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March 27, 2023

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Walkable Albany
Andrew Neidhardt, President
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Washington Park Neighborhood Association
Shadi Khadivi, President
shadi.khadivi@gmail.com

RE: PIN 1761.64 Lark Street Improvement Project

Dear Neighborhood Association & Walkable Albany Presidents:

Thank you for providing the City with various comments throughout the entire process of the Lark Street Streetscape Improvement Project. We sincerely appreciate your partnership and support through the planning and design process.

The City and our Engineering Consultants have reviewed various comments and suggestions from a variety of public input mediums. Please accept this letter as the City's response to 11 more frequently asked questions and/or concerns brought to the City's attention.

1. **Align new crosswalks with the existing sidewalk paths.** *Rationale: Clear sightlines and pedestrian pathways are optimal for walkability, particularly in business environments. By aligning the crosswalks with the corresponding sidewalk paths, as opposed to locating them yards out of the direct path, crosswalks would be more naturally accessible than either the existing or proposed offset configuration allows. This gained space would add up to improved on-street parking, facilitate business deliveries, and allow for the planting of more trees than are currently planned.*



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Elissa Halloran
Elissa Halloran Designs
229 Lark Street
Albany, NY 12210

Sent via elissahalloran@yahoo.com

RE: PIN 1761.64 Lark Street Improvement Project

Dear Elissa:

Thank you for providing the City with comments regarding the Lark Street Streetscape Improvement Project. The City and our Engineering Consultants have reviewed your comments and concerns. Please accept this letter as the City's response to the two items you raised with us.

1. *Proposed midblock crosswalk near Chestnut Street:*

City Response: The purpose of the Lark Street Improvement Project is threefold:

- Rehabilitate the roadway pavement surface on Lark Street that has exceeded its service life.
- Correct sidewalks and curb ramps that are not in conformance with current ADA Standards.
- Include choice elements/recommendations from the 2020 Lark Street Improvement Study, with a focus on providing increased traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures where feasible and within the project's funding/budgetary constraints.

The purpose of the mid-block crosswalks is to:

- 1) Provide additional pedestrian access across Lark Street.
- 2) Increase pedestrian safety through the traffic-calming effects of adding curb line extensions (bumpouts) at the crosswalks, and

- 3) Increase direct pedestrian links between Lark Street and the Empire State Plaza two blocks to the east.

The 2020 Lark Street Improvement Study recommended midblock crosswalks at **Hamilton Street, Chestnut Street, and Spring Street**. This recommendation received wide-spread community and stakeholder support at the time the study was completed.

The actual placement of the mid-block crosswalk at the selected intersection locations (north or south) is dependent on several factors including the safety considerations listed above, as well as roadway drainage collection and piping, underground utility interference, and potential disturbance of existing above-ground features such as trees, utility poles, and light poles.

The intersection of **Spring Street** was not selected as a candidate based on its proximity to Washington Avenue (150 feet), and because the incorporation of bumpouts (to provide traffic calming) is not feasible with the multi-lane configuration approaching Washington Avenue.

The distance between Madison Avenue and Hudson Avenue is the longest stretch on Lark Street between existing crosswalks. Keeping that in mind, the **Hamilton Street** location, at the mid-point between Madison Avenue and Hudson Avenue, and at the 1/3rd point of the corridor, was chosen as one of the two new crosswalk locations. Installing the crosswalk and bumpouts at this location meets the three goals established for the installation of new crosswalks.

Both Jay Street and Chestnut Street were then considered for the final crosswalk location. **Chestnut Street** was chosen over **Jay Street** based on the following factors:

1. The area of Lark Street between Lancaster Street and State Street (where Chestnut Street is at the mid-point) is the second longest stretch between existing crosswalks.
2. The Empire State Plaza is directly accessible from Chestnut Street whereas it is not directly accessible from Jay Street.
3. Chestnut Street is at the 2/3rd location along the corridor, and when combined with the Hamilton Street crossing at the 1/3rd location, crossings and traffic calming features will be evenly distributed within the corridor.

As currently designed, the addition of mid-block crossings at Hamilton Street and Chestnut Street provide increased pedestrian safety and traffic calming features throughout the corridor and limit the loss of existing parking spaces to the greatest extent possible.

The City understands that installing additional crosswalks on Lark Street would result in some parking loss (2 spots per crosswalk). That is why we have worked hard to ensure as few parking spaces as possible are eliminated as part of these improvements, and only 9 parking spaces will be eliminated across the corridor.

2. *Trees:*

City Response: As mentioned in the presentation at the Lark Street Improvement Project Public Informational Meeting, the City's Arborist will be inspecting and evaluating all of the street trees within the project limits to determine the overall health of each individual tree and make recommendations for removal and replacement. The City's goal is to remove as few trees as possible and replace any tree that is unfortunately removed as part of the construction process.

Thank you again for providing us with your comments.

Sincerely,



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City Engineer

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City Response: The proposed north-south crosswalks along Lark Street that cross the side streets are generally in-line with the pedestrian walking path. The proposed east-west crosswalks, crossing Lark Street, are generally aligned in the same location as the existing crosswalks. This is necessary because existing utility poles, traffic signal poles, and streetlights would conflict with the curb ramps if the crosswalks were moved away from their existing locations.

2. **Reduce the radii of corner curbs from 15 feet to 10 feet.** ***Rationale:** Ten-foot radii will slow turning vehicles, provide larger pedestrian waiting areas at corners, and improve sight lines, thereby altogether improving pedestrian safety and walkability. Reducing the size of the curb arc and refining the design of the bump outs will also help align the curb cuts so they face the street being crossed and are not angled toward the intersections.*

City Response: The currently proposed intersection radii design provides for the turning movement of emergency response vehicles, garbage trucks, and single-unit delivery trucks the City currently owns. Any smaller radii would prevent our larger vehicles, including certain fire and waste collection vehicles, from making the turn without encroaching into oncoming lanes or jumping the curb.

3. **Add east-west crosswalks at Spring and Jay.** ***Rationale:** Facilitating crossing here makes sense because these cross streets are close to parking lots and are places where drivers-turned-pedestrians are likely to cross the street. Moreover, Spring is the only place where a car can cross Lark but a pedestrian cannot.*

The currently proposed crosswalk at Hamilton makes sense: Madison to Hudson is the longest unbroken stretch in the neighborhood, and there is already a curb cut there, so there will be no new burden of maintenance on the property owner. We propose that you consider eliminating the Chestnut crosswalk and curb cut from the plan. Doing so would help protect the incoming and outgoing delivery operations of the many businesses on that block. It would also help keep the street clear of double parking there. The addition of crosswalks at Spring, Jay, and Hamilton would achieve the goal of increasing pedestrian safety without potential adverse effects on property owners.

City Response: The purpose of the Lark Street Improvement Project is threefold:

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The actual placement of the mid-block crosswalk at the selected intersection locations (north or south) is dependent on several factors including the safety considerations listed above, as well as roadway drainage collection and piping, underground utility interference, and potential disturbance of existing above-ground features such as trees, utility poles, and light poles.

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The distance between Madison Avenue and Hudson Avenue is the longest stretch on Lark Street between existing crosswalks. Keeping that in mind, the **Hamilton Street** location, at the mid-point between Madison Avenue and Hudson Avenue, and at the 1/3rd point of the corridor, was chosen as one of the two new crosswalk locations. Installing the crosswalk and bumpouts at this location meets the three goals established for the installation of new crosswalks.

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As currently designed, the addition of mid-block crossings at Hamilton Street and Chestnut Street provide increased pedestrian safety and traffic calming features

throughout the corridor and limit the loss of existing parking spaces to the greatest extent possible.

The City understands that installing additional crosswalks on Lark Street would result in some parking loss (2 spots per crosswalk). That is why we have worked hard to ensure as few parking spaces as possible are eliminated as part of these improvements, and only 9 parking spaces will be eliminated across the corridor.

4. **Relocate traffic poles out of direct, natural pedestrian paths.** *Rationale: The fewer obstacles and obstructions on a sidewalk the better. Currently, and in the proposed plan, there are some outsized poles that are awkwardly placed and impede easy walking.*

City Response: The entire Lark Street corridor is home to large amounts of various underground utilities, including water, sewer, electricity, cable, and other conduits - significantly more than underneath a typical city street. We have designed this project to have as little impact on the underground infrastructure as possible to limit the impact of the project schedule on residents and businesses and also because of the limited funding available. After reviewing traffic and utility pole locations across the Lark Street Corridor, it has been reaffirmed that we are unable to relocate any traffic or utility poles due to the locations of the existing underground infrastructure. It should be noted that years ago the poles were originally planned to be placed outside the walking path but were installed in their current locations because of the location of the underground utilities.

5. **Consider eliminating one northbound lane at Washington and Lark to improve pedestrian safety.** *Rationale: Eliminating one of the two northbound lanes here would have a traffic-calming effect at this notoriously busy intersection because it would allow retaining existing parking on the west side of the street, thereby creating a pinch-point, while not impacting businesses that increasingly rely on delivery services.*

City Response: The City recently evaluated and reconstructed the intersection of Washington Ave. and Lark St. After further review as part of this project, it was determined any changes to Washington/Lark would exceed the budget allocated for this project and may have additional unintended impacts to the intersections surrounding Washington and Lark that were outside the scope of this project.

6. **Reconsider the string-light gateway plan.** *Rationale: Because they will be strung necessarily high to allow truck and bus clearance, the string lights won't achieve the desired aesthetic impact, i.e., the pleasant glow typical of low-strung lights. It would be better to eliminate these than have ineffectual lighting that will also be difficult and costly to maintain. If more light is desired, the existing lamp posts could be retrofitted*

with two luminaire heads set to a warm, welcoming color temperature, an overall effect that would be more in keeping with the historic character of the street.

City Response: The gateway string lights are an integral component developed as a recommendation from the 2020 Lark Street Improvement Study and has the overwhelming support of the Lark Street Stakeholder group and the public attending the recent Public informational Meeting. The proposed height of the lighting system will be approximately at the same height as the traffic signal lights. These fixtures will emit a warming light and serve as a gateway to the Lark Street Corridor.

7. **Designate areas for new and additional trash cans.** *Rationale: The inclusion of 20 anchored, lockable, and high-quality trash cans is necessary to helping mitigate the neighborhood's stubborn litter problem.*

City Response: While the placement of trash receptacles was not included in the scope of the Lark Street Streetscape Improvement Project, the Department of General Services understands the addition and placement of new trash receptacles is important to the Lark Street Corridor. DGS is committed to working in collaboration with the Lark Street BID and Neighborhood Associations upon the conclusion of this project to discuss and implement the siting of new trash receptacles along the corridor.

8. **Select cast-iron detectable warning pads for corners.** *Rationale: Cast iron is durable and a sound investment. Moreover, because it's more substantial, it simply looks and feels better and is more dignified than plastic or cement, particularly in a historic neighborhood.*

City Response: Cast Iron Detectable Warnings at the curb ramps are included in the current design plans and were identified as being included during the Public Informational Meeting presentation.

9. **Select signage appropriate to the neighborhood's scale and historic fabric.** *Rationale: Overly large or too-bright "fluorescent yellow" signs, as are used in larger scale environments, should not be used here. Standard yellow should be chosen. Too many and outsized signs run the risk of causing sign-fatigue, not improved awareness.*

City Response: The "type" of reflective sheeting used on traffic signs is a mandated requirement from the Federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) with the NYS Supplement to the MUTCD, and the NYSDOT Standard Specifications. All signs are required to have retro-reflective sheeting. The City uses the "fluorescent yellow-green" sheeting for these type signs as it provides the motorists a heightened view of the unsignalized pedestrian crossings. This is consistent City wide at signed pedestrian crossings.

The “size” of traffic signs is a mandated requirement from the Federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) with the NYS Supplement to the MUTCD based on the roadway type. For Lark Street, sign sizes will be based on the “Conventional Road – Single Lane” category, which provides for the smallest sign sizes. Although Lark Street is a 30-mph roadway, it is also a Principal Arterial, and the “minimum” sign size would not apply.

Standard Sign Sizes follow the Federal Highway Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and/or the NYS Supplemental Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices which are adopted as law in the New York State Vehicle and Traffic Law. Standard Highway signs sizes are listed in each of the two manuals.

- Stop Signs: 30” octagon;
- Speed Limit: 24”x30” rectangle;
- On Way: 36”x12” rectangle;
- Pedestrian warning/crossing sign: 30” Diamond plus a 12”x24” arrow or ahead sign;
- Parking Regulation: 12x18” or 12”x24” rectangle depending upon the amount of wording on the sign;
- No Turn on Red: 24”x30” rectangle.

These are typical sign sizes for most of the signs that will be placed on the Lark Street project. In addition, these standard sign sizes are used City wide.

10. **Reduce the footprint of the proposed permeable tree surrounds.** *Rationale: The permeable tree surrounds are a good solution to control weeds and enable maintenance. That said, there’s no need for them to cover as much surface area as they do in the plan. The existing decorative block surround could be retained with the permeable fabric set within it.*

City Response: In order to remove the existing cast iron frames used to support the existing tree grates, the concrete sidewalk panels adjacent to the tree grates require removal, which will also necessitate the removal of the brick surrounds. The concrete sidewalk panels will be replaced in-kind and a 5’ x 5’ permeable tree surround installed.

11. **Reconsider the plan for benches.** *Rationale: The benches proposed do not fit with the historic aesthetic of Lark Street, and they will likely quickly become a maintenance problem.*

City Response: While the placement of benches was not included in the scope of the Lark Street Streetscape Improvement Project, the Department of General Services understands the addition and placement of new benches is important to the Lark Street

Corridor. DGS is committed to working in collaboration with the Lark Street BID and Neighborhood Associations upon the conclusion of this project to discuss and implement the siting of new benches along the corridor.

Thank you again for providing us your comments.

Sincerely,



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City Engineer

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2. *Trees:*

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