

Design unveiled for new Dale Street bridge over I-94

By JANE McCLURE

Ramsey County Department of Public Works officials unveiled a new design on January 9 for the Dale Street bridge over I-94 that features 16-foot-wide pedestrian plazas on either side and public art commemorating the old Rondo neighborhood that flourished in the area prior to the building of I-94.

More than 100 people turned out for the unveiling at Rondo Library to learn about the design of the bridge and the rebuilding of Dale Street between University and Iglehart avenues. The project will take place in 2020—or three years after the original start date. The delay gave the county more time to engage people in the design process, and they were visibly pleased with the results.

The existing Dale Street bridge was built in 1961 along with the rest of I-94 and renovated in 1983. It will be demolished in two stages beginning in January 2020. The plan is to keep one lane of traffic open in either direction throughout. The entire project is scheduled to be largely completed by the fall of 2020. Ramsey County has received \$6 million in federal funds for the project and provided a \$5 million local match.

Bridge design is about 30 percent complete. The current bridge has two lanes of traffic in each direction, limited left-turn space and five-foot sidewalks. The new bridge will have 16-foot-wide pedestrian plazas on either side, four-foot shoulders that will be available for



The Dale Street bridge over I-94 (seen from the southwest) will be reconstructed in 2020 with two 16-foot-wide pedestrian plazas and more room for bicycles and cars.

bicycles, two 11-foot traffic lanes in either direction, and 12-foot left-turn lanes.

Dale Street will have medians separating the lanes of traffic between Carroll and Concordia avenues and between St. Anthony and Fuller avenues. Corner bumpouts will be added on some of the streets that intersect with Dale Street to improve pedestrian safety. The northeast corner of Dale and St. Anthony Avenue will have both a straight sidewalk and a winding sidewalk to the north to ease the way for pedestrians who may struggle with the steep slope. New traffic signals will be installed with audible instructions for pedestrians with visual disabilities and “walk” signs that give pedestrians a head start in getting across the street.

Storm sewers will be upgraded to resolve

longstanding problems of water ponding in the area. Sidewalks and streetlights north and south of the bridge will be improved. Abutting property owners will not be assessed for the street work, but they will help pay for the above-standard street lighting at a rate of about 86 cents per frontage foot.

The final bridge plans will be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Transportation late this summer with a decision anticipated in September. The contract for construction will be awarded in November.

People attending the meeting on January 9 generally liked what they saw, especially the pedestrian improvements and the public art. The art will have a “We Are Rondo” theme. It will be created by the team of Mica Anders, Hawana Sullivan Janzen and G.E. Patterson,

all of whom have worked under acclaimed St. Paul artist Settu Jones.

Panels below the bridge will show stylized maps of Rondo as it looked prior to the building of I-94. The map design will also be used on the bridge’s sidewalk expansion joints. Panels in the bridge railing will honor the Rondo neighborhood, as will two large metal trees, one on each side of the bridge.

The dance steps for the Lindy hop will be re-created in a leaf pattern on the sidewalk approach panels. A poem will be embedded in the sidewalks so that it can be read both backwards and forward. The words “We Are Rondo” will appear on the bridge kneewalls in multiple languages, and the bridge piers will have embedded concrete designs reflecting area homes.

Questions were raised at the meeting about hiring for the project, especially the hiring of people of color and women. Ramsey County recently adopted a workforce equity plan, which will be used in the hiring for the bridge project, according to county workforce specialist John O’Pheilan.

Ramsey County will be working with such local agencies as Ujamaa Place and the YWCA to get more people into building trades apprenticeship and training programs, O’Pheilan said. These people could be hired for the reconstruction of Dale Street and other future projects, he added. Hiring goals will be announced this summer, but they are expected to be approximately 30 percent for people of color and 20 percent for women.