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### Arlington council OKs contract to get public feedback on design of Abram Street

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 BY SUSAN SCHROCK  
[sschrock@star-telegram.com](mailto:sschrock@star-telegram.com)

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ARLINGTON — Residents and businesses will get a chance next year to weigh in on the future look of Abram Street through downtown — including how many lanes it will have — when it is rebuilt.

The City Council unanimously approved a \$187,538 contract Tuesday night with Gresham, Smith and Partners of Nashville to begin holding public meetings and using that feedback to develop designs for the future Abram Street between Cooper and Collins streets.

The street has five lanes, and city officials have said each lane reduction would free up 10 feet to add pedestrian amenities such as wider sidewalks and more landscaping to encourage redevelopment.

Last month, the council rejected the idea of reducing Abram to three lanes and informally decided that the consultants would explore only two options: narrowing Abram to four lanes for the entire stretch between Cooper and Collins streets or narrowing a shorter section to four lanes between West Street and the Tarrant County Subcourthouse. But council members reconsidered that idea Tuesday, saying that the choices were too limited and that residents and businesses should also have a voice on the option of reducing Abram to three lanes.

Earlier in the afternoon, Mayor Robert Cluck asked the council to table Tuesday night's vote on the contract to give them a chance to meet again with the consultants before deciding which lane configurations would be presented to the public.

"I've asked, 'Is this street for beautification or is this street to carry traffic through Arlington as a main thoroughfare?'" Cluck said. "We have to understand what the consequences are."

But Cluck joined the council in its 9-0 vote after it was decided that the consultants would evaluate more than two options.

"We haven't reached any permanent conclusions," Cluck said. "We have a lot of people downtown who want three lanes. I want to know what that does to traffic. That street is a very busy street."

A pedestrian-friendly downtown is one of the long-range goals adopted in 2004. But council members have expressed concern about impeding traffic in exchange for drawing more pedestrians to downtown businesses.

As part of the first phase of study, the city paid the same consultants \$55,000 last year to explore how traffic congestion downtown would be affected by reducing the thoroughfare to four, three or even two lanes.

Between 24,000 and 27,000 vehicles use the street each day, but consultants expect 8,000 to 11,000 more vehicles by 2030. Reducing Abram to four lanes is expected to add about one minute to motorists' travel time between Cooper and Collins streets, the consultants reported to council in May.

The Downtown Arlington Management Corp. was among those pushing for more options, but Cluck said he has also received feedback from others who wish to leave the street alone. Some corporation board members favor narrowing it to three lanes, which they say could raise visibility of downtown businesses and encourage those passing through to get out of their cars and walk to restaurants and shops, said Tony Rutigliano, president of the corporation.

"When you make an area more pedestrian-friendly, more walkable, the retail and other businesses thrive in that environment," Rutigliano said.

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Public meetings are expected to start in February, according to a city staff report. The input will help planners decide the lane configurations and the added amenities. The consultants are to make recommendations to the council by April.

**This report includes material from the Star-Telegram archives.**

*Susan Schrock, 817-390-7639 Twitter: [@susanschrock](#)*

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