



COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Committee convened in a regular meeting on Monday, December 2, 2013 at 301 W. Second Street, Room #1001, Austin, Texas.

Subcommittee Members in Attendance: Mayor Pro Tem Cole (Chair)
Council Member Morrison
Council Member Riley

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Cole called the Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Committee meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

1. CITIZEN COMMUNICATION

Mayor Will Wynn spoke on item #4 and stated he own a Historic free standing building on 6th street. He wasn't involved in the stakeholder process as Mr. Lazarus described but was very pleased with the concept and that staff was doing a fantastic job and that he believes the changes would be a jewel to the street.

Tim League spoke on item #4 as the immediate past chair of 6th Street Austin. Mr. League stated this project must go forward; he moved his business to 6th street about 5 years ago to open the Ritz Theatre as this street is very near and dear to him and want it to be the street it can be. Mr. League is in complete support as to what the team has put together on the plan. It accomplishes a lot of the goals.

Council Member Morrison, asked Mr. League to elaborate on his thoughts about how the staff recommendations can work toward the goal of diverse activities on 6th Street.

Mr. League, stated the flexible lane that could be used for parking needs to be used for parking and just the fact to make that language a little stronger because if you are going to be recruiting retail to the street or restaurants to the street, you don't need to solve all of their parking needs but you need to have a suggestion that there is parking on the street.

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, stated she realizes that we identified \$1M available through a bond from 2010 and that the project is \$19M, is unfunded and that Mr. League has contributed a considerable investment on 6th street with his businesses. What urgency does Mr. League sees for the City to make these improvements?

Mr. League, stated the urgency is the street is not a street that is necessarily competitive in bringing a lot of exciting new business. But, because of the state of the infrastructure when people look at those properties they usually don't take those properties because of the amount of the extra dollars needed to do it.

Mr. Larry Craddock, spoke on item #4 and stated he was in support of the proposed project. His family has operated a business on 6th Street since 1949 and would love to see this change happen.

Ms. Molly Alexander, spoke on item #4 and stated she was the Executive Director of the Historic Preservation League in Dallas, Texas and Chair the Historic Review Board in Elgin. Ms. Alexander has worked on the retail construction on 6th street for over seven years and it is our biggest challenge. If the City is not maintaining the public infrastructure it is hard to sell properties in that area. The Downtown Austin Alliance fully supports this endeavor and that the staff has down a great job.

Ms. Meredith Bossin, Director of Waller Creek Conservancy spoke on item #4 in support of this proposal because East 6th Street is an important gateway to Waller Creek and that it is vital to Austin and visitors alike to have a positive experience of downtown.

Ms. Jennifer Walker, Director of Marketing Communications with the Austin Convention Visitors Bureau spoke on item #4 and stated they fully support the 6th Street improvements. Currently, in the media 6th Street is being referred to as "dirty sixth" and that is not the type of attraction we are looking for. Also, the entire local hospitality industry fully supports and this project and thank you for your consideration.

Mr. Don Garner, spoke on item #4 and stated he is in support of the plan and believe it has many good points. Especially wanted to comment that the City staff appears to have listened to what the public have to say and have come up with points to address what they can. Mr. Garner stated a concern that he feels historic brick accent is not enough to maintain the historic character of the street. Mr. Garner would like to see historic design professionals brought in to come up with some ideas to enhance the character with this project.

Council Member Morrison, asked Mr. Garner about his comment of the brick accents. Were you talking about the streets being brick accented and that you are suggesting that is not really enough to maintain the historic character?

Mr. Lazarus, stated right now the sidewalks are primarily concrete with the historic brick as accent but the street itself will not be accent.

Mr. Garner, stated yes that is correct.

Mr. Donald Goertz, head of Austin Montessori School, spoke on item #3 and stated within the 22 years they have been in this location has never experienced excessive noise. He received in the mail a note soliciting his vote for MoPac sound wall. There was no information describing the size, material or effectiveness of the barrier. The proposed barrier seems pointless and ugly and will remove several beautiful trees and a waste of money.

Mr. Arron Delagarza, stated that his concern is the City will have to deal with graffiti and maintenance of the wall.

Ms. Carolyn Athens, stated she is a neighbor in Allendale. That out of the 19 sound walls being built this is the only one not in the MoPac right of way, its double and next to the longest wall and the portion we object to is 20 feet high.

Council Member Tovo, asked Ms. Athens if she was one of the eligible voters along this area?

Ms. Athens, stated no.

Council Member Morrison, asked for clarification regarding the original vote and once the homeowners received the information you found that the north section of this area that 5 homeowners voted for it originally?

Ms. Athens, stated yes.

Ms. Carrie Crowe, stated she has been a resident for about 13 years now and that she doesn't live immediate where this wall will be built but is close enough to care about her neighbors and that the right thing is done. I feel it is vital that the city's position on this represent the well-being of the homeowners and the schools within the area.

Ms. Leslie Rosenstein, stated she has a view of Great Northern Boulevard through her dining room window but was not considered as an eligible voter. For the past 3 years there has been vocal opposition of this wall but yet now the City of Austin has tasked themselves with the maintenance of this wall in spite of the cost. Ms. Rosenstein provided the Council Members with a

handout which consisted of tables of potential yearly cost estimates for graffiti abatement on Sound Wall #3 and maintenance costs. Please protect our neighborhood.

Ms. Sandra Hilton, stated this wall is not in line with federal guidelines.

Ms. Linda Bistros, stated she has been a resident in this area for about 36 years and was never asked for input regarding this wall. I have an issue of safety regarding this wall. People cannot see mischief that goes on outside this wall. Also, it will cut off our view and the breeze.

Mr. Matt Sonzala, stated he has been a homeowner in Allendale for almost 6 years now and this wall will affect more people than those on Great Northern. We do not want a 20 feet wall placed in front of our homes.

Ms. Mary Fero, stated she is not a voting member and has lived in Allendale since 1988 and my concern is really more about the voting process itself and what appears to have been a flawed process in spite of the best efforts to have public meetings. We are hoping that there is some type of reasonable accommodations pertaining to this.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 13, 2014 – Approved the December 2, 2013, minutes on a 2-0 vote with Council Member Riley off the dais.

3. PRESENTATION OF THE MOPAC IMPROVEMENT PROJECT FROM LADY BIRD LAKE TO PARMER LANE, INCLUDING THE SOUND WALL PROCESS AND CONSTRUCTION.

Mr. Mario Espinoza, Deputy Executive Director, Mobility Authority and Ray Umscheid, Noise Specialist with TxDot. The plan for Urban Congestion to create a regional express lane network linking regional centers identified in CAMPO 2035 plan. The Environmental Assessment by TxDot was conducted between July 2010 and August 2012. Design work is ongoing, construction starts December 2013 and project completion slated for Fall 2015.

The project scope is to construct one tolled express lane in each direction on an 11-mile stretch of MoPac between Lady Bird Lake and Parmer Lane. The limited access points will keep traffic in the express lanes flowing freely and safely, north near Parmer Lane, Central between Far West Blvd. and RM 2222 and South at Cesar Chavez Street and lady Bird Lake. The design improvements will include bicycle/pedestrian, 3 miles of shared use paths, 13 cross street intersection improvements including ADA improvements,

sidewalk extensions and addition of bike lanes and 4 miles of sidewalks to fill in gaps between existing sidewalks.

Mr. Ray Umscheid, Noise Specialist with TxDot discussed the noise mitigation (sound wall process). The process is required on all federal aid highway projects in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), implementation guidelines established by individual states (TxDot) with review and concurrence by FHWA, noise study conducted to determine current noise levels and predicted future noise levels, if noise levels exceed or are predicted to exceed acceptable levels (66dB residential exterior) or if predicted noise levels increase by greater than 10 dB (A) over existing levels than noise mitigation measures are considered and if walls are determined to be reasonable and feasible, sound walls will be constructed. There were seven open house meetings and a public hearing conducted during Environmental Assessment, noise study conducted in 2011 to determine location of reasonable and feasible walls along MoPac. Sound wall information packets and voter ballots mailed to eligible property owners via registered mail, seven sound wall workshops held between June 2011 and August 2011 and second voter packet mailed via registered mail (as needed).

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, asked Mario to give them an overview of the first voting blog.

Mr. Espinoza, stated he will ask representative from TxDot to come and help with that question because the process was led by TxDot. Ray stated the length of the wall was determined because normally you want to have a continuous wall that is affective for noise abatement.

Council Member Morrison, asked why couldn't the wall be broken?

Mr. Umscheid, stated for acoustic purposes it is best to be one wall.

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, stated her overall concern is at this stage in the process what would have to happen for TxDot to proceed with another vote for the Northern section?

Mr. Umscheid, stated generally they have one vote and they have never had a re-vote ever. We had a vote consistent with our guidelines. Now, for a major change within a design or utilities that may require a revote.

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, asked at this point there is not a procedure in place for a revote?

Mr. Umscheid, stated correct.

Council Member Morrison, asked for an understanding of the reasonable and feasible mentioned under the slide for of noise mitigation?

Mr. Umscheid, stated he does not have specifics on the study but he would imagine they were but can't say definitely.

Council Member Morrison, asked if traffic noise comes from the number of cars on the road or the speed they are traveling?

Mr. Umscheid, stated both.

Council Member Riley, stated that if we know the neighbors to the North end of the wall are less supportive of a wall than those South of the wall why wouldn't we consider breaking it up?

Mr. Umscheid, stated it was his understanding that the voting was of the majority section and if the voting is against must definitely walls can be changed. On one of the walls we shortened it because the property owner didn't want it. As long as it doesn't affect the majority of the people that did vote for something we can make changes. But, that is not my understanding of the voting in this case.

Council Member Riley, stated the citizens in the audience stated they have gotten impressions from TxDot that the voting indicated less support towards the Northern end.

Mr. Espinoza, stated that is correct there was less support on the Northern end but none the less you still had some yes votes on that Northern end.

Council Member Riley, asked being that the project is underway what is the current timetable for construction of the walls?

Mr. Espinoza, stated they are expected to go up in the summer of 2014 and there is a schedule for all of the walls.

Council Member Tovo, asked about the consideration of doing something different on the North part could call into question the part South as well and it's my understanding that would require input from Federal highway administration?

Mr. Esponoza, stated that is correct and if you would recall this project is funded 80% federal and 20% state. We are following those guidelines.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE EAST 6TH STREET CONSTRUCTION FROM CONGRESS AVENUE TO I35, IMPROVING THE DRAINAGE INFRASTRUCTURE AND STREETScape BY WIDENING

SIDEWALKS, ADDING BIKE LANES AND PLANTING MORE TREES.

Mr. Howard Lazarus, Director of Public Works Department, discussed some solutions for Sixth Street and the goal is to obtain concurrence with the festival street concept before launching into a detailed design program.

The Downtown Austin Plan approved by City Council ordinance in 2011, identified 6th street improvements as a “highest priority” and one of the “Seven Transformative Steps in the New 10 Years.” It was directed that 6th street be reimagined as a destination for everyone, established project goals of improved pedestrian environment, diverse activities and protection of unique historical character. Street pavement and subgrade is failing, sidewalks are failing, inconsistent and require increased maintenance and drainage is poor and the storm drain system is less than half the size that it should be.

The rebuilt of 6th street should look like retain Historic District Character, nighttime safety, wider sidewalks with furniture and trees, bicycle lanes, parking and loading areas and better movement of traffic and closures. Some Merchants have spoken with staff and stated the main focus should be on preserving existing hardscape; retain 10’ wide sidewalks, head-in angle parking and two lanes of traffic.

At this time staff is conducting extensive stakeholder engagement and still do not have consensus, ready to start detailed design \$1M available from 2010 bond program, total project cost estimated at \$19M, unfunded, there is a broad support for more pedestrian-oriented experience on 6th street and major business owner concerns exist over construction impact, regardless of design approach taken.

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, asked about the alternative proposal and the desire not to have as many lanes of traffic. Why does the staff proposal of The Festival Street concept is still being preferred over the alternative design proposal?

Mr. Lazarus, stated the proposal of The Festival Street gets rid of the curb and when you want to open up the street for festival use you have the entire width of right of way. The Festival Street concept does not impact on the number of travel lanes and the use being flexible. That will occur you have the curb or not.

Mayor Pro Tem Cole, asked Mr. Lazarus about his comment of still working with stakeholders?

Mr. Lazarus, stated we are and that there were a significant number of business owners that had expressed concerns and we have committed to continue to work with them to try and address the issues they raised.

Council Member Riley, asked Mr. Lazarus about his comment of the sidewalks being 18 feet and concrete and everything in between will be asphalt?

Mr. Lazarus, stated yes.

Council Member Riley, asked about the funding of \$19M would this come from the future bond election? But, there might be other future bond elections.

Mr. Lazarus, stated yes.

Council Member Morrison, stated she thought we had some East 6th Street monies in our 2012 bond?

Mr. Lazarus, stated there are no construction monies in the 2012 bond for East 6th street.

Council Member Morrison, asked if the \$1M for design was out of the 2010?

Mr. Lazarus, stated yes.

Council Member Morrison, asked if this was going before the Historic Landmark Commission?

Mr. Lazarus, stated absolutely.

Council Member Morrison, asked if Mr. Lazarus envisioned a Council action to put a final approach on things?

Mr. Lazarus, stated maybe.

5. UPDATE ON THE IMPROVEMENTS OF THE SHOAL CREEK TRAIL GAP PROJECT.

Item postponed until January 13, 2014.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Cole adjourned the meeting with no objection at 4:02 p.m.