

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
Austin, Texas

Special Meeting -- March 15, 1960

The meeting of the Commission was called to order at 7:10 p.m. in the Council Room, Municipal Building.

Present

D. B. Barrow, Chairman
Marvin B. Braswell
Howard E. Brunson
Carl A. Johnson
S. P. Kinser
H. F. Kuehne
W. Sale Lewis
Emil Spillmann

Absent

Doak Rainey

Also Present

Hoyle M. Osborne, Director of Planning
Dudley Fowler, Assistant City Attorney
Nat Goodfriend, President, Downtown Austin Unlimited Association
Ed. Wroe, Jr., American National Bank
E. C. Bartholomew, Austin National Bank
E. W. Jackson
Joe Dacy
M. H. Crockett, Sr.
M. H. Crockett, Jr.
Ernest Rosner
W. W. Patterson
John Simpson
Roger Hanks
Howard M. Simmons

R1270 LOCATION OF POST OFFICE-FEDERAL BUILDING

The Commission again discussed the location for a post office-federal building. Mr. Barrow said he did not think the Commission had sufficient knowledge of the problem to consider sites other than the one the Commission thought had been selected by the General Services Administration north of West 12th Street between San Antonio and Nueces Streets. Comments were then made by members of the Commission and others present.

Mr. Braswell: I believe that each member of the Planning Commission by this time has had sufficient time to consider locations. I think each member of the Commission should suggest what in his opinion would be the ideal set-up and make a general discussion of it, then put it to a vote.

Mr. Lewis: I don't think we need to rush into it that fast.

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Mr. Braswell: I believe it was expressed by the Council that the time element was a factor in it and that we should come up with something as an immediate recommendation.

Mr. Lewis: I think if we are to spend 13 million dollars, we should give it more thought.

Mr. Johnson: That is my thought.

Mr. Braswell: Obviously they want two blocks of land. It would be our problem to come up with some suggestion as to where it would be the most logical place, whether it would be downtown or somewhere else.

Mr. Barrow: We might approach this matter from the standpoint of proceeding this way -- we may know what basis they're interested in, that they are interested in this site on Nueces and San Antonio. What do you think if we were to get the Commission to express an opinion about that site?

Mr. Braswell: I believe we should clear that before we discuss any other area. I make a motion that we disapprove that location (motion rescinded so that it could be discussed).

Mr. Lewis: I was going to ask if this site has even been approved by the General Services Administration.

Mr. Kinser: I would like to hear from the downtown group, and the others present before I make any motion, or consider eliminating that site, or suggest another site. They are all interested in it the same as we are. I think it is a matter of what is best for Austin.

Mr. Lewis: I would make one observation. You mentioned that you would like to lay it open for discussion of another area. I think we should not close the door on any site. We should leave it open and investigate.

AGREED: That the Commission would hear the downtown group.

Mr. Goodfriend: We are here primarily this evening to discuss this matter and in fact I think that the comments of Mr. Bolton in analyzing the problem on KTBC took all of the sting out of what I had to say. Primarily, we are going to try to select a site that would be convenient, and accessible for its beauty in the city and to keep in mind that by locating the post office and federal building in the downtown area, we increase the tax structure of the downtown area. That, basically, is what we wanted to discuss this evening. We made this request before the City Council and you gentlemen are carrying forward with it. There are several other persons who would like to discuss more specifically a location. We are not here to present any one particular site.

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Mr. Kinser: Do you have any particular location or area, Mr. Goodfriend, where you personally would like to see the post office building located?

Mr. Goodfriend: No, not anything specific other than an area where it would be readily accessible, conveniently located and would enhance the values of downtown Austin, and that can be rather broad with the facilities that are required. There are some other members of our organization here this evening that might have more specific ideas.

Mr. Wroe: I am also a member of Austin Downtown Unlimited, so I would like to speak wearing several hats. I am in complete agreement with Mr. Goodfriend, and I think I speak for most of the financial family in downtown Austin. We need this post office and federal building in the downtown area. It has been a great concern to the business I am associated with, the gradual evacuation of working people and businesses from the downtown area into the perimeter of downtown area, much less in the suburban, and we feel that it is of tremendous importance to retain as many of these working people as possible. This is a rather large block of people we are considering in the downtown area. In addition, we wish to retain an investment of this size in the downtown zone. My personal feelings on this matter are that it will be of great value to our community to have this in the downtown area and preferably south of 5th Street. We read in the afternoon paper the discussion of tunneling the railroad tracks under Congress Avenue which proposes about the same thing -- to enhance the use of the property south of 6th Street. My personal opinion is that we are not in the position to recommend a specific area. I think all of the downtown group is most interested in the City Planning Commission urging them to locate it to the best interest of the city. It is my understanding that the General Services Administration has had the policy down through the years of cooperating with planning groups such as this in locating their building sites, and it would be my suggestion that the Planning Commission offer its services and its knowledge of Austin and the plans that the City has for the development of Austin to the GSA to assist them in determining the best and most satisfactory location for the post office and the federal building.

Mr. Kinser: Last Tuesday in considering this location on 12th Street, while I made the observation that it would probably relieve the traffic situation downtown, I believe Mr. Patterson disagreed with me that it would generate more traffic downtown since people would be going from town out to this area. I would like to hear what you think about this, because that is one of the most important things and one of the greatest concerns this Planning Commission has. Traffic is one of our greatest concerns.

Mr. Wroe: There is down and then there is downtown. When somebody says downtown to me, I think of 6th Street and Congress Avenue, but we are talking about an area that is 10 or 11 blocks north and south, 6 and 8 blocks east and west. That will give us a general idea of downtown. The location

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of a structure, say the present post office site where there is a hazardous traffic problem, is trying to accommodate all of the parking around that site. But a location on the perimeter of this downtown area might possibly leave it within walking distance of many of the people that would use the post office and at the same time allow us breathing space for disposing of all of these feeders. It would seem to me that the location which they have considered would add considerable difficulty to an already congested area around the high school and to an area that would be further congested when the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company puts its building in the neighborhood. That is my off-hand thinking.

Mr. Bartholomew: I am not a traffic expert but I would like to make this observation in which I have had experience from time to time. People going to the post office usually make these trips the same time as commercial houses are closing or shortly before or shortly thereafter. On 12th Street at this time we have tremendous traffic from 7 until about 8:15 in the morning and from 12 until 1 in the afternoon, beginning at 4:30 on through 6 o'clock. 11th and 12th Streets are principally the main arteries in that area until you get to 19th Street which is pretty heavy. I think we are just adding a little more confusion to confusion, and I am not trying to qualify myself as a traffic engineer. I am pulling for downtown Austin not for a selfish reason and I certainly do not want to pinpoint it on a certain place. We now have West 1st Street going all the way out to the intersection of Lake Austin Boulevard at the Missouri Pacific Underpass which is taking a tremendous lot of traffic. We have its sister artery 5th Street taking virtually the same crest and 6th Street in the same direction. East you have 1st Street and 5th Street through to Interregional Highway. Those arteries would be perfect to serve a post office located somewhere in the downtown area.

Mr. Kinser: West 12th Street has a bottleneck there at Lamar Boulevard.

Mr. Bartholomew: I am keenly strong for a downtown post office. I am sure the GSA would listen to you if you would get together with them. I believe it would be advantageous for this group to meet with them. Why not consider something between San Antonio and Neches and between 1st and 5th, 6th or 7th?

Mr. Brunson: From the point of view of traffic, if the government does pick a location like 12th Street, do they intend to leave a downtown location for a retail office?

Mr. Lewis: Do we have the specification of the size of the tract involved?

Mr. Barrow: Not more than the one that is being considered, which is two blocks.

Mr. Lewis: That would involve closing one street like you would have there in closing 13th Street. What would the solution of that be?

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Mr. Barrow: There are some locations where the closing of the street might not be objectionable but others where it could be objectionable.

Mr. Barrow: It seems that the time element may not be so important now and I would be glad to contact the GSA and some of the other members of this group might also contact them.

Mr. Kinser: With regard to closing one street where they might use two blocks, it seems logical that somewhere below 5th Street where the river has already cut off the streets and so far as closing the street, that would be the least objectionable than most anywhere.

Mr. Braswell: When you mentioned 1st to 5th, you have not ruled out the possibility of south of 1st Street, considering the tracts along the River?

Mr. Bartholomew: I was merely suggesting an area. I feel that that area is accessible to 1st Street, as far as going east and west, and to the other streets.

Mr. Jackson: I concur with what the other speakers have said. I would like to answer Mr. Kinser's question about whether the post office generates traffic. It does happen that we (The Steck Company) have lots of loading and unloading at the post office for our own business and there is a lot of traffic generated by the post office. If you ever try to park in downtown Austin you know there is parking available on 4th Street but when you get further north you really have a parking problem. So to relieve the traffic problem, you have the best opportunity in moving further south. Of course I am interested in this thing from the standpoint of the beautification of Austin. I hope that the federal government will take that into account too and I am sure that the Planning Commission will. But putting that post office and office building in that area right on our town lake with the beautiful riverfront and civic center across the River, you would make downtown Austin a jewel for people coming into Austin seeing this instead of what we have. Here we have a rare opportunity to fit this post office into the most feasible location in Austin and at the same time do a tremendous job of beautification of downtown Austin. I think we should not try to pinpoint it. I think the GSA should have the opportunity to pinpoint it, but I think between San Antonio and Red River and 10th Street to the River would be a good area. Overlooking that lake would be a beautiful sight.

Mr. Dacy: I would like to pinpoint this location. Mr. Jackson said the beautiful view overlooking the beautiful lake and coliseum and beautiful South Austin. There is a traffic hazard further up. I have no selfish interest in this, but I have a selfish interest for the City of Austin. When you go north from South Austin, you would see a 11 or 12 million dollar building overlooking the coliseum. It may take in Congress Avenue on 4th, first going west about 4 blocks where you have a dead-end and you are

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blocking no streets. We are going to have to plan this. Of course they know how much land they want. It seems to me like if they are planning like the State behind the capitol, that Austin would make a good seat for the government to put whatever buildings they have right here in that center. You have traffic going east on 1st Street to Interregional Highway, then you go west where the Missouri-Pacific Boulevard will be and go as far as you want west on 1st Street. You have something there that does advertise our city -- that anchors one end of Congress like the Capitol anchors the other end. We came up here with one intention -- to see if we could be of some help like you are trying to be of help to the GSA. Of course they are going to want us to help them and at the same time, as Mr. Goodfriend said, it does enhance the value for tax purposes. After all Congress and downtown does pay a lot of taxes. It would be a beautiful sight from South Austin.

Mr. Crockett, Sr.: I have been sort of representing South Austin for a long time. We have about 11 or 12 acres that would be available and if a very wise mayor, city council, and planners could put the 3 million dollar auditorium there, I could take care of the post office across the street to the east. There would be no traffic hazard there, and I would like to see you give that a little thought. We have a solid rock bottom there for a foundation. On the north side of the River you don't have that.

Mr. Rosner: I believe that to have a healthy city the heart of the city is the most important part of the city to maintain. I think a federal building like is planned should be in the downtown area.

Mr. Patterson: The GSA has been thinking about this much longer than you and I have; I know they have been thinking about it for the last six months. GSA did not come out on 12th Street with something that fell out of the sky. They had some reason to want it in the northern part of the city. As a citizen of Austin I don't think 12th Street is the best location. For the federal government it may be. We have two things to consider -- the federal government and the City of Austin. I am definitely for it downtown and I think if we put it downtown it should be within walking distance of the office buildings and the capitol. If it is not within walking distance you will not have what you want to accomplish. We all like to have a beautiful Austin. The River with its lake will be beautiful, but I can't see putting a big building on it. That will not make it beautiful. In fact it will block it. It doesn't mean that it is not a good site but if you are thinking of something beautiful you will have to do something besides put a building on the River. From the traffic point of view, I don't see how anybody could suggest coming up and down First Street which is too gummed up with traffic. I definitely think that if you don't put it within walking distance of people downtown who will use it, the people who are using the office buildings and the stores, then you are going to create a problem. When they get in their cars from these office buildings and the capitol to go to the post office that will create a lot of traffic and that is where most of the business will go to the post office. If you put it out of walking range, you really have a

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traffic problem, and it will not be a profitable traffic to the customers or Congress Avenue. It will keep away people who want to come downtown to shop. We should also keep in mind that this is going to be a federal office building, and people that use that will use that building or will be using the post office also. That will also bring a lot of people who come to this building to the hotels. If you put it out of the reach of hotels, where they have to get taxicabs or cars, then you increase the traffic. I think it should be located as centrally as possible. You are not going to clean up the southern part of Congress Avenue by putting the post office there. It will not hurt it particularly but it will not help it. A post office is where you have a lot of trucks which do not improve the appearance. The railroad tracks will remain there and this might increase the tendency to keep the tracks there.

There is only one good street you can travel and that is the Interregional Highway. There is not another street that carries any traffic to amount to anything with any speed. So you will have to locate it convenient to the Interregional Highway. First and Second Streets are carrying all the traffic they can carry right now. 7th and 8th Streets which are in the process of being widened, will have good access from the Interregional into Austin. Also, going north and south San Jacinto is one of the main thoroughfares. I don't see how you could beat a location between 7th and 10th. It should be close enough to the capitol. I think as long as we don't have to put the mail trucks through the center of Austin, the better off we will be. To me, convenience to the people who use it is number one. Number two is to help out the downtown area of Austin. And to move it out of downtown you are really giving downtown a blow. For that reason, it ought to be in downtown some place. I urge you to locate it close to Interregional Highway, close to the capitol, close to Congress Avenue, and close to city hall insofar as possible. I think the United States Government should build a bomb shelter. We do not have a shelter anywhere. If it is going to be located where no one can get to it, you might as well put it out on 12th Street as far as the shelter part and traffic are concerned. I think if you want to improve the downtown part of Congress Avenue you must get the railroad tracks out. It will not blend with the post office there. Ordinarily a person will walk from 3 to 5 blocks.

Mr. Simpson: I am interested in the perimeter area but I am not interested in the post office being in that area. My interest is as a citizen of the whole of Austin. I think the post office should be best located in the downtown area, and I might indicate that I would disagree with Mr. Patterson that the area from 5th and 6th Streets to the River from a traffic flow standpoint would be much better. I spend a considerable amount of time on 1st Street and I don't find the traffic problem on that street. Trucks can be an asset to a location if you have the proper place to put them. I think that trucks and cars, if they are not properly cared for, are not an attraction. I think that the matter of walking is not serious. I think that most

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of the downtown people use a car or some other vehicle now. Certainly it would be accessible from South Austin, Delwood, Tarrytown, Enfield and other areas, through 1st, 3rd, 4th, and Interregional in the downtown area. I believe that as time goes on those arteries will possibly be improved by one-way operations, widening or otherwise, and that there will be plenty of access for all of the citizens of Austin to this downtown area.

Mr. Barrow: I would like to ask Mr. Osborne if he has anything to say since our last meeting.

Mr. Osborne: First thing, is that the size of the site that is apparently proposed on 12th Street is about 4.2 acres and that is including 13th Street. The size of an average downtown block is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres. The block immediately between 12th and 13th is a little over-sized.

The second item is on the matter of traffic. I think perhaps we are putting a little too much emphasis on traffic. Because you would say that almost anywhere you would put it in the downtown area would create a traffic problem. It might not be a serious traffic problem, but there is a problem on most any of the streets. For instance, on 12th Street the traffic count at this particular location is about 12,000 cars per day. On 1st Street just to the east of Congress Avenue, 13,000 cars per day. East 1st Street in this particular location is badly overloaded as is 12th Street. You can pick almost any of the other streets -- East 5th Street for instance has 10,000 cars per day. The traffic flow map shows that 15th Street has some possibilities, since it has only about 6200 cars per day, or a location east of the capitol. However, this traffic count was made before the state office buildings were complete and it has jumped to about 8000 or 9000 cars per day.

The next thing is a matter of direct access. This has been brought out in a number of instances. Access is not direct on 12th Street, especially if you go east, because you swing around the capitol. On other streets you have both directness or indirectness.

Another problem occurring in the lower part of the suggested area around 1st Street is a proposal which has received serious consideration to make a bridge crossing connecting San Jacinto with Trinity, making Trinity one-way north and San Jacinto one-way south, and come across a bridge into South Congress Avenue. That would be similar to what we have at Lavaca and Guadalupe Streets at the River.

The other problem is on any other street closing problems. You can't make any blank statements as to what streets would be closed. There are many possibilities and difficulties in closing streets.

Another problem is terrain and topography. Even downtown Austin is not flat and specific sites get to be rather intricate as to what can be done with

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them. In the case of the site on 12th Street, it is mildly sloping terrain with no serious problem from the topographic point. There appears to be rather shallow rock there which would probably support a building without any serious difficulty. There is also a 10' x 10' culvert there on Nueces Street which used to be a creek. The plan 4 years ago did suggest consideration of an area east of the capitol. There certainly are terrain problems there, especially in the vicinity of Waller Creek. I think I am raising more problems than I am making any specific suggestions but this is important in arriving at what could be done.

Mr. Barrow: Would you want to say where you think there would be a good site for a post office?

Mr. Osborne: No, not at the present time. My knowledge of post office operations is slight. I don't even know how many people might go into this building or into the office building.

Mr. Barrow: I mean from a planning standpoint. You don't have to be too specific, but do you know of a location which has been talked about that would be better from a planning standpoint?

Mr. Osborne: I don't think the group this evening has discussed it; I frankly would go back to the recommendation of the Plan for the area east of the capitol.

Mr. Hanks: Mr. Osborne, the Interregional Highway is very vital, isn't the Missouri-Pacific going to be just as vital when it is developed? What is being done to tie these two expressways together? Is the riverfront road contemplated to do that?

Mr. Osborne: The primary connection would be under the Congress Avenue Bridge, tying up to 1st Street on the east and Missouri-Pacific on the west.

Mr. Crockett, Jr.: What about just to the east of Interregional where the Interregional, with the one-way access streets and the best arteries of traffic you have in town, could be used to get to the post office fronting on the Interregional and just to the east of it. You could still keep it down around 7th and 8th Streets.

Mr. Osborne: I think that would definitely be a possibility and would be worth considering. I have not considered this too thoroughly, but it has some good possibilities.

Mr. Crockett, Sr.: What is proposed for the development of the Riverfront Boulevard on the south side?

Mr. Osborne: Riverside Drive will be developed and it is proposed to swing under the Congress Avenue bridge.

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Mr. Simmons (W. R. Coleman and Associates, Architects): I would like to pinpoint a location, at the intersection of 17th and Colorado, to set up a federal center on those four blocks, and to take a centerline between the capitol and the University and open up a new street as a continuation of University Avenue. Where they intersect would provide a center which is an area for future expansion. I think it would be wise for the City to buy this and offer it to the federal government for this development. 17th Street could be opened up to a 100-foot width from Shoal Creek Boulevard to San Jacinto, on over to Interregional. Having this street through this area would leave all the surrounding area open to the planning and capital area and would also take the traffic flow from the University. I cannot see putting it any further south if you are going to eliminate a traffic hazard in downtown Austin. I would like to see the City and the State do a whole lot in getting the federal offices located here. If you set it up as a federal center with the post office located on one corner and reserve the other three for future expansion, I think it would be a good thing for the City of Austin.

Mr. Crockett, Jr.: I would like to suggest one other location. What about the riverfront property between South 1st Street and Congress Avenue? There would be the two big arteries of traffic -- South Congress and Riverside Drive -- that would carry you to Interregional or Lamar Boulevard. I think that would help beautify the waterfront.

Mr. Braswell: I would like to express myself on a specific area, not to get specific action but to get something started. I have noted in this downtown improvement that they are 100 per cent behind it. It is my belief that in the selection of a site, the traffic problem is going to be of paramount importance. I would suggest for serious consideration, the Becker Lumber Company tract and the adjoining block to the east separated by Brazos Street. I have had two approaches. This is a 12 million dollar project. I believe we could pick up a million on this site alone if we consider this site between the Avenue and San Jacinto at the south end of Brazos Street. As Mr. Osborne brought out, with the strong possibility of San Jacinto going through it would enhance this from a traffic standpoint. Then there would be a tie-in from the River. North Riverside Drive with the bridge would tie in with the Missouri Pacific bridge. Then from another standpoint a construction of this magnitude in this area would definitely enhance and influence the complete rehabilitation of all the surrounding property. Then by being a split-level deal it would provide for off-street parking.

Mr. Barrow: Does the Commission want to take any specific action on the 12th to 14th, Nueces to San Antonio site?

Mr. Brunson: I would still like to hear from GSA as to why they chose that location and what their specifications are.

Mr. Spillmann: I wonder if it could not be on record that we offer our services to GSA. In case they come down to select a location we might discuss it with them.

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The Commission then unanimously

VOTED: To go on record as offering our services to GSA at any time they would like to consult us.

Mr. Braswell: There is a strong possibility that the GSA may be waiting on us to do something here. That is the reason I thought we should take some action tonight.

Mr. Lewis: I believe that a location on 1st Street might have potentialities but I think we should consider other locations. We can't do that here but would have to go on the ground and get more information than we have here tonight.

Mr. Braswell: I think we should collectively and individually study these sites.

Mr. Barrow: I had the feeling, when we talked about contacting the GSA, that it would be much more effective if we would talk to them rather than their coming to us. I think that a better approach to learn what they have in mind and what we might do in the way of serving them is to go and see them.

Mr. Braswell: I would suggest that some of the Commission go to the GSA.

Mr. Kinser: I would like to see a committee contact the GSA as soon as possible.

Mr. Barrow: I think we should determine this as soon as we can, if we can be of service to them and if we can have some influence in what they do, and then move to express our selves about the matter one way or another. I think we should then arrive at some conclusion and express it.

It was then unanimously

VOTED: That the Chairman appoint several members, with himself as chairman, to go to the GSA to discuss this matter.

Mr. Kinser: After the committee has contacted GSA and has all the information it can get, I suggest that the Commission be called for a special meeting and the committee report to the Commission and others who are interested what information is available.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

APPROVED:

David B. Barrow
Chairman

Hoyle M. Osborne
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Executive Secretary