



CITY OF West Linn

PLANNING COMMISSION WORK SESSION Minutes of November 16, 2011

Members present: Vice Chair Michael Babbitt, Gail Holmes, Holly Miller and Christine Steel
Members absent: Chair Robert Martin, Laura Horsey and Dean Wood
Council Liaison: Teri Cummings
Staff present: John Sonnen, Planning Director

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Michael Babbitt called the meeting to order in the Council Chambers of City Hall at 6:45 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (None)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Steel **moved** to approve the Minutes of October 5, 2011. Commissioner Holmes **seconded** the motion and it **passed** 4:0. Commissioner Steel **moved** to approve the Minutes of October 19, 2011. Commissioner Holmes **seconded** the motion and it **passed** 4:0.

WORK SESSION

Highway 43 / Willamette Falls Drive concept vision

http://westlinnoregon.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/1_concept_vision_general_feasibility_assessment.pdf

Director Sonnen distributed the November 10, 2011 staff memorandum, "Phase I of the Highway 43 / Willamette Falls Drive corridor vision project." Phase I was wrapping up and the consultants were going to take the vision and the results of public outreach to the Council on November 21. Then the Council would decide whether or how to continue the project. Sonnen described the public outreach efforts, which included neighborhood meetings, a work shop, surveys and an advisory committee. The conceptual vision was based on that input as well as what existing city and neighborhood plans aspired to. It put forth notions people seemed to like or wanted to have addressed. There was fairly significant public support for just about every aspect of the vision. He advised limited staffing resources meant it would be necessary to prioritize the projects that would do the most good. The advisory group had talked about the need to do what needed to be done in order to get ahead of market forces in Robinwood. There had been no quorum at their last meeting so he did not have a recommendation from the advisory committee.

Director Sonnen discussed key concepts in the conceptual vision: transportation improvements and town centers. The public wanted safer, separated bike ways, pedestrian connections and alternative connections to town centers. The upcoming Transportation System Plan (TSP) update could address that. Imagine West Linn envisioned a river walk. That could serve as an alternative bike/pedestrian route. There had been lots of public support for it. People liked the town center concept of being able to satisfy more of their routine needs by patronizing businesses closer to home. Some people in Robinwood and Willamette would allow more density around businesses if that would support the businesses they would want to walk to.

Commissioner Steel pointed out the two circles around each center represented a ten minute walk to retail and a five minute bike ride. She recalled hearing people say the community needed a city center. The Arch Bridge area had that potential. Sonnen advised Metro's plan to build high capacity transit along I-205 would put the Arch Bridge/Bolton area at a crossroads of the transportation system in 10 to 15 years. The combination of transit service, river amenities and more intense employment and housing opportunities would make it a significant regional center. Commissioner Holmes added that it would be a gateway to West Linn.

Director Sonnen advised that each center would have different planning needs. Willamette already had a core to work with. The City would need to start fresh at Arch Bridge. The existing framework and street pattern would not work. He advised that planning each center would require computer simulations of different designs and traffic patterns and decisions related to infill and redevelopment. Public support would be tested for different scenarios. He related there was enough money available for the staff to take on designing one of the centers and to make interim measure text changes to aspects of Robinwood or Willamette. Some short term projects could also be started now, such as securing easements to ensure the future opportunity for a river esplanade was not foreclosed. The City had banked \$200,000 thus far from SDCs it had collected to pay for the original 2005 plan for a bike/pedestrian path along Willamette Falls Drive. The state planned to install a bike path on I-205, so the Willamette Falls Drive path might not be necessary. The SDC funds might be invested in the river trail/esplanade instead. The City could work toward having an interest in or an easement over the Blue Heron site and purchase the PGE recycling center and the bus garage property. Commissioner Holmes advised the City already owned the old rail line right-of-way there.

During the discussion the Commissioners suggested finding another way down to Willamette Park than down the hillside that was too steep for families to bike or walk down. Sonnen suggested the Commissioners could recommend testing and refining the originally planned alignment to determine where the river trail really ought to go and if the necessary easements could be obtained. Then the City could start purchasing them.

Vice Chair Babbitt was concerned about going back to the "village" concept. He recalled the Comprehensive Plan had been changed to replace designated town centers with neighborhood plans ten years ago. Sonnen explained the "centers" the concept plan referred to were the existing commercial areas. The idea was to round them out to make them more viable, accessible and walkable. The Comprehensive Plan, Imagine West Linn and the Sustainability

Plan talked about that kind of development along Highway 43. The Council had directed the staff to find out what people wanted out there. Commissioner Steel clarified the conceptual vision did not refer to "village," but anticipated that the Bolton area would be a regional center and each of the other areas would be a neighborhood center. Sonnen advised Metro recognized Bolton as a "town center." Arch Bridge/Bolton could be a fairly substantial town center. Willamette could be viewed as a "destination" because it had its own character; it was a destination and it served the immediate neighborhood's needs. Each of the other centers would serve the needs of that neighborhood as well as draw people as they were traveling by. Commissioner Holmes recalled the consultants had talked about the "8/80 rule." That rule was met if an 8-year-old or an 80-year-old could safely walk there. Vice Chair Babbitt and Commissioner Holmes observed if the Council wanted to go this direction it would be critical to stay focused on it, budget for it and actively pursue grants to make it happen. Sonnen reported the City's Metro liaison had advised she would work on getting Metro's help. He advised it would take an aggressive effort because Metro had less money to distribute now.

Commissioner Steel recalled advisory committee members saw a need to make Robinwood a priority because Wal-Mart was coming in. The City had to act quickly to get ahead of things so it would not end up in reactionary mode. Director Sonnen advised a "keep bad things from happening" approach would be to draft interim code to ensure the zoning only allowed appropriate uses in Robinwood. He related the consultants believed the City should focus on Arch Bridge/Bolton and the TSP. Steel compared addressing Robinwood to doing maintenance on your house and developing the concept for a regional center to building a brand new house. She indicated she would prefer to keep the momentum going on everything in the plan. That might mean just doing small, interim fixes to keep bad things from happening in Robinwood. Miller recalled there had been more public support for doing things to maintain the integrity of Robinwood than for Arch Bridge. Steel predicted that the citizens would not be happy if Highway 43 became another McLaughlin Boulevard.

Vice Chair Babbitt advised that the public outreach process should keep in mind what had happened in the past and address things that would reduce public support. In the case of the future esplanade it had to address the route and the high cost. He understood that Wal-Mart wanted to do all kinds of improvements in Robinwood. But he was concerned that would trigger public hearings and enough of a backlash from the public that they would never be able to do it. Sonnen recalled there had been a handful of Robinwood residents at the meeting who would embrace putting higher density housing around neighborhood-oriented businesses there to support them, but there was a contingent that would not support that. There seemed to be broader support for street improvements that would make it easier for a family to bike or walk in the neighborhood. Residents of Robinwood had diverse and strongly held opinions. The public involvement-related challenge in Robinwood was to come up with a concept they would all embrace. Another concern he had was whether they would feel short-changed if the City focused on the Arch Bridge area first. Steel, Holmes and Miller stressed the need for good dialogue between the City and Robinwood. Robinwood residents needed to help the process by clarifying what their priorities were and what concept they wanted to see in their own neighborhood. Miller suggested even if the priority was Arch Bridge the City should be talking

with Robinwood at the same time. The Robinwood matter should not be tabled because Robinwood did not yet have an identity. Robinwood residents should participate in helping flesh it out. Sonnen suggested an interim fix could be to work with the owners of the site that might feature a Wal-Mart. Holmes explained a strong retail/commercial area could not be lopsided. It could not have two great blocks and a dead zone on the other side of the street.

Babbitt related the aspect of the conceptual vision that he looked forward to the most was eventually being able to walk from one end of West Linn to the other on a sidewalk. Sonnen reported the process had revealed that seemed to be a uniformly supported goal. When the question of using the trails plan for connectivity was raised Steel reported that she had not heard people at the public meetings she had attended clamoring for more parks. Sonnen related work shop participants had been asked what uses they wanted to see at the Blue Heron site and they had responded they wanted parks and open space. Holmes and Steel interpreted that as saying they wanted to be able to access the area. Holmes commented the City did not have much commercial land available. It would be great to have a hotel down there as well as wetlands and walking trails. Steel recalled the advisory committee had talked about bringing in a good employer - like Nike or Microsoft – that would develop an ecologically sensitive campus.

Sonnen pointed out the staff suggested making Arch Bridge/Bolton the first priority with Robinwood second. The advisory committee unanimously wanted Robinwood to be the top priority. The Commissioners seemed to favor making Robinwood first priority. He asked them to come to agreement and offer a rationale he could convey to the City Council. Babbitt gave complete streets the highest priority. Sonnen advised that was likely to happen anyway in the TSP update process. He then asked the Commissioners to decide between the centers and the waterfront improvement. There was enough funding to do one or the other well this coming year. Holmes stipulated there should be good dialogue with Robinwood that would help fashion the concept for an eventual overlay. She did not want to see piecemeal development in either Robinwood or the Arch Bridge area. A master concept was necessary in the Arch Bridge area as well in order to prevent inappropriate development results. Miller explained she would prioritize Robinwood because that was what she had heard people saying they wanted the priority to be. Her personal choice would be to plan the Arch Bridge area and an overlay for Robinwood. Sonnen observed the consensus was that if the City could only accomplish one, Robinwood should have priority.

Babbitt clarified his overall top priority was complete streets. Sonnen discussed the timing and cost. The TSP update process would not start until July. The consultants estimated the additional work would add \$100,000 to the cost of accomplishing the Highway 43 plan. He noted the street improvements seemed to have broad appeal. He hoped the City would find the additional money for them.

The staff had suggested preparing the route and easements for the riverfront trail should be the third priority. Steel observed it had to be a priority because the City needed to determine the alignment and secure the easements for the future trail as opportunities came up. Holmes encouraged staff to keep the 8/80 rule in mind.

The discussion returned to how to rank transportation improvements. Babbitt held to making them first priority. The other Commissioners questioned the need to rank them. They agreed there was broad public support for protected bikeways. They anticipated the TSP update process would address the improvements and they would be accomplished that way. Sonnen advised state law required the TSP to be updated by December 2012. Babbitt noted that even though the City had an existing TSP, it did not have complete sidewalks. Planning them and implementing them was his first priority. Steel reasoned that sidewalks in themselves were not as critical now as putting the plan and zoning in place. McLaughlin Boulevard had complete sidewalks but it was not an attractive street and she would not want to walk along it and breathe diesel fumes. Holmes wanted to see a concept plan in place along Highway 43 because it would help make it both livable and walkable. Steel recalled hearing citizens on the Listening Tour acknowledge that the community was a bedroom community with amenities such as less dense development, trees, hills and waterways. They did not expect to walk everywhere in an urban environment. They did not expect their jobs and doctors to be here. Holmes had heard people complain about the bus service. Better bus service required more ridership. Sonnen advised potential ridership would come from development within a quarter to a half mile along the corridor. The process could test whether people were willing to have attractive denser housing in commercial centers that was close enough to increase ridership. Holmes recalled the consultants had described that as creating a living room on both sides of the street. Density would be there, but not everywhere. Sonnen suggested he would report that one Commissioner gave street improvements the highest priority and the other three ranked them fourth. Babbitt observed one could not compare Highway 43 to McLaughlin. McLaughlin had more lanes. Zoning along Highway 43 would not allow an auto row. He believed the center planning projects could be pushed out a year or two without jeopardizing the look and feel of the City. It was not safe for him and his children to bike to the library from their home near Mary S. Young Park. There were no sidewalks. He wanted them to be able to do that. Steel recalled many people had indicated that they wanted that as well. Sonnen assured Miller that the Council would be given all the statistics from the work shop and surveys.

Director Sonnen then asked the Commissioners to decide whether Willamette or the riverfront improvements should have higher priority. Steel would give the overlook the lowest priority unless the City had an opportunity to strike while the iron was hot. Holmes agreed the City should not turn its back on an opportunity. Sonnen advised PGE wanted to sell its property, but it had limited utility and would be hard to build on. The county was likely to pick up the Blue Heron site and give the City stewardship of it. It could sit as it was for a long time. But zoning needed to be in place in case a developer purchased it. It was currently zoned part R-10 and part Industrial. He advised Willamette did not need to be highest priority because it was in the best shape of all of the centers and would just have to be enhanced. Babbitt commented that Willamette citizens were active and well organized and had done a good job. Sonnen then observed the Commissioners would rank the projects as follows: the Blue Heron site; Willamette and then the overlook (unless an opportunity came up).

Sonnen encouraged Commissioners to attend the Council meeting to hear the Councilors discuss priorities. There had not been a quorum at the last advisory committee meeting, but he had asked the other committee members to send in comments. He had not received any yet, but he would put anything he received by Friday into the Council packet.

ITEMS OF INTEREST FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION (None)

Wal-Mart had sent out a mailer that asked people to check what they supported or did not support. Commissioner Steel had received one. Director Sonnen recalled the Council had been advised not to respond to anything that would indicate a bias toward an outcome on a land use case that would come before it. Wal-Mart was apparently going to move into the old grocery store shell without making exterior or site improvements that would trigger a land use review, but it might do that sometime in the future.

Vice Chair Babbitt had received emails that raised the issue that the approved plan for a kayak launch at Maddax Woods had been changed. He was concerned about the process. If the applicant was not going to install the kayak launch they should have to come back to ask the Planning Commission to approve the change. Commissioner Holmes reported that someone had taken her to the kayak launch site to show her the historic skids to Maddax's boat building structure that were still there. There was a WRA-related issue as well. That might not be the best place to put in a kayak launch. Sonnen agreed to look into the matter and report back.

ITEMS OF INTEREST FROM COMMISSION FOR CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Commissioner Steel had revised and forwarded the draft letter to the Council regarding improving process to Vice Chair Babbitt. He had not had time to add the specifics he had planned to add. He suggested attaching the minutes of the CCI meeting to the letter instead. The minutes described the testimony, which offered specifics. Steel agreed to forward the draft to Sonnen.

The Commissioners discussed whether and how the CCI should be involved in improving involvement in land use discussions at neighborhood association meetings. It had heard repeatedly that neighborhood associations were "broken." Miller recalled the newspaper had reported neighborhood associations were looking at it themselves. Steel recalled watching a Council meeting when the Council heard from neighborhood association presidents. They might be getting ready to do something. Babbitt suggested just giving the associations some talking points to focus on. Sonnen related neighborhood association presidents met together monthly. He offered to find out what they were doing and report back.

ITEMS OF INTEREST FROM STAFF

Director Sonnen updated the Commissioners on the PUD/Infill project status. Chris Kerr had found his interim communications position duties required most of his time. He would continue to work on revising the language as time permitted. Sonnen's time was occupied by

the Highway 43 project the Council had directed him to work on. He reported the administration would provide the Commissioners with generic Planning Commission business cards, but not cards with their individual names on them.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no other business, Chair Martin adjourned the Planning Commission meeting at approximately 8:45 p.m.

APPROVED:



Michael Babbitt, Vice Chair

2-16-12

Date