MEMORANDUM
To: Charlottesville City Council
From: PLACE Design Task Force
RE: January PLACE meeting
Date: January 28, 2015

PLACE’s January meeting occurred later in the month than usual, which presented the task force with the opportunity to review the newest developments in the West Main Street project, including the council consideration of the project during its latest meeting.

The council discussion about West Main during its January 20th meeting highlighted many of the topics that PLACE addresses as part of our charge and we offer the following thoughts with the hope that they might be helpful as Council considers options for West Main Street.

Public projects such as West Main have the best chance of success when they follow an orderly, progressive process; include the community in the design; and use design to solve problems. PLACE believes that the West Main Street project has been successful in engaging the community and has provided a comprehensive design solution for the corridor, which is currently unsafe and inaccessible with inefficient parking and crumbling infrastructure. The complexity of problems necessitated a nuanced design response based on both extensive research and inclusive community engagement. The steering committee and members of the public who gave their time to the project have offered a bounty of local knowledge and guidance to the consultants and have been important participants in the design. There have been months of dialogue, debate, research, and design investigations. The steering committee unanimously approved the latest concept plan.

PLACE recommends that the city take several steps to address concerns about the West Main project:

1. Organize a process for reconciling the discrepancy between the full range of information captured during the project and what has been discussed with council. This may require additional work sessions so that the consultants have opportunities to discuss the project findings with council in a more interactive way. PLACE also suggests that a meeting between council, the project steering committee and city staff may be valuable for the same reason.
2. Reconvene the West Main steering committee. A follow-up meeting will give members an opportunity to review new project information such as the project’s urban design/code report, which they have not seen yet. A meeting would also provide the members with an opportunity to craft a statement about the design, outlining the pros and cons of the major design decisions from a local perspective.
3. Conduct a full project debrief and management hand-over from Jim Tolbert, who has run the project so far, to another city staff person so that there is project management continuity at this critical juncture in the process.

PLACE understands that this is a critical moment for the City and NDS, in particular, as a transition occurs with the departure of longtime department head Jim Tolbert who has been the staff contact for PLACE. We believe that it is similarly a critical time for West Main Street to continue on the path toward civic improvements for our important link between Downtown and the University.

END