Mr. McMeekin, Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m., introduced the Urban Design Review Board members as well as the Planning Department staff, and explained the UDRB’s public hearing and administrative meeting procedures.

**PUBLIC MEETING**

**Public Case for Discussion & Approval:**

| UD-10-015 | REQUEST: Schematic Design Review and Approval-144th Street and Blondo Corridor Improvements |
| City of Omaha | LOCATION: 144th Street from Dodge St. to Maple and Blondo Street from 132nd Street to 156th Street |

At the Urban Design Review Board meeting held on October 21, 2010, Kyle Anderson, Project Manager, Felsburg, Holt & Ullevig, presented the project. The context of the project on 144th Street runs from the edge of the interchange of West Dodge Road to near Corby Street on the north end which will complete the gap on the 144th Street corridor. Blondo Street has been improved from east to west but this project will tie in at 125th Street. As indicated in the construction design phase plan, the construction is to begin in 2012 on 144th Street; in 2013 the intersection and up to Corby Street; 2014, Blondo Street to the intersection; and the last section of Blondo Street in 2014. 144th Street will be widened to a four-lane facility with a 28-foot widening to allow for dual turn lanes and graded to allow for future widening to six lanes. The long range transportation plan does indicate that the entire segment of 144th Street is identified as needing six lanes.

Kevin Strehle, BCDM, presented the landscape aspect of the project. He stated that several items were utilized from the 1989 Master Plan, the Green Street handbook and the context of what currently exists. Funding was an impact of the design. The medians and intersections on 144th Street will have
ornamental trees with ornamental grasses with a recommendation of the native buffalo grass because of the maintenance and reduction of molding. On the east and west side of 144th Street, near El Dorado and Linden Estates, there is a substantial amount of landscaping where very little planting needs to occur. On Blondo Street from 135th Street to the west the desire would be ornamental trees in the median area which is a very similar approach of what exists on Blondo Street (east of 135th Street) with groups of three trees at intervals of 100+ feet. The landscaping on Blondo Street is restricted because of the right-of-way therefore most trees will be placed behind the sidewalk. He asked the board for their opinion and approach with regard to the red concrete, retaining walls standards, rain gardens, lighting and traffic poles on 144th Street which are presently galvanized.

Jed Moulton, Urban Design Manager, summarized that there have been several meetings with Jon Meyer, Public Works, and the design team. These two streets are classified as Green Streets with 144th Street as an Area of Civic Important and the review is based on the Green Street plans and handbook and other forms of adopted Master Plan documents. Recommendations were made that were previously discussed. A recommendation report will be formulated after this hearing.

Mr. Ciaccio stated he has a big concern with the signal truss with regard to aesthetics and continued use in the future. Todd Pfitzer, Public Works, stated there are good reasons for a truss on a wide intersection. When the mast arms are over 65 to 70 feet, they begin to sag and it is impossible to mount cameras at the end. Mr. Ciaccio questioned if there was a way to design the truss in more of an art form, i.e. different metal, painted differently. He suggested exploring the use of the trusses from a more functional design to a more aesthetic design. Mr. Anderson indicated that the truss provides more opportunities to hook up and install ITS improvements on the system. With regard to federal aide projects, there are restrictions on what FHWA would consider reimbursable.

Mr. Peters asked for a brief overview of the funding sources. Mr. Meyer stated the entire project must meet the federal guidelines but 80% of the project is federal funds and 20% is local.

Mr. Peters asked for the federal position on the noise walls. Mr. Meyer answered that the retaining walls are a basic item but the staining is for aesthetics purposes. Any additional cost on staining would not be a major cost but is optional.

Mr. Peters stated he is interested in achieving as much as possible with regard to the Green Street initiative. There was a community decision that public and private projects in Omaha would be more appropriate to Omaha and achieve the Green Street vision. Mr. Anderson stated he could not guarantee 800 trees per mile but the number of existing trees will be part of the number. Mr. Ciaccio requested that the Green Street manual be adhered to with regard to 800 trees per mile. Mr. Moulton verified that both 144th Street and Blondo Street are Green Streets. Mr. Anderson pointed out that on Blondo Street there is very little room to plant 800 trees per mile. Mr. Ciaccio indicated that the continuity of the landscaping or scattered pattern does not relate well to the residential district.

Mr. Strehle questioned the use of the landscaping that has been established on the east side corridor near Linden Estates area and to the north. Mr. Ciaccio suggested augmenting the design to achieve a pattern south of the Linden Estates area.

Mr. Tondl questioned if the proposed truss would accommodate six lanes. Mr. Pfitzer answered that 144th Street is slated as a future six-lane corridor therefore the truss would be designed for the future. Mr. McMeekin asked what the truss is designed for. Mr. Anderson stated that the amount of vehicles on 144th Street is in the upper 20,000 and the projection is for 50,000 vehicles by the year 2037. Mr. Pfitzer stated that development would drive the increase in vehicles and is a major developable corridor. Mr. Anderson stated that 144th Street is one of the few north/south corridors in west Omaha. Mr. Holland was concerned that a truss would be installed for a future six-lane corridor that may be constructed 25 years from now.

Mr. Holland stated that Green Street sets a level of aesthetics that this board is interrupting including screened walls, retaining wall colors, and acoustical walls. Mr. Anderson agreed to gather and analyze the data.
Mr. Holland asked if a lighting plan has been created. Mr. Meyer answered that a lighting plan has not been created for this corridor. The general direction in Public Works is to reduce the amount of overall lighting. In preliminary findings, Omaha is over lit by two and one half times and is not sustainable. He stated his recommendation would be to provide lighting at major intersections but at a reduced level. He indicated he would not recommend the lighting of the straight corridors because there is no evidence that the lighting would provide for safer driving. Mr. Moulton questioned the need to supplement pedestrian lighting in the distinct pedestrian area on the side path along 144th Street.

Mr. Holland questioned where the retaining wall and/or screen walls would be located. Mr. Anderson stated there are preliminary design plans that were presented at a recent public meeting. Mr. Holland stated the board would review everything above the dirt including retaining walls. Mr. McMeekin stated he would like to see more detail including the location of the retaining walls, material of the walls and the look of the wall.

Mr. Ciaccio questioned Mr. Anderson about the noise walls. Mr. Anderson answered that there will be a public meeting held where there will be a vote on whether or not to have a wall on the northeast corner of 144th and Blondo Street.

Mr. Ciaccio asked if all center islands would be buffalo grass. Mr. Anderson stated that was a recommendation from Parks and Recreation. Mr. Ciaccio questioned the percentage of the existing plant material on the east side of 144th Street. Mr. Strehle stated the majority of the landscape sits to the east inside the trail with a few trees on the west side between the trail and the road. Mr. Anderson indicated that they plan on working closely with the individual homeowner associations by identifying the trees that will be removed.

Mr. Holland asked if metro transit would be anticipated. Mr. Anderson stated there is a new transit study on the books within the next two years but anything can be accommodated from that study. Mr. Holland questioned if there will be an opportunity for benches along the long pathway. Mr. Anderson stated that according to the Master Plan, there will be benches or outdoor rooms but a decision has to be made as to who will fund the project.

Ms. Jacobson recommended that non-profits or art organizations could be a partner for private funding or grants. She stated that Lauritzen Gardens could possibly consider a west Omaha display and that may be a solution to the maintenance of the trees.

Mr. Peters was concerned about the lack of opportunities to landscape along Blondo Street and would strongly encourage members of the board to consider supporting the application of the Green Streets.

Mr. Anderson stated he was confused and questioned why the 144th Street segments to the south was considered a good example of a Green Street. Also, a segment of Blondo Street was identified as a typical standard project in the Green Streets manual but did not meet the criteria of the tree planting. He stated he would like to continue what was done with regard to the Green Street manual. Mr. Peters stated he believes that the Green Street initiative was to build upon those reasonable examples.

Mr. McMeekin questioned the pedestrian refuge areas at the longer crossings and how that would be achieved. Mr. Meyer indicated that he has been in contact with Carlos Morales, Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator, and he requested a four-foot flat area be installed where a pedestrian has the opportunity to stop and step back into the median. There are practical side effects because of the flat area and the median noses cannot be extended any further because the truck turning radius is impacted. There is no need for pedestrian refuge areas because once the traffic signal button is pushed it is designed to allow a pedestrian enough time to cross the street. Mr. McMeekin agreed that it would be safer than having pedestrians standing in a four-foot area in the middle of traffic. Mr. Moulton agreed and stated that he would retract that request.

Mr. McMeekin questioned why there would be no sidewalk on 144th Street from El Dorado to Dodge Street on the west side. Mr. Anderson answered that he wants to discourage pedestrians from crossing at that interchange but he agreed to consider an alternative.
Mr. McMeekin stated he would like to see the neighborhood engaged and take responsibility with regard to maintenance. He requested more design information regarding rain gardens and the storm sewer system. Mr. McMeekin stated he would stress that the plantings be native, low maintenance, nice looking and would like to see landscaping details. Decisions are being made on large increases in traffic but there is a hope to design by reducing the increases in infrastructure with the ability to add more money to landscape and streetscape elements.

Mr. Moulton questioned if there is a possibility to tighten up the turning radius to slow traffic down at the turning movement. Mr. Meyer stated the turning radius on Blondo Street would be a 50-foot center radius to accommodate truck transportation.

Mr. Ciaccio moved to APPROVE the plans as presented subject to those recommendations provided by staff to include: 1) provide for approval, a lighting plan for both vehicular and pedestrian facilities meeting urban design standards; 2) provide for approval, a maintenance plan for the project areas including extended warranty and monitoring; 3) provide for approval, bench seating and trash receptacles along the pedestrian facilities meeting urban design standards; 4) coordination with Metro Area Transit bus stop areas and the incorporation of ACI standard bus shelters at key transit intersections; 5) clarify location and design of railings and fences, specialty lighting and retaining walls per the Streetscape Handbook (retaining and screen walls shall be masonry); 6) tree planting details shall include extensive soil de-compaction and or soil amendment for areas mechanically graded and stripped of topsoil; and 7) provide for approval, a utility plan showing placement and screening of all utilities. Additional board recommendations include: 1) options to improve the aesthetics or an alternative solution to the truss; 2) review specific locations and materials of retaining noise walls; 3) alternatives for low retaining walls; 4) Green Street manual be adhered to for both 144th Street and Blondo Street; 5) minimize loss of existing plant materials; 6) investigate non-profit and neighborhood contributions in public engagement process; 7) sidewalk setbacks be reviewed; 8) traffic signals and light poles to be bronze on 144th Street; 9) island nodes to be tan in color instead of red; 10) review location of utilities; 11) review plan submittal at current stage; and 12) project to be reviewed by board. Mr. Peters seconded the motion which carried 5-0.

Request for Administrative Disposition:
None

DISCUSSION ITEM:
None

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEM:
Mr. Peters moved to APPROVE the meeting minutes of September 16, 2010. Mr. Holland seconded the motion which carried 4-0 with Mr. McMeekin abstaining.

ADJOURNMENT:
It was the consensus of the Board to adjourn the meeting at 4:15 pm.