

Memo



Date: May 24, 2011
File: 2530
To: City Manager
From: Andrew Gibbs - Manager, Park and Public Space Projects
Subject: Project Update - Highway 97 Median Landscaping, Burtch to Highway 33

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the Report from the Manager, Park and Public Space Projects dated May 24, 2011 with respect to the Highway 97 Median Landscaping project from Burtch Road to Highway 33.

Purpose:

To provide a status report to Council regarding the design and re-development of the existing Highway 97 medians between Burtch and Highway 33. Since its original endorsement by Council as a capital budget item several years ago this project has been delayed several times.

Background:

The Highway 97 corridor through the city is a vital transportation link that has been described by many as an eyesore, as a poor reflection of our community. To improve this image the City has been gradually landscaping centre medians of this corridor to green it up. As a result of this effort 6.5km of the 10km length between Abbott Street and Sexsmith Road has landscaped medians. The remaining 3.5km, between Burtch and Highway 33 does not. In this stretch of the corridor there are 6 'candidate' medians (n.b. a 'candidate' median is one that may be wide enough and long enough to be cost effectively landscaped without interfering with roadway visibility, infrastructure and left turn lanes):

- Burtch to Sutherland
- PRP Overpass to Kirschner
- Spall to Ambrosi
- Cooper to Dilworth
- Underhill to Leckie
- Banks to Powick

The existing medians are typically a gently sloping cap of asphalt or concrete between the two curbs that define the median. Their appearance is plain; there is no landscaping or special hard surface treatment of the medians. The original design treatment proposed for these medians was similar to other medians along the corridor that were already landscaped: sloped unit pavers on either side of a band of landscaping running the length of the median.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name of the author, Andrew Gibbs.

Landscaping of these medians had been deferred for several years due to the estimated cost of utility works necessary for the landscaping (i.e. burial of existing shallow street lighting electrical conduit that ran the length of the corridor, and extension of irrigation service to the medians from the boulevards). Additionally, the effectiveness of the landscaping would have been limited in favour of roadway safety because trees would have interfered with the ability of the roadway lights, located in the medians, to maintain adequate light levels on the roadway.

These conditions changed in 2009 when the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure added a third westbound lane to Highway 97. As part of this work the streetlights were relocated from the medians to the boulevards and the shallow electrical line in the medians was removed. As part of this larger project the City was also able to have utility conduit installed to the medians for irrigation of future landscaping. The result of this widening project was that the medians are now unencumbered by costly utility work that would have to be paid by the City.

In 2009 WorkSafeBC notified the City that maintenance practices being used by City-hired contractors on the existing landscaped Highway 97 medians were not adequate for worker protection. In response the contractors had to undertake maintenance work at night with lane closures and Parks Services received permission from Council to use pesticides on a temporary basis in order to control weeds in the medians and mitigate cost impacts. Today the cost to maintain the existing medians is approximately twice what it was prior to 2009.

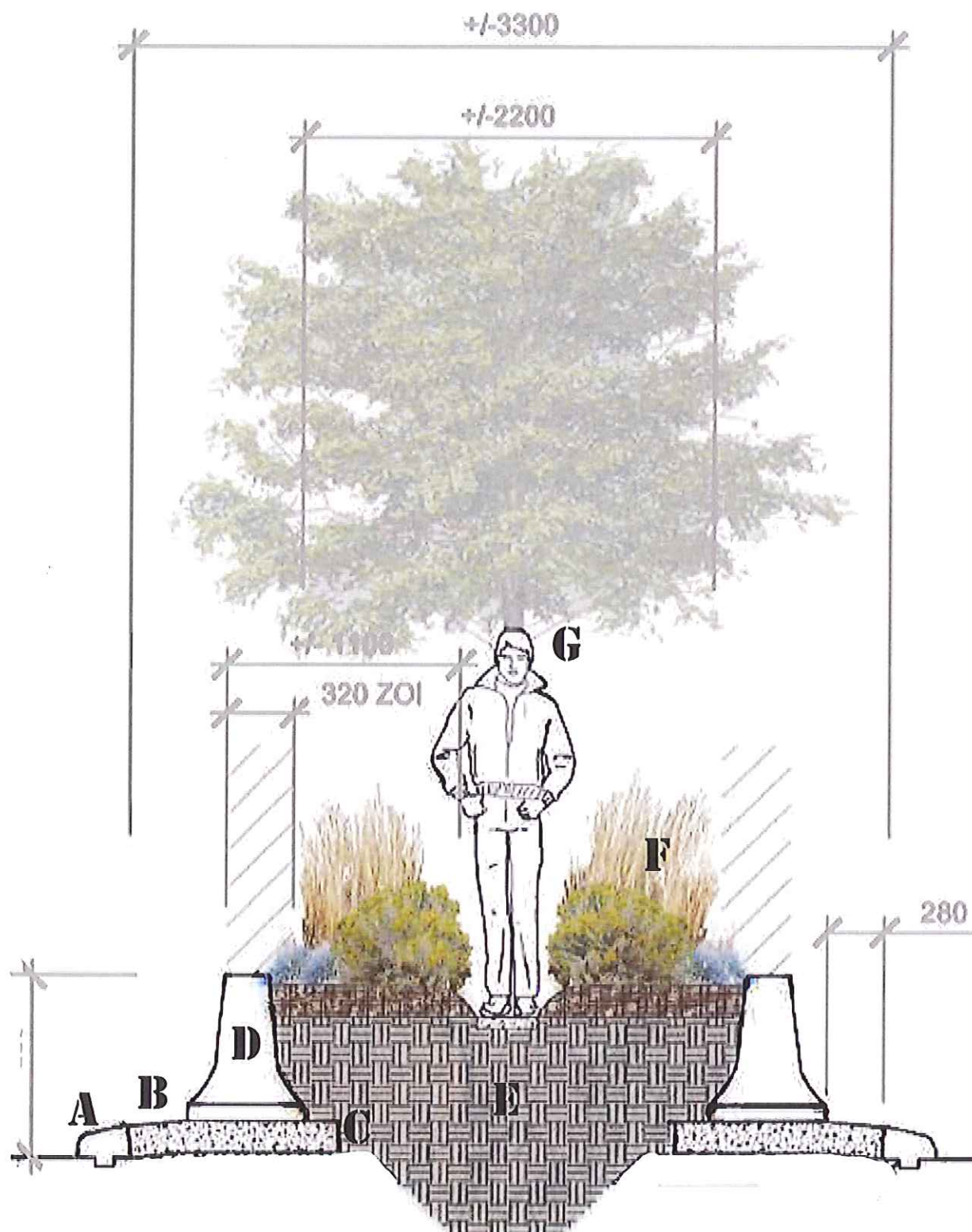
The WorkSafe notification has ongoing safety, maintenance and cost impacts for medians in the city. In order to mitigate those impacts for new medians it was necessary to take a new approach to the landscaping of them. What began as an initiative to green-up the highway corridor from Burtch to Highway 33 and improve its appearance evolved into a more complex undertaking. As a result the objectives for the median landscaping project were revised to achieve the following:

- Enhanced worker safety
- Reduced maintenance effort and cost
- Compliance with highway safety requirements
- Improved corridor appearance

At the start of the re-design process six different options were developed to meet these objectives. Each of the options was evaluated by City staff to determine how it performed in regard to worker safety, maintenance requirements and aesthetics. Based on this evaluation one option was selected as the preferred approach. WorkSafeBC was consulted about the preferred option and concurred with the City evaluation as it related to worker safety. Additionally, a highway safety audit was performed on the preferred option and several changes were recommended in order to address road safety considerations.

In 2010 the City retained a local consulting firm (Urban Systems Ltd) to work with City staff, WorkSafeBC and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to develop a median design that would meet the above objectives, and then to get the first new median built. It has taken almost 24 months to resolve the overlapping and sometimes conflicting design objectives, and the need to involve the various agencies and City departments with a stake in the medians, to get to the point where there is an acceptable design for new medians.

The following sketch illustrates what the new median will look like:



The result is a median design that will provide a greener, more aesthetically pleasing corridor for the highway between Powick and Burtch. In addition, the new medians are expected to require less maintenance effort than the existing ones. Most importantly, the design for the new medians is safer. It is compatible with WorkSafeBC and Ministry expectations, and adheres to the City's internal safety protocols and standards.

This design will function as the standard for new and replacement medians between Okanagan Lake and Highway 33. The City has been advised by the Ministry and WorkSafe that for new and replacement medians north of Highway 33, due to higher traffic speeds, revisions to this design or a different design entirely may be required. Work on this by City staff will commence after the first new median is constructed.

Based on this final concept plan the detail design of a standard median treatment has begun. It is expected that detail design and costing for the first phase of median construction will be complete in 8 weeks and that, subject to Ministry permit approvals and project pricing, construction will begin in the fall. The proposed first phase is in front of Orchard Park Mall, between Cooper and Dilworth.

Internal Circulation:

- I. Wilson - Manager, Park Services
- T. Barton - Manager, Parks and Public Places
- P. Irani - Manager, Road, Drainage and Solid Waste Projects
- A. Albiston - Manager, Roadway Projects
- B. Donaldson - Occupational Health and Safety Advisor

Considerations not applicable to this report:

- Legal/Statutory Authority:
- Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:
- Existing Policy:
- Financial/Budgetary Considerations:
- Personnel Implications:
- External Agency/Public Comments:
- Community & Media Relations Comments:
- Alternate Recommendation:

Submitted by:



Andrew Gibbs - Manager, Park and Public Space Projects

Approved for inclusion:



B. Berry - Director, Design and Construction Services