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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Consultants present streetscape design options

Consultants hired to guide streetscape improvements along portions of Main Street and Union Street in the River District provided on Wednesday a computer-aided view of how each block might appear.

The designs, the consultants said, take into account the varying character of the blocks, such as whether they are lined by traditional downtown storefronts or by non-traditional structures such as administrative office buildings.

"We are trying to create a sense of place and make this Danville," said Mark Lieberth, project manager for Land Planning & Design Associates (LPDA). "We want to create a 'somewhere,' and not just a pretty design."

Toward that goal, the consultants presented preliminary designs at three meetings on Wednesday, beginning with an afternoon meeting of representatives from several city of Danville departments that will play a role in the project. Later in the afternoon, a meeting was held for merchants and business owners and operators along Main and Union streets. The final meeting was the community meeting at Galileo.

LPDA Vice President John Schmidt said the designs are meant to "steer the ship."

"We are bringing a lot of ideas regarding the physical construction of Main and Union streets," Schmidt said. "We want your feedback. We want to leave with a good direction, knowing the ideas that rise to the top."

In the 300 block of Main Street from Memorial Drive to Market Street, LPDA suggests keeping the existing brick circle at the intersection of Memorial Drive, Craghead Street and Main Street. "They (brick pavings at intersections) are nice features," Lieberth said. "We would only want to reset the brick and perhaps add an accent."

The presentation also included the creation of a plaza in the corner space located to the side of the building at 310 Main St., beneath the mural of the “Wreck of the Old 97.”

“It would bring added visibility to that corner,” Lieberth said.

Across the street at the building now occupied by Danville Public Schools’ central administrative offices, LPDA suggests removing the planters atop the wall at the sidewalk, and then covering the wall with a non-structural material that would bring the appearance more in line with the rest of Main Street.

“We want to set up these vertical elements that can be repeated along Main Street,” Lieberth said.

These vertical elements or walls would not only cover the fronts of non-commercial areas along Main Street – such as the school administration building – but they also would be placed in front of the parking lots located in the 500 block of Main Street from Union Street to Floyd Street. These walls would screen vehicles from view, much like on Bridge Street.

Also in the 500 block of Main Street, LPDA suggests combining entrances to parking areas. “You have a lot of curb cuts there now,” Lieberth said.

At the site of the former Downtowner Motor Inn, which is undergoing demolition, Lieberth pitched the idea of a recessed area from the street. “We’re not talking about using it as a park but as a refuge,” Lieberth said. “We want to provide some relief to this side of the street – a place for some benches and tables not off the street but not right up on it. I think there needs to be a sitting area where you can go and sit and have a sandwich or relax.”

The streetscape project will focus on Main Street from Memorial Drive and Craghead Street to Floyd Street and on North Union Street from Main Street to Spring Street.

Funds will be used to widen existing sidewalks, install brick pavers, create more visible and safer pedestrian crossings, and provide amenities such as outdoor café space, trees, benches and new lighting.

Also as part of the project, the number of traffic lanes on Main Street will be reduced from three to two by eliminating the center turn lane. This change will allow for the wider sidewalks.

On Wednesday, LPDA presented curbing and paving options available for the widening of sidewalks.

“We have heard time and time again that citizens here really like Bridge Street, with its granite curb, wide verge and concrete sidewalks,” Lieberth said. “It is a pretty simple design.”

Lieberth said granite curbing is attractive, historically correct and durable, but it is two to three times more expensive than concrete curbs.

“If we want granite curbs, then we may have to have more concrete sidewalk, and less brick sidewalk.”

Similarly, Lieberth said brick sidewalks are more expensive than concrete sidewalks.

To remain within budget, LPDA suggests concrete curbs, with a blend of brick and concrete sidewalks. The suggestion met with favorable comment at all three meetings on Wednesday.

The next step in the design process is for LPDA to finalize drawings and present them to City Council during its March 6 meeting. Following the meeting, LPDA will perform the final engineering, which would take until May to complete. Construction bids will be solicited in June. Construction is scheduled to begin in July and continue through March of 2013.

LPDA is a landscape architecture and planning firm providing services since 1971 for both public and private clients. The company has offices in Charlottesville and Sterling. Its list of clients includes more than 25 cities and counties in Virginia, as well as hospitals, universities, state agencies and U.S. military departments.

Wednesday's meeting was the second community meeting to be held on the streetscape project. The first meeting was held on Jan. 18 at Galileo High School.

The project is estimated to cost \$2.8 million, with half of the total provided by the Virginia Department of Transportation.

The streetscape project was determined to be the most feasible public project at this time following a study last year that identified public and private projects to bring new life to the River District. The district includes the downtown and tobacco warehouse areas.

Upon completion of the project, a second phase is planned if funding is available. The second phase will involve the reconfiguration of Main Street from its intersection with Memorial Drive and Craghead Street to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Bridge. The city is in the process of seeking a VDOT grant of \$800,000 to pay for half of the \$1.6 million cost.

For more information on the River District and the development project, visit the city of Danville's website at www.danville-va.gov. For more information on LPDA, visit www.lpda.net.

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