

February 7, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

CC: Dan Cotterman, City Manager  
Dave Roderique, Deputy City Manager

Through: Brian Craig, AICP, Development Services Director  
Adam Copeland, Deputy Director of Planning

From: Ken Galica, Planning Manager

**Re: Monroe Avenue Interim Landscape Improvement Project**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This memorandum is intended to provide a brief update on the Monroe Avenue Interim Landscape Improvement Project, Stage 3 of the 5 stage project that is intended to improve the aesthetics, walkability, and economic development potential of the downtown core (Monroe Avenue between 1<sup>st</sup> Street and 9<sup>th</sup> Street) in line with the recommendations of the Downtown Specific Area Plan (DSAP) that was approved by the City Council in October 2023.

### **BACKGROUND**

At the conclusion of a two year public process that involved significant stakeholder input, the Downtown Specific Area Plan (DSAP) was adopted by the City Council in October 2023 to guide and support both short-term and long-term revitalization and redevelopment of Buckeye's downtown area as a regional destination that capitalizes on the historical and cultural assets available in the 2,946-acre area generally bounded by Rooks Road to the west, the Watson Road alignment to the east, Maricopa Road to the north, and the Gila River on the south.

The goal of the nearly 2-year long public process leading to adoption of the plan was, first and foremost, to ensure the plan reflected the downtown community's vision for the area. To this end, the process involved a host of outreach and participation opportunities including, but not limited to:

- 865 responses from area residents, business owners, and other interested parties to a survey seeking input on downtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints.
- A recurring Stakeholder Group featuring over 90 interested residents and business owners who provided direct input into the preparation of the plan.
- Two in person open houses attended by 440 interested citizens, where all implementation ideas identified in the DSAP were visually presented for comment by anyone interested.
- Two virtual open houses allowing any persons unable to attend the in-person events the same opportunity to provide comment and direction on the plan.
- Two Planning and Zoning Commission workshops and two City Council workshops where members were asked to provide input into preparation of the planning document.
- A workshop with the Buckeye Youth Council, to ensure that the plan would consider the changing preferences of younger generations.

- A City Council tour of the downtowns of east valley cities Chandler and Gilbert, to see firsthand the techniques those cities utilized to revitalize their once downtrodden downtown areas.
- A monthly e-newsletter sent to over 4,000 recipients who signed up via the City’s website providing ongoing updates on any item of relevance to the downtown.
- Notification of 1,952 property owners via mailing to addresses on file with the County Assessor of all public open houses and Commission/Council hearings related to the DSAP.

The adopted DSAP, which was heavily informed by the extensive feedback outlined above, identifies 29 implementation steps related to land use, design, public infrastructure improvements, and economic development, all of which are intended to guide the revitalization and renewal of Downtown Buckeye as “the soul of the city, an active, day-and-night, community-focused, and mixed-use destination with history, home to many and built for all.” Included amongst the 29 implementation items were several related to future improvements to Monroe Avenue designed to transform the auto-centric corridor to a more intimate street befitting of a historic downtown, reducing the travel lanes to one in each direction, widening sidewalks, undergrounding overhead utilities, and adding additional landscaping to both soften the feel of the street and provide the shading vital to attracting both day and night year round use.

The ultimate street section envisioned for Monroe Avenue included within the approved DSAP can be found below. The approved concept provides for parallel parking lanes on both sides of the street, with the ability to convert that parking into a “parklet lane” for use by adjacent businesses in the event that additional public parking lots and/or garages are provided in the area in the future. Provision of a dedicated center turn lane may be included when the City completes final design of the project.



### MONROE AVENUE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

To demonstrate the City’s commitment towards achieving the shared vision identified in the DSAP while the significant funding necessary for the permanent improvements to be designed and constructed is still being identified, a phased approach to completing the improvements was selected. This approach, where relocation of curbing to permanently narrow the street edges is deferred to a later phase, allows the City to monitor road function and tweak design of the final improvements to address observed

issues while providing an immediate realization of the themes and concepts developed by the thousands of DSAP process participants, in particular the prioritization of pedestrian safety and beautification of the downtown core.

A basic outline of the project stages is as follows:

**Stage 1 – Monroe Restriping and City Hall Eastern Parking Lot Improvements:** The restriping project, started in Summer 2024, reduced the number of Monroe Avenue travel lanes in each direction from two to one, striped parallel parking adjacent to the travel lanes on the north and south sides of the street and utilized paint to convert the former parallel parking lanes to “parklet lanes” for use by adjacent businesses and/or pedestrians. Stage 1 also included improvements to the eastern parking lot serving City Hall, expanding the number of public spaces available for public and employee use. Stage 1 of the project is complete save for minor adjustments to driveway hatching that is slated for adjustment in the coming months.

**Stage 2 – Landscape Demonstration Project:** Completed in December 2024, Stage 3 added temporary landscaping in the form of boxed trees and shrub planters within the parklet lane on the block between 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The landscaping serves two purposes, enhancing the aesthetics of the street while also serving as a barrier that separates the parallel parking spaces from the parklet areas, increasing safety and ensuring cars are not parked in the intended pedestrian area. A parklet platform featuring two picnic tables was also installed directly in front of City Hall to demonstrate the potential for businesses to provide their own platforms to create enhanced street presence. As its name suggests, Stage 2 is intended to be temporary, giving downtown visitors and residents a preview of what’s to come for the full stretch of Monroe Avenue while a robust public process to identify the materials used in the longer-term Stage 3 project was running concurrently. The parklet platform and landscape materials utilized in Stage 2 will be reused in Stage 3; if any materials are inconsistent with the final preferred Stage 3 concept, the materials will be relocated to parks or other City facilities to enhance the beauty of those sites.

**Stage 3 – Interim Landscape Project and Controlled Pedestrian Crossings:** The third stage, currently in design, will include provision of landscape improvements in the gray parklet zone for the full length of the downtown core, stretching from 1<sup>st</sup> Street (Miller Road) to 9<sup>th</sup> Street. The City hosted a design charrette on November 14<sup>th</sup>, open to any members of the public (approximately 30 attended), allowing participants to select their favorite landscape and hardscape materials that could be included in the project’s final design. An online survey was also conducted, receiving over 400 responses, where participants could similarly vote on their preferred designs. Upon compiling that feedback, the City’s consultant prepared a recommended design concept illustrating how the proposed improvements would appear on the block between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets. Upon receiving leadership’s support of the recommended concept, the City’s consultant will compile final design documents that expand the concept to the full stretch of Monroe, with installation expected to occur in late summer or early fall of this year.

The recommended concept (see attached) features Corten steel and galvanized “horse trough” planters, reflecting Buckeye’s rural heritage. These planters will accommodate a mix of Heritage Live Oak, Red Push Pistache, and Chinese Elm trees, chosen for their resilience and attractive forms, along with colorful shrubs and accents such as Blackfoot Daisy, Autumn Sage, Dawe’s Aloe, Deer Grass, and Blue Bells.

To enhance Downtown Buckeye’s ambiance, bistro-style festoon lighting will extend across Monroe Avenue at each intersection, marking block ends and adding warmth. A parklet platform with public seating will be placed in front of Benbow Park, while picnic tables will activate the painted parklet zone near Buckeye Elementary School. These design elements will be applied throughout the core, with parklet platforms and seating limited to civic facilities—businesses may opt to provide their own adjacent platforms if desired.



The interim landscape improvements are partially funded through the approved “Downtown Enhancement Program”.

Additional funds may be required to complete the improvements for the full length of the core; alternatively, the scope of the improvements could be reduced, for example by eliminating the festoon lighting or eliminating outer blocks from the initial project, to allow the existing budgeted funds to sufficiently cover costs of installation.

In response to community requests during the first two stages of the project, Stage 3 also will include the installation of an enhanced pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Monroe Avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> Street; the enhanced crossing is expected to be further supplemented in FY2026 with installation of a push button activated pedestrian signal known as a “PED-HAWK”.

**Stage 3 Expanded – Tentative Restriping of Monroe:** The current temporary two-lane painted configuration with parklet areas and off-curb parallel parking is pending reconsideration. In response to community and councilmember feedback regarding vehicular turning movements, public safety vehicle response and access, and a desire for enhanced business access, Staff will present alternatives to the existing two-lane configuration at an upcoming Council Workshop. Staff will present lane configuration options and related impacts to landscaping and pedestrian spaces, e.g. two-lane, three-lane (aka center-turn lane option as described in the background section on page 2), or returning to the previous four-lane configuration and related widths for pedestrian ways, cafe-style seating, and on-street parking. Discussion and feedback on these topics will inform the final interim design process mentioned in subsection ‘Stage 3’ above and provide guidance for the ultimate section and reconstruction project discussed in ‘Stage 5’ below.

**Stage 4 – Storm Drain, Fiber, and Utility Improvements/Relocation:** The fourth stage will design and construct the ultimate storm drain, fiber, power, water, and sewer improvements along Monroe. Included in this stage is a Design Charrette Report (DCR) which will analyze the existing utilities as well

as placement of Stage 5's Permanent Monroe Avenue Street and Landscape Improvements to propose the various phasing options, cost estimates, utility modeling, design, and construction of the ultimate utilities. The funding for the storm drain design is in FY25 and FY26 with the DCR funded intended for FY26. The construction funding for the storm drain and fiber, earmarked for FY27, is heavily dependent on a FEMA grant and Flood Control District of Maricopa County contribution. Ultimate power, water, and sewer design and construction is currently in out-years with timing considered further during the DCR phase. As construction of this stage will require intermittent street closures, the City will emphasize communication to residents and closely coordinate businesses to minimize impacts to the extent feasible.

**Stage 5 – Permanent Monroe Avenue Street and Landscape Improvements:** The final stage of the project will include full reconstruction of Monroe Avenue, constructing new curb, gutter, pavement, wider sidewalks, decorative street lamps, and permanent, in ground landscape beds within the Downtown core. If it is observed that Monroe Avenue is functioning less than optimally without a continuous center turn lane, the ultimate improvements could provide such a lane by either reducing or eliminating on-street parking and/or narrowing proposed sidewalk/landscape areas as discussed in subsection 'Stage 3 Expanded' above. Timing of the final improvements is dependent upon the project being funded; it is not currently anticipated that the permanent improvements would occur within the next 5 years.

Attachments:

Stage 3 Interim Landscape Recommended Concept Materials