pedestrian trails. The additional width should not be taken from the multi-use path.
 - The bike lanes should be separate and protected from both motorized traffic and pedestrians. They should be well marked, painted and with signage, all in keeping to the highest and best practices and standards.
- **Access and cross-streets:**
 - More work needs to be done to include the higher traffic counts that will accompany the construction currently happening with the CIHA project and future planned development farther east on Chugach Way. This includes the need for safe non-motorized access for pedestrians, bicyclists, people using wheelchairs or other modes of transportation onto and out of Chugach Way.
 - There needs to be a higher concentration of attention to how the road will interface with Chugach Way, West 30th Avenue, West 32nd/33rd and so on. How will the spillage from the improved road impact the side streets that have no sidewalks or trails? How will the improvements to West 32nd and 33rd interconnect with Spenard?
 - The planners and engineers need to take into account the higher use of West 36th by vehicles between Spenard and Minnesota. The road there is underdeveloped with sidewalks that disappear and a narrow right of way. We can only assume this part of the road will be more heavily used in the future.
 - The SCC has opposed the routing of northbound traffic from Minnesota to Spenard and a couplet at West 36th in the past and continues to do so. This is contrary to our desires for a safer, slower road that will be friendlier to pedestrians and bicyclists.
- **Integrate transit:** The plan is considered a "Transit Corridor", so it should include bus turnouts and ways for passengers to safely cross Spenard Road throughout the corridor to get on and off the bus.
- **Safe crosswalks:**
 - There need to be safe pedestrian crossings. Again, there are the curves which makes it extremely hazardous for people to cross anywhere other than at Benson Blvd. or 36th Avenue.
 - Can the idea of motion lights or weight pads be included on Chugach Way that will allow cars to exit without a planned lighting signal? There is a concern that having a signal at Chugach will cause traffic to back up on Spenard even further towards 36th, but having an "as needed" light might assist as a safer alternative.

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- **Winter maintenance:** We want all seasons of the year to be considered and snow is a problem for everyone: the Municipality snow removal and maintenance crews, vehicle traffic and especially pedestrians and bicyclists. We do not want to see snow storage in bicycle lanes or on sidewalks. How will the road be maintained and how will there extra sidewalk/trail space and bike lanes not be utilized as a convenient snow storage space?
 - **Minnesota Drive:** The designers, planners and traffic engineers need to take into consideration the huge impact Minnesota Drive will have on this project. The Spenard Community Council would like to see future plans, studies and improvements that address Minnesota Blvd. also look into how it interacts with Spenard Road. Minnesota bifurcates Spenard neighborhoods and the community. The sheer size of the Minnesota with multiple lanes, fast speeds and narrow sidewalks that are used as snow storage make it a challenge to the non motorized public. This is a huge commitment of time, resources and public monies. We want the project to be a success for everyone concerned.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our thoughts on this project and we look forward to a fruitful collaboration with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lindsey Hajduk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Lindsey Hajduk, President

Resolved, this 2 day of February 2022.

Vote: 23 in favor, and 0 opposed.