

## STAFF REPORT

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**Date:** April 12, 2023

**To:** Mayor and City Council Thru:

Doug Thornley, City Manager

**Subject:** Staff Report (For Possible Action): Presentation, discussion and potential action to accept the Virginia Street Placemaking study and adopt implementation phases as presented. [Ward 5]

**From:** Amy Pennington, Special Projects and Outreach Coordinator

**Department:** Public Works

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### **Summary:**

In spring 2022, Gehl Urban Design Firm began a placemaking study of Downtown Virginia Street. The goal of the Virginia Street Urban Placemaking Study was to create a shared community vision for downtown Virginia Street and develop a phased implementation plan to initiate the proposed changes. The study spanned the Virginia Street Corridor from Sierra Street to the west, Lake Street to the East, Ninth Street (University Gateway) to the north, and Liberty Street to the south. Gehl engaged the community and stakeholder groups for input and feedback during three phases of the process.

Council has approved \$2,550,000 in State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to help begin implementation of recommendations from the Virginia Street Urban Placemaking Study. If the final report is accepted, city staff will create cost estimates for each project based on the recommendations set forth by the Placemaking study. As projects are developed in detail, they will be brought back to Council for approval.

### **Alignment with Strategic Plan:**

Economic and Community Development

Infrastructure, Climate Change, and Environmental Sustainability

### **Previous Council Action:**

February 23, 2022 - Council approved to finalize and enter into a Professional Services Agreement with Gehl Studio to complete a Virginia Street Urban Placemaking Study in an amount not to exceed \$150,000. (Regional Transportation Commission reimbursement and Street

Fund)

September 8, 2021 - Council approved an Interlocal Cooperative Agreement with the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) of Washoe County to complete a Virginia Street Urban Placemaking Study in an amount not to exceed \$150,000 with the RTC agreeing to reimburse the City of Reno 50 percent of the costs, in an amount not to exceed \$75,000. (Street Fund)

**Background:**

In September 2021, Council approved an inter-local agreement with RTC to conduct a placemaking study to provide a cohesive and regional vision for the future of Virginia Street throughout downtown Reno. After a comprehensive search process, including a formal Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process, Gehl was selected to facilitate the Placemaking Study based on their approach to human-centered research and digital data to document the experience of place.

**Discussion:**

Gehl conducted the Virginia Street Urban Placemaking Study in three phases. The following tables summarize the goals, community outreach, and outcomes of each phase.

Phases 1	
Goal	Understand the placemaking opportunities on Virginia Street with a multi-method approach of online survey, work sessions, amenity mapping, past reports, open source and census data, mobility models and trends, and site observations.
Outreach	<p>Gehl collected area research, previous studies, and conducted public engagement through a survey that asked residents and visitors about their experience and desires regarding Virginia Street.</p> <p>A survey to understand how the public viewed Virginia Street and what they desire to see was distributed to the public through newsletters, TV, radio and print media, social media, paid ads on social media, Spanish outreach, and distributed through stakeholder groups (RTC, TMBA, RAAC, NABs, City Staff, the DRP and downtown businesses, UNR, Downtown residents).</p> <p>The survey received over 2,700 responses over six weeks.</p>

<b>Outcomes</b>	People desire to see: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 18/7 Activation and Programing</li> <li>• Platform for Creativity and Innovation</li> <li>• Enhance Connectivity and Climate</li> <li>• Local Economic Development</li> </ul>
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<b>Phase 2</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	Based on the understanding of opportunities and what the public would like to see, create draft recommendations for design and activation of Virginia Street.
<b>Outreach</b>	<p>In November, Gehl returned to Reno to present their findings to the public and hold stakeholder sessions to gather more feedback and ideas. The public meeting had over 100 participants and was followed by a feedback survey that asked if the finding resonated with the public.</p> <p>During the November trip and in the following weeks, Gehl also held several stakeholder meetings. These stakeholders included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown Reno Partnership Board (Represents downtown businesses, casinos, residents, UNR)</li> <li>• Designers of Virginia Street (RTC, TMBA, RAAC, Arts and Culture)</li> <li>• Activators for Virginia Street (Downtown business and property owners)</li> <li>• Users of Virginia Street (UNR Students, Downtown residents, Historic Resources)</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	5 Strategic moves: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Celebrate the character areas</li> <li>2. Elevate the baseline</li> <li>3. Connect the dots</li> <li>4. Activate the underutilized</li> <li>5. Activate the edges</li> </ol>

<b>Phase 3</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	Create an implementation plan for the recommendations.

<b>Outreach</b>	Gehl returned to Reno in February 2023 to hold a community meeting followed by a survey that was open for two weeks. The purpose of the survey was to understand the community's priorities for the implementation of the plan.
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p><b>Placemaking actions prioritization, phase 1</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Streetscape furnishing zone improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Implement public seating on every block of Virginia Street</li> <li>○ Pilot wayfinding signage with walking distances to districts and destinations</li> <li>○ Assess opportunities for integration of shade: trees where not in conflict with underground, other shade</li> <li>○ Assess need for upgrades to event infrastructure</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Facade improvement &amp; activation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop program and source funding for facade improvement program to manage vacancies and support groundfloor activation</li> <li>○ Pilot ground floor activation, starting with micro-retail for local businesses in the edge of the Circus Circus parking garage</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Locomotion Plaza 2.0 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Site and implement event infrastructure and storage facilities</li> <li>○ Source and implement movable chairs and tables, including lounge style chairs</li> <li>○ Pilot a shade structure</li> <li>○ Develop and communicate a plan for recurring events</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. The ROW Placita <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Source and implement seating elements, movable by forklift, and include wayfinding with walking distances to districts and destinations</li> <li>○ Coordinate operations and maintenance agreement with the ROW and DRP, consider using this as a pilot for a partnership program for activation of privately owned public space</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><b>Placemaking actions prioritization, phase 2</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Streetscape improvements across the site <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Implement signal timing for slower speed in preparation for physical improvements to the right of way</li> <li>○ Assess need and feasibility of implementation of PUDO's in middle and upper area - will require curb adjustments</li> <li>○ Assess impact of proposed intersection upgrades to the wider bike and vehicular network</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Streetscape improvements lower area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implement continuous on street parking and bollard and buffered protected bike lanes - elimination of turn lane</li> <li>● Implement bike markings across intersections</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess how the Liberty intersection can be upgraded to better serve people walking and wheeling, including removal of slip lane</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streetscape improvements middle area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement two-lane bi-directional vehicle lanes and continuous buffered bike lanes - including elimination of turn lanes and center loading</li> <li>Implement intersection improvements; tightened corner radii, bike marking, and planned changes to cross streets within the block</li> </ul> </li> <li>Believe Plaza 3.0 initiation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot a concession stand and tourist information outpost. Consider implementation of a permanent structure in relation to further planned improvements to the plaza</li> <li>Implement movable seating and shade</li> <li>Implement bleacher seating and pilot a play feature</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><b>Placemaking actions prioritization, phase 3</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streetscape improvements upper area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement continuous bollard and buffered protected bike lanes through redesign of the central median. Include raised bike lanes at the bus stops for bus access</li> <li>Implement clear bus lane markings</li> <li>Assess how the freeway intersections can be upgraded to better serve people walking and wheeling</li> </ul> </li> <li>Maker Row @Court <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilot edge activation of the county parking lot with micro-units for local makers and artists. Use lessons learned from implementation of the Circus Circus parking garage</li> </ul> </li> <li>Believe Plaza 3.0 capital improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a comprehensive plan for transformation of the plaza</li> <li>Include additional greening and trees</li> <li>Include permanent play and urban sports and games features. E.G. splash-pad, ping-pong, chess, dedicated area for skateboarders</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
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### **Financial Implications:**

There is no financial implication with the acceptance of this study. As projects are developed in detail, they will be brought back to Council with funding identified for approval.

### **Legal Implications:**

Legal review completed for compliance with City procedures and Nevada law.

### **Recommendation:**

Staff recommends accepting the recommendations of the Virginia Street Urban Placemaking

Study and directing staff to develop cost estimates and return to Council for approval.

**Proposed Motion:**

I move to accept staff recommendation.

**Attachments:**

Final\_Virginia Street Reno - Placemaking Study + Recommendations.pdf  
Placemaking Study Memo to Council