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Upper Kirby moves to walk the livable centers walk

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A review of comments from an earlier workshop on Upper Kirby livable centers shows residents and area business-owners the availability of parking and complete sidewalks as keys to the area's future.

"For people to park or walk there have to be interesting places to go," said Tim Van Meter, at a follow up meeting June 17 at the Upper Kirby office, 3015 Richmond. Van Meter is an architect and urban designer with Van Meter Williams Pollack.



Upper Kirby leaders hope to make walkable areas like this intersection a reality.

At the heart of creating successful urban livable centers is the ability to transform an area into a place that is walkable, well-connected and accessible, and attractive for compact, mixed-use development.

At a heavily attended Jan. 14 meeting and through submissions since that time, the designers have been told by the community that while green space and pocket parks, wherever possible, are desirable, better crosswalks, particularly on Richmond, Kirby Drive and Eastside and Alabama streets are the keys.

Pedestrian crosswalks on Richmond were termed "absolutely essential" in the findings.

Looking to the future, Van Meter said, "We must ensure that (the University line) rail doesn't cause massive congestion in the planning area."

Among the priorities listed for Upper Kirby are focusing on the improvements in conjunction with Metro Transit Authority, both concerning future light rail and bus routes. That will include improvements at transit plaza areas.

"Most people will walk a quarter-of-a-mile without thinking about it," Van Meter said of the distance between the proposed stations.

Walking that far, of course, will require improving on sidewalks that currently end abruptly, forcing pedestrians to walk well out their way, sometimes facing traffic hazards, he said. In Houston, it will also require more shade.

Van Meter called pedestrian access under U.S. Highway 59 "a brutal place to walk," adding a lack of access contributes to the underuse of Levy Park, behind the Upper Kirby office.

Van Meter expects the final study to be completed in July. The Upper Kirby District and Houston-Galveston Area Council are expecting a Oct. 9 kickoff date for the livable centers project.

For further information, visit www.h-gac.com/livablecenters.