



Memorandum

To: City Council Members

CC: David E. Weiss, Mayor
Jeri Chaikin, Chief Administrative Officer

From: Joyce G. Braverman, Director of Planning
Laura Englehart, Economic Development Director
Kara Hamley O'Donnell, Principal Planner
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Subject: **Lee Road Corridor Action Plan**

Date: May 4, 2021

This memo serves as an update on the **Lee Road Corridor Action Plan and a recommendation for moving the plan forward**. The action plan is a community-driven, visionary, targeted reinvestment plan for the Lee Road commercial corridor that will craft the long-term vision and address all aspects of transportation and redevelopment.

Lee Road is a busy regional thoroughfare that carries ~23,400 cars a day. The half-mile between Chagrin and Scottsdale is characterized by high commercial vacancies, tax delinquencies, little landscaping, and 45 driveway curb cuts that create a pedestrian-hostile environment. Underinvestment and disjointedness in the commercial district contrast with the nearby active and diverse residential neighborhoods that have a strong sense of community.

In 2012, NOACA TLCI funds paid for the Lee Road Traffic & Corridor Plan, a study of Lee Road from border to border. The plan recommended drive lane reduction and bike lanes/shoulders along most of Lee Road. It also suggested next steps including: developing a long-term vision for the area south of Chagrin Boulevard including study and creation of access management plan, shared-use parking lot on City-owned parcel, redevelopment strategies on parcels with insufficient depth (including parcel consolidation), urban design strategy, marketing strategy, and developing connections to the residential neighborhoods.

The 2012 traffic study is still valid and the County will be conducting a Safety Study for the corridor this summer. The proposed Lee Road Corridor Action Plan will use this data and undertake the next steps recommended in the 2012 plan. The Plan will provide detailed recommendations for transportation enhancements: traffic calming; access management; pedestrian and bike amenities within the district and connections with surrounding neighborhoods and corridors; urban design strategies to achieve a corridor transformation; an economic development and facilities strategy; and robust community engagement.

The **Lee Road Corridor Connections Plan** will address four critical elements:

- 1) **Urban Design and Streetscape Plan**—consider and improve the overall physical design and appearance of the corridor.
- 2) **Economic Development and Facilities Strategy**—develop a place-based economic development strategy to optimize development opportunities along the Lee Road corridor and create an environment where business can thrive; consider best use and redevelopment of public facilities along the corridor.
- 3) **Transportation Plan**—Establish a multi-faceted plan for all modes of transportation using data and information collected in previous traffic studies; study traffic calming, access management, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure; enhance connectivity between the business district and neighborhoods, businesses and residents, and between residents and jobs.
- 4) **Community and Stakeholder Engagement**—implement a robust process to gather input from residents, neighborhood associations, business owners, property owners, and the broader community.

The Lee Road plan sets up investment in a part of the community that has not seen large-scale reinvestment since work was completed in 2005 at the Shaker Town Center shopping center area. Due to resident-led efforts, particularly through the Moreland Rising project, residential neighborhoods adjacent to the Lee Road commercial district have become stronger and more vibrant. The City should help foster the same spirit and be intentional in creating equitable, inclusive approaches to planning and development in the neighboring commercial district. Lee Road connects to Cleveland Heights to the north. The corridor continues south through Cleveland and is an important link to Cleveland's Lee Harvard neighborhood and I-480. Participation in this planning effort and coordination with Cleveland's plans for the corridor is crucial to the Plan's success. Investment and connectivity between the business district and adjacent residential neighborhoods, between businesses and residents, and between residents and potential jobs is important.

Accordingly, the plan will involve diverse resident and stakeholder participation from the adjacent neighborhoods and current business owners in the commercial corridor. The proposed plan will also complement a recently passed NOACA resolution calling for equity in transportation planning. The City has completed past traffic studies and plans in the Lee Road area and will build on those plans to complete a comprehensive, detailed plan for transforming the area into a thriving commercial district that is attractive, walkable, and bikeable.

To fund this study, Council authorized the Planning Department to apply for, and accept, \$100,000 in NOACA TLCI grant funds with a \$25,000 local match via Ordinance 20-77 in September 2020. This application was part of a highly competitive field and, unfortunately, the planning study funding request was not successful.

Council authorization of funding this year to undertake a year-long planning effort will allow the City to complete advanced planning now to pave the way for implementation funding and meet the expected 2025-26 construction year. To keep on schedule, the City will soon issue an RFP for planning services. Once a consultant team is recommended by the administration and costs finalized, we will come to committees and Council with a request to appropriate the funds for the study from the general capital fund.

The City has requested implementation funding from NOACA for road resurfacing, a multipurpose path/streetscape in funding year 2025. We are also preparing a Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) grant application to NOACA for Lee Road signalization and for Lee Road multipurpose path funding that, if awarded, would be available in 2025-2026. The plan would also prepare us to request State capital funds and other grant sources in 2022-2024. The plan and funding strategy uses the same techniques as other successful projects, most recently the Chagrin/Warrensville intersection reconfiguration and public improvements in the Van Aken District.

Recommendation. This is a request for support to distribute a Request for Proposals for consulting services for the **Lee Road Corridor Action Plan**, a visionary reinvestment plan for the Lee Road commercial corridor.