

August 7, 2018

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Patrick A. Duhaney, Acting City Manager 

Subject: SUSPENSION OF THE LIBERTY STREET SAFETY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

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As you are aware much has changed over the last three years related to our infrastructure needs and available resources. In addition to unforeseen expenditures (e.g., the emergency Riverside Drive retaining wall project), we have new opportunities, such as the FC Cincinnati Stadium, that must be incorporated into the fabric of our budget, infrastructure planning and community. The stadium has the potential to result in major positive changes to our City. It will also necessitate changes to our road infrastructure. As of today, we can anticipate only some of what those changes might be. Future planning will require transportation studies for the entire area to include Liberty Street and Central Parkway.

The Administration is aware that the Liberty Street Safety Improvement project is the result of an Over-the-Rhine (OTR) community request. However, the Liberty Street Safety Improvement project, as currently planned and designed, does not adequately take into account the impact of the new stadium. There are also outstanding budgetary concerns that need to be addressed before the project can move forward. It is critical that we take the necessary time to ensure this \$3.2 million project continues to make sense as designed, that the taxpayers are made aware of the true project costs, and that the project is the best use of valuable taxpayer dollars at this time.

Based on the variables stated above, the City Administration has decided to suspend the Liberty Street Safety Improvement project for the time being while the following factors undergo further evaluation:

- **A detailed area traffic study is needed.** Preliminary traffic impact studies have shown that Liberty Street will carry the largest amount of traffic for people attending events at the future FC Cincinnati Stadium. While those preliminary studies are helpful and were appropriate at the time, they do not adequately assess the scale of the impact on our road infrastructure. Now that the specific stadium location has been identified there needs to be a more in-depth study that includes surrounding neighborhoods and considers pedestrian safety, impact on public safety response and deployment, traffic flows, transportation options and parking needs for all impacted areas. Central Parkway, as a result of the stadium, will change dramatically and must also be re-evaluated in context to any work taking place on Liberty Street. We believe that Liberty Street is now just one facet of a more complex project area.
- **There is a project funding gap.** \$2.3 million is what is budgeted for the Liberty Street project; however, the full cost of the project is expected to be \$3.2 million. When the project was first initiated, Greater Cincinnati Water Works (GCWW) was told that a water main that was just replaced in 2002 needed to be relocated due to the narrowing of the right-of-way. The initial plan was that this relocation would be covered by the \$2.3 million available for the project. As more detailed cost estimates were developed, it became evident that the identified project

funding is not enough to include the water main relocation work, estimated at \$960,000. GCWW was tasked by the previous Administration to complete this work assuming 100% of the cost, passed on to ratepayers. Given the strain to GCWW's already stretched capital budget, especially considering the high cost of the unexpected emergency Riverside Drive retaining wall project, and the fact that the water main is not close to the end of its useful life, this Administration finds it impractical to expect the ratepayers to bear the cost of moving a water main that does not require replacement. More time is needed to identify additional funding and/or alternative strategies to realize the project without replacement of the water main.

Since the OTR Community Council recommendation in 2016 and 2017, there have been significant changes to the project area. Given the circumstances listed above, the Administration has determined that the best course of action is to suspend this project pending further evaluation. That does not mean the project cannot be revisited in the future, just that we do not feel it is prudent to move forward at this time.

cc: Don Gindling, Interim Director, Transportation and Engineering  
Philip Denning, Director, Community and Economic Development  
Cathy Bailey, Director, Greater Cincinnati Water Works