

Staff Report

**WELCH AVENUE OUTREACH PLAN
AND CROSS-SECTION DETAILS**

August 14, 2018

BACKGROUND:

Welch Avenue is a community feature in the Ames Campustown area. The street pavement was most recently built in late 1980s/early 1990s and still features century-old underground utility infrastructure in need of upgrading. The 100 block of Welch Avenue, between Lincoln Way and Chamberlain Avenue, is scheduled for reconstruction in FY 2019/20 as part of the Capital Improvements Plan. Many things have changed on and around Welch Avenue since the time improvements were last made. Student population has shifted to off-campus living, and Campustown is now one of the most densely populated parts of the city. Additionally, growth along Lincoln Way has brought new residential and commercial opportunities.

This scheduled improvement provides the opportunity to consider infrastructure changes to improve traffic flow, upgrade amenities, and explore ways to match the current use of the area to a new streetscape.

Several years ago, a pilot project was initiated to add temporary features to Welch Avenue in an effort to reduce vehicle, bicyclist, and pedestrian conflicts in the 100 and 200 blocks of the street. In May 2016, City Council directed staff to implement the use of concrete planters to close off the east-side on-street parking as a pilot project. Street furniture and bike racks were then installed in the newly defined area. The goal was to create a safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclists while creating a usable pedestrian space for the district. The project has been in place since June 2016 with seasonal changes during the winter months that removed the street furniture but left bike racks and the planters in place.

As this project was implemented, it became clear that the use of these temporary materials could have the added benefit of encouraging users to think about what the streetscape could look like in a different configuration. This information could then be used to inform the design for a future permanent project.

There was some initial feedback to these additions – both positive and negative. While several users indicated they enjoyed using the outdoor space, some motorists and business owners were unhappy with the removal of parking spaces. With the Welch Avenue reconstruction slated for next year, staff is suggesting some additional ways to gather feedback on what a reconstructed street should look like by soliciting opinions from those who use it.

It should be noted that although the pilot project involving the planters affects both the 100 and 200 blocks of Welch Avenue, the permanent infrastructure project is focused primarily on the 100 block. The utility improvement project will require replacement of underground utilities in the 200 and 300 blocks of Welch Avenue as well as the 2500 block of Lincoln Way (just west of Welch Avenue); however, those blocks are not anticipated to require streetscape or pavement improvements. Once design direction has been identified for the streetscape of the 100 block of Welch Avenue, staff can evaluate how the streetscape of the 200 block of Welch Avenue transitions into it.

TWO OUTREACH PHASES:

Two outreach phases have been identified as necessary for a successful project:

1. Pre-Construction Phase: What features are desired with a reconstructed Welch Avenue?
2. Construction Phase: How will pedestrians, motorists, bicyclists, business owners, residents, and others be kept apprised of construction updates?

PRE-CONSTRUCTION PHASE:

While there have been many ideas about what Welch Avenue might look like in the future, a single, unifying vision has not emerged to drive the project. The most significant limitations to making major changes to Welch Avenue are: 1) the 66-foot Right-Of-Way width, 2) continuing vehicular access to approved public and private parking lots, and 3) balancing the multi-modal needs of the corridor. These limitations may be an impediment to adding all the features likely requested by users.

Staff has created five cross-sections (visual representations of how different amenities could be placed along the street) of preliminary options to include in a survey. These cross-sections are there to convey ideas of what Welch Avenue could look like following reconstruction with different points of emphasis, while considering the limitations mentioned above.

The five cross sections include:

1. Pilot project with parklet and one-side parallel parking
2. Pre-pilot project (circa 2015) with two-side parallel parking
3. Sidewalk widening with one-side parallel parking
4. Bike lanes on street with no parking
5. Angled parking with one-way circulation

Some of the cross-section features include bicycle facilities, parking (parallel or angled; east side only, west side only, or both sides), and extended sidewalks. Features such as streetlights, meters (if parking spaces are included), and trash receptacles are automatically included. Extended sidewalks create the opportunity for parklets, sidewalk cafes, bicycle parking, food carts, and retail

alternatives. Maintaining current sidewalk widths allows for either more parking or to consider creating bike lanes. Additionally, the different cross-section alternatives have different impacts on CyRide operations and Fire Department access.

Outreach for the preconstruction phase is aimed at gaining information on the types of users of Welch Avenue and their preferences. Staff will create an online survey to be placed on the City's website, which will collect feedback from the public regarding their primary use as a student, business member, or other community member and their preferences regarding the different cross-section alternatives. The public's preferences will be considered alongside operational and functional needs. Other amenities, as identified through the survey, could be incorporated into the cross-section options as part of the final infrastructure design.

In addition to the online survey, large poster boards featuring the cross sections will be brought "on tour" for user input. Some upcoming events include WelcomeFest (Aug. 22) and First Friday in Campustown (Aug. 24). The Farmer's Market was identified as another opportunity to reach a different community demographic. Additionally, staff is partnering with the Community and Regional Planning (CRP) Club at Iowa State University to increase student participation. The CRP Club is planning to host several pop-up "survey tables" on and around campus to gather user input. Participants would indicate a streetscape preference through voting for their favorite cross section, as well as directing them to the City's online survey to fill out more information on how they use the street (pedestrian, bicyclist, motorist, etc.), when they most frequently use the street (days, nights, weekends, etc.), and what amenities they would most like to see incorporated into a new design.

Through outreach by City staff and Campustown Action Association (CAA), the business community will be encouraged to take the survey to convey their preferences for cross-section selection and street amenities. Another outreach opportunity will be for City staff to host two public meetings for input to be voiced. City staff will also meet with the Ames Bicycle Coalition to gather its members' input.

Through the combination of the online survey, "pop up" events, press releases, social media posts, newsletter mentions, and traditional marketing, staff believes helpful feedback will provide direction for the streetscape design. Public Works staff will also meet with other City Departments that would be affected by changes in the streetscape.

Feedback collection will take place through mid-September. Staff will analyze the feedback and return to the Council in October with results and recommended next steps. It will be necessary for the City Council to identify the specific design direction at that time in order to develop construction documents and bid the project for spring/summer 2019 construction.

CONSTRUCTION PHASE:

The complexity of the proposed project means the streetscape will be entirely removed, including sidewalks, all the way to the front entrances of abutting properties. This will have a substantial impact on day-to-day business for these businesses and residents. Staff is sensitive to potential concerns and challenges with providing access and minimizing disruption.

During the Welch Avenue construction, staff will work closely with local partners to share information about the project and progress. The intent is to build on the reach of organizations such as CAA, Iowa State University, ISU Student Government, the Ames Chamber of Commerce, South Campus Area Neighborhood, Ames Bicycle Coalition, and others to share project goals and updates with those most closely affected.



In preliminary meetings with CAA, it was suggested staff adopt a fun, light-hearted approach to the project that allows those in the area to quickly get information. Previous business expansion projects along Welch Avenue, such as the Kingland Systems construction, included use of a web camera for constant updates. Also, CAA used the “Carl the Construction Worker” mascot for updates and has volunteered Carl for this project. Carl could pop up

on messaging around the construction site explaining detours and the project, as well as on social media posts, newsletters, and other communications tools with the most recent notices. Welch Avenue reconstruction messages would be kept fun, light-hearted and consistent through the tagline and social media hashtag “What the Welch?” (#WtW). Again, keeping the informational campaign positive and fun was identified as the most beneficial way to reach Welch Avenue users.

During the construction, staff will make efforts to accommodate deliveries, answer questions, provide construction updates, and be considerate of property owner and tenant needs. Staff will work one-on-one with each property owner and/or tenant to understand their unique needs and issues so they can be effectively addressed during the project.

NEXT STEPS:

Staff now requests direction from the City Council regarding the next steps.

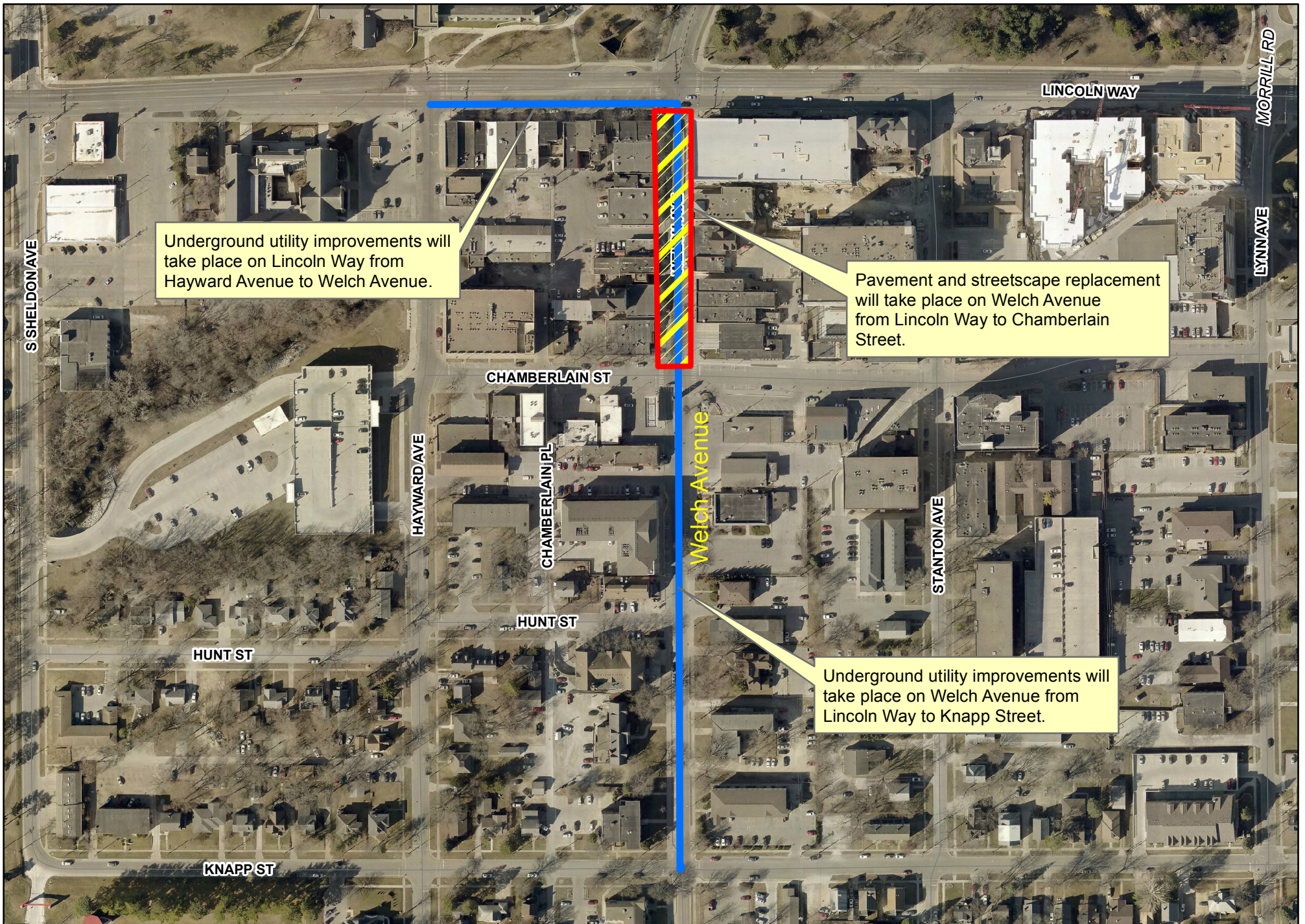
- 1. Approval of the proposed pre-construction feedback collection.**



It should be noted that the proposed cross-sections are intended to generate discussion and ideas, and are not final design drawings. If unique ideas not represented in these cross-section examples surface during the feedback gathering stage, they could be evaluated by staff and potentially incorporated into a recommendation for the final construction design.

However, if the City Council wishes to describe other concepts upon which staff should gather feedback, those should be identified at this time. The City Council could also provide any further direction it might have regarding the proposed methods of feedback collection or key stakeholders to include.

2. Approval of the proposed construction phase communication and outreach.

Although construction is still many months away, it is important to recognize the temporary and long-term impacts this project could have on the community. Therefore, a well-planned communication effort will be critical to minimize the disruption residents will experience. As the planning for this project progresses, additional details regarding the outreach and communication plans will be developed. However, if the City Council has preliminary thoughts regarding how staff should prepare for this effort, those could be identified at this time.



-  Location of Utility Improvments
-  Location of Pavement and Street Scape Replacement

Map
 Showing the Capital Improvements
 Schduled for 2019-2020

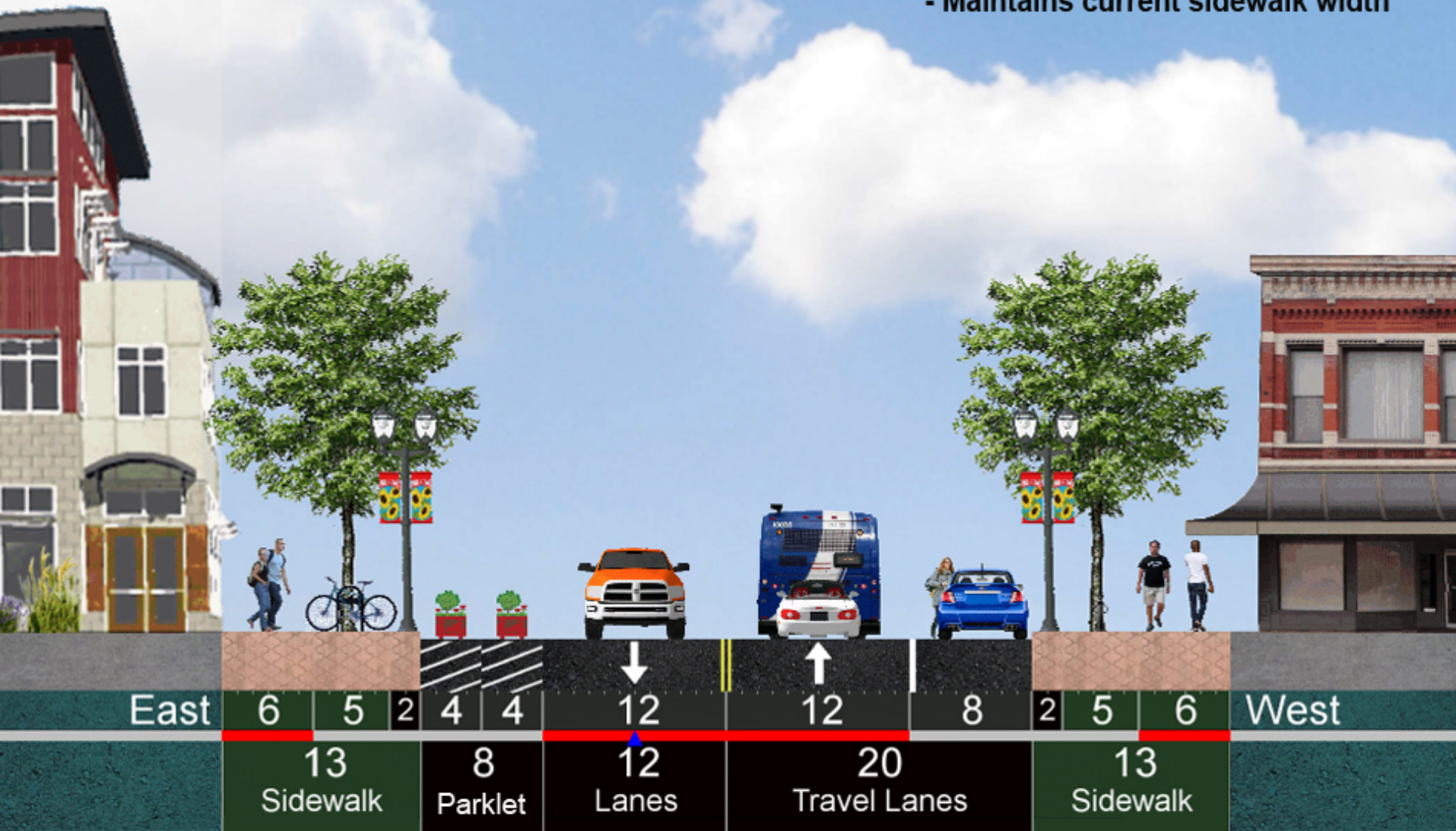


WELCH AVE. (Looking South)

Option 1- Existing Conditions with Parklet Pilot Project

Considerations:

- On-street parking- 11 spaces
- Bikes share travel lanes
- Flexible parklet space, one side
- Maintains current sidewalk width



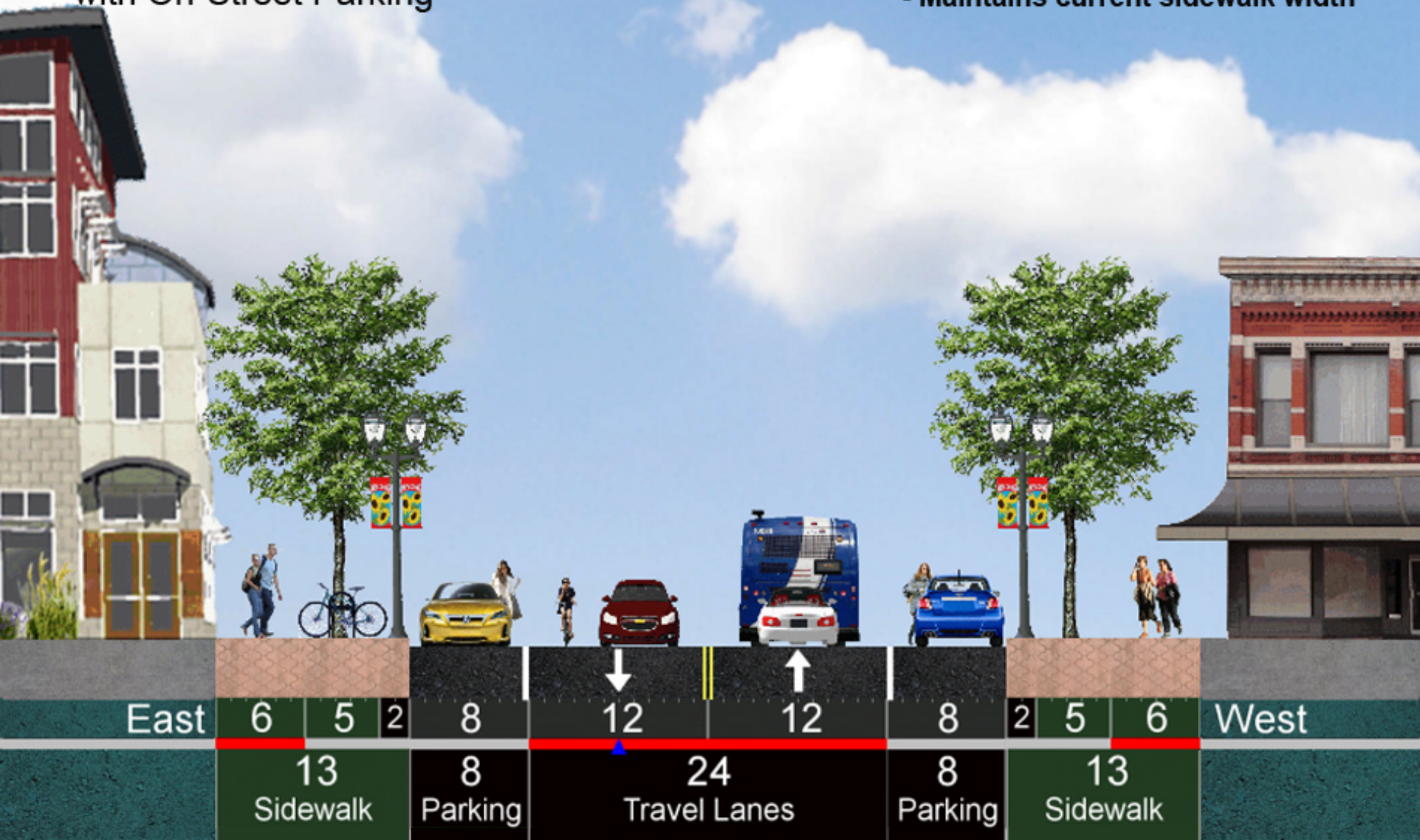
WELCH AVE. (Looking South)

Option 2- Pre-Pilot Project (2015)

with On-Street Parking

Considerations:

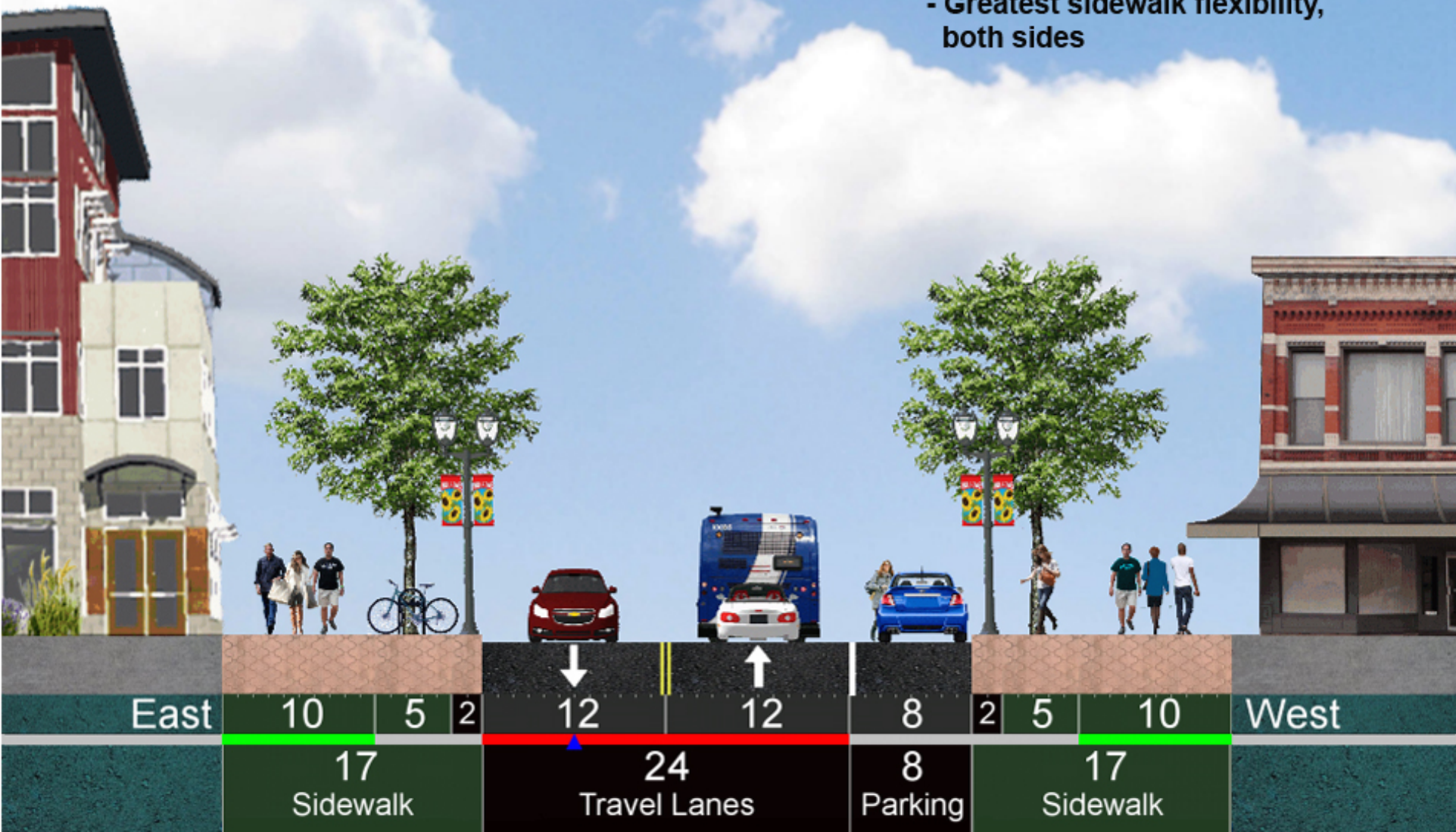
- On-street parking- 20 spaces
- Bikes share travel lanes
- Maintains current sidewalk width



WELCH AVE. (Looking South)
Option 3- Widened Sidewalks
with On-Street Parking (One Side Only)

Considerations:

- On-street parking- 11 spaces
- Bikes share travel lanes
- Sidewalk cafe use- yes
- Greatest sidewalk flexibility, both sides

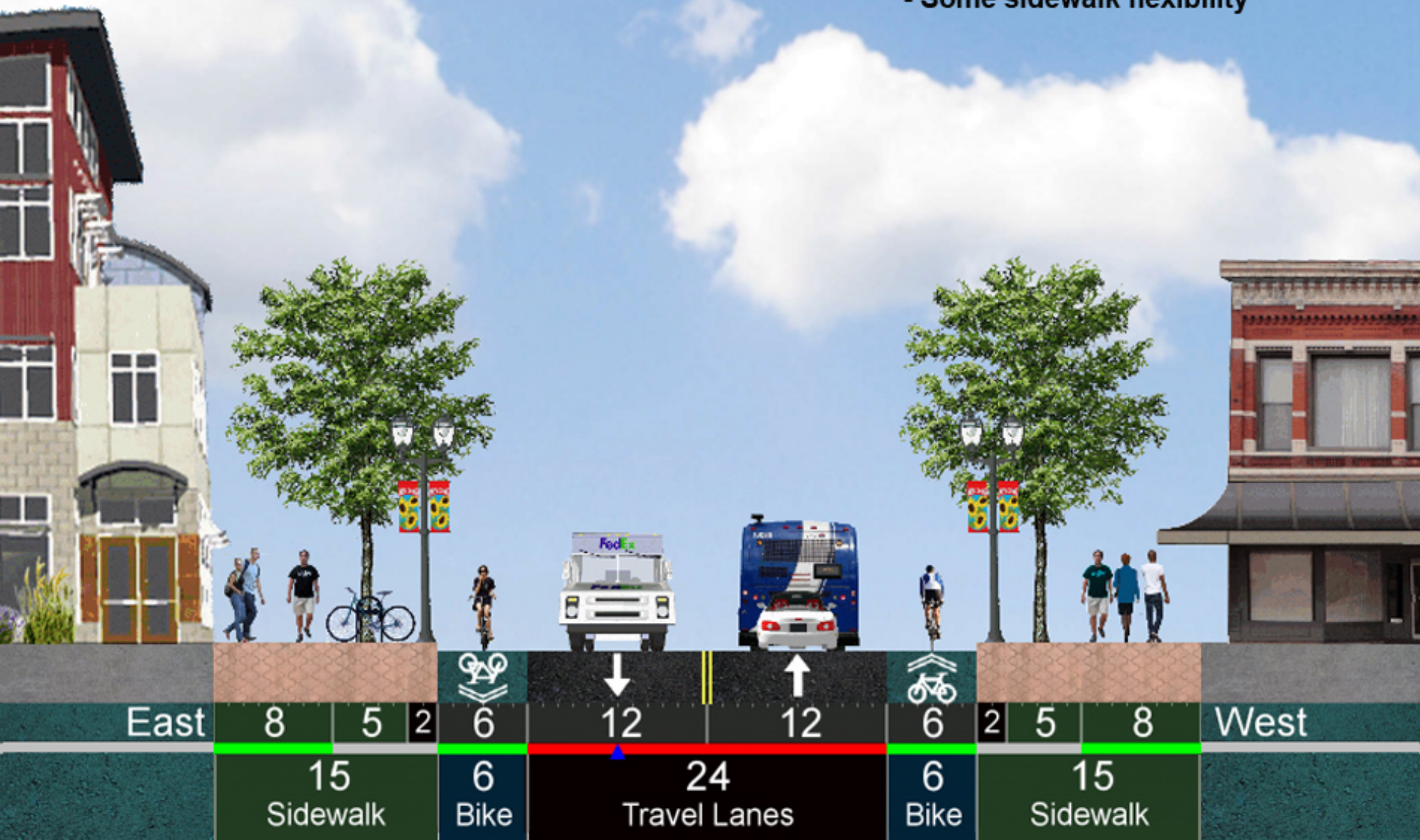


WELCH AVE. (Looking South)

Option 4- Bike Lanes on Street

Considerations:

- No on-street parking
- Designated bicycle facilities
- Some sidewalk flexibility



WELCH AVE. (Looking South)

Option 5- Angled Parking with One-Way Travel

Considerations:

- Vehicular / bike travel-northbound only
- No separate bike facilities
- CyRide reroute
- On-street parking- 20-25 spaces
- Maintains current sidewalk width

