

ASTORIA PLANNING COMMISSION WORK SESSION

Astoria City Hall

May 6, 2013

CALL TO ORDER - ITEM 1:

President Innes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL - ITEM 2:

Commissioners Present: President McLaren Innes, Vice-President Mark Cary, Al Tollefson, David Pearson, and Zetty Nemlowill

Commissioners Excused: Thor Norgaard

Staff Present: Community Development Director / Assistant City Manager Brett Estes and Planner Rosemary Johnson.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS - ITEM 3: No reports.

NEW BUSINESS - ITEM 4(a): Transportation System Plan Update Presentation and Discussion

Director Estes explained that the Planning Commission would ultimately review the Transportation System Plan (TSP) Update and provide a recommendation to City Council regarding adoption of the final TSP document. Staff wanted to get feedback at this meeting in order to address issues now as they continue working on the project. The TSP should be complete in late 2013 with public hearings at the Planning Commission being conducted in November 2013 and City Council public hearings in December 2013.

The Commissioners stepped down from the dais to watch the presentation.

Chris Maciejewski, DKS & Associates, presented the TSP Update via PowerPoint, which included a review of the TSP Update process; key proposed projects, public involvement, and options for addressing various transportation issues in the city. He also presented the feedback received at the community meeting regarding citizen preferences on transportation options pertaining to Downtown, the Port, Road Diet, Pedestrian Bicycle System Management and Bicycle and Walking Improvements. The PowerPoint and material regarding the community's preferences were included in the meeting packet.

Mr. Maciejewski addressed questions and comments from the Commission with additional comments by Staff as noted:

- Director Estes stated that while 15 out of 20 people preferred two-way streets with Marine Drive as the highway, it is too early to know what the downtown businesses supported. Representatives from the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA) spoke at the public open house. While they would like to see two-way traffic on Marine Drive, removal of the parking without replacing it would be detrimental to the businesses. This concept was suggested by Michelle Reeves about two weeks prior to the public meeting. Her plan is currently being reviewed by the ADHDA, who will likely make a formal statement about this over the next month.
 - Mr. Maciejewski stated he and Ms. Reeves agreed that implementation of two-way streets could be completed in phases and would begin with the local streets. This would allow the community to see if they like the new traffic pattern prior to changing the highway.
 - He clarified that his job is to identify issues and make policy statements or directions towards future solutions. Considering the feasibility of how to create more service parking lots is beyond the scope of work for the TSP.
 - Director Estes stated the City has no parking requirements in the downtown area. The City will rely on ADHDA to provide feedback on what they, as a group of business owners, believe is needed downtown. There are no public parking lots in the area. Land and funding would have to be secured to build a public parking lot or garage. Costs can be up to \$50,000 per parking space for a garage.
 - An estimated 80 parking spots per block would need to be removed.

- Director Estes added that ADHDA is conducting an informal parking inventory of the downtown area. He asked ADHDA for specific feedback because the City is moving forward with a plan while the ADHDA is acting on the advice of their consultant. Individuals from the ADHDA at the public meeting stated that they supported the idea of two-way traffic on Marine Drive as long as the parking issues were addressed.
- Marine Drive is an Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) facility. ODOT has been a key participant at all the stakeholder meetings and have appointed a planning lead to work with the City. ODOT supports the local community's desires as long as no flaws are created in the system.
- No one voted for the Duane Street option at the community meeting after Mr. Maciejewski shared some of Ms. Reeves' views that one-way flow would not be beneficial to downtown and would create an island on Commercial that people may try to avoid.
- The network congestion graphics show what congestion would look like 20 years in the future and compares suggested solutions to making no changes.
 - One simulation compared converting local streets to two-way streets versus existing conditions and the overall delay in the network. Slowing and stopping at traffic signals or stop signs added up throughout the entire downtown. The result was slightly less congestion leaving the highway as is and converting to two-way streets.
 - A complete two-way flow resulted in much more congestion because traffic diverts off the highway, resulting in more flow on local streets because of the reduced capacity. It is also harder for local traffic to get onto the local highway.
 - Simulation File #1 was also displayed, featuring the west side of the downtown along 8th, 9th, and 10th Streets during weekday PM peak flow. Local cross streets are a two-way flow and the highway maintained as a one way.
 - He confirmed that trucks and large vehicles have been figured into the models, as well as pedestrians crossing at intersections, so all that resulting congestion impact is figured in. The simulation is unable to capture on-street parking friction that occurs when a driver stops to parallel park. The model shows average traffic conditions 20 years in the future rather than a worst-case scenario.
 - The reaction of many who view these models is that not enough congestion is showing, because most remember the worst weekend scenarios and believe that happens all the time. However, that is not what the City is designing for.
 - Traffic solutions that increase safety and promote pedestrian traffic can worsen congestion during peak periods; tradeoffs exist for safety, walkability and two-way flow.
- If Marine Drive were converted to a two-way with three lanes, Commercial Street would be a local two-way street and likely all the traffic signals would be replaced with stops signs. It could be a one-lane, one-way street with diagonal parking. He noted a 20-foot through way was required for emergency vehicles to drive through. A single lane is 12-feet wide and diagonal parking takes up more space. Diagonal parking may not be an option if it encroaches into emergency response standards.
 - Director Estes confirmed the Engineering Department could assist the ADHDA with gathering information to make a more informed decision about the Marine Drive option. The City has considered various scenarios. Benefits from diagonal parking occur in areas where no driveway cuts exist. The City researched diagonal parking on Duane Street a few years ago and discovered driveways reduce the number of parking spaces. A larger number of parallel parking spaces would fit in these areas.
- At the Port, 10 of 11 people preferred one eastbound through lane coming into town. At all the crucial locations, two westbound through lanes are necessary. A reversible lane is ideal for a corridor with heavy commuter traffic that contains twice as much traffic in one direction. During peak conditions at the Port, traffic is pretty well balanced in both directions. The traffic pattern at the Port does not support a reversible lane.
- With regard to the Road Diet, Director Estes confirmed that reopening Bond Street is possible. Some reconstruction would have to occur, but the Public Works Department has been considering various funding options. The hillside would need to be removed where it extends out over the road, which would also have to be reconstructed a bit.
 - Mr. Maciejewski added many people wanted alternate routes for emergency vehicles and events. It was very difficult to reroute traffic with Bond Street only being a one-way.
 - Mr. Maciejewski showed the traffic simulation for the area west of the Holiday Inn, noting that a Road Diet at the Holiday Inn would prove to be a fatal flaw as congestion would gridlock the entire traffic system. In order to accommodate a road diet at this intersection, the City would need to eliminate turn movements or close one leg of the intersection, which would be difficult without negatively affecting

businesses and connections in the area. Hume Street is the recommended transition point. The one eastbound lane in the Port area could continue through Uniontown and extend up to Columbia. The road would still be four lanes, but the center turn lane would be retained making it better for pedestrians.

- Surprisingly safety upgrades in the downtown area did not receive more votes. He believed this might be because specific ideas have not yet been developed.

President Innes commented it was difficult to get close enough to the exhibits at the public meeting to understand which section she was on; all the choices were overwhelming. She believed simplifying the choices would encourage more public input. People may feel frustrated if they are unable to address each issue and make their points known.

Mr. Maciejewski stated he would like to hear the Commission's preferences about the options presented, which will help shape bike and pedestrian as well as other improvements.

Director Estes stated the TSP committee that has been working in an advisory role would take all public and Planning Commission feedback to begin refining recommendations. Mr. Maciejewski added the TSP will include goals, which will be ranked by the committee in order of importance at the next meeting. Having high, medium, and low priorities helps simplify the Plan. If an item is missing from the ten high priority projects taken from fifty choices, people tend to pay attention and engage more in the process.

Commissioner Tollefson stated he would like the opportunity to study the information packet more before making comments, as the packets were just recently received by the Commissioners due to mailing issues.

Commissioner Nemlowill explained the Traffic Safety Committee has been discussing pedestrian safety improvements in the downtown area, which seems like a big priority. She asked if one of the four options would improve pedestrian safety downtown. Mr. Maciejewski stated he has been looking for additional research data on the safety of two-way versus one-way traffic. He knows having a couplet, two lanes in each direction, is better than a four-lane highway. He has not seen evidence that suggests that two-way local streets are better than the one way flow for pedestrian safety. On one-way streets, drivers tend to look in one direction for oncoming traffic and may not look as often for pedestrians in the wrong leg of the intersection. When the nearest parking spot is removed at intersections to increase pedestrian safety, only the spaces on the approaching legs of the intersection would need to be removed. On two-way streets, parking spaces all the way around the intersection would need to be removed.

Commissioner Nemlowill noted that there would be no parking on Marine Drive and Commercial Street would be more pedestrian friendly with no highway traffic. Option 4 seemed to be the best solution for pedestrian safety. Mr. Maciejewski added that traffic signals would remain on Marine Drive at every other block with Option 4. Refuge islands would allow pedestrians to cross one lane of traffic at a time, which tends to be safer than crossing two lanes at once. On two-lane, one-way streets, one car may stop and the driver in the other lane does not see the pedestrian. More design work is required to determine whether refuge islands could be installed because freight mobility requirements may prevent a reduction of the current width capacity of the highway. Refuge islands can be barriers but can be installed if the minimum width dimension can be maintained.

Commissioner Nemlowill reiterated that she prefers Option 4, the Marine Drive Option, if the parking issue could be offset. She would like to find out if diagonal parking with one lane of traffic along Commercial Street is feasible and if that would fit the mobility standards for emergency vehicles. If diagonal parking on Commercial Street is possible, she would also like to know the ratio of diagonal versus parallel parking spots that could be installed. Director Estes replied that would depend on the angle of the spaces. Mr. Maciejewski estimated diagonal parking would provide a 25% increase in the number of parking spaces. Planner Johnson added diagonal parking could only be along one side of the street, so two rows of parallel parking would be replaced with one row of diagonal parking. Mr. Maciejewski added if the street were wide enough, it could accommodate parallel parking on one side, diagonal parking on the other side, and one through lane of traffic. Director Estes recalled that the ADHDA and some committee members have expressed concern that parking would not be available directly in front of businesses on Marine Drive. The committee has recognized this as an issue. The closest parking space would be about a block away.

Commissioner Pearson asked if other communities have successfully implemented such options, like decoupling. Mr. Maciejewski replied that downtown Vancouver has done this on some of their streets, of course

no major State highway was involved. He has not seen this implemented in smaller communities in the last five or ten years. Silverton and Sisters considered, but chose not to use couplets. He has not seen conversions like that being considered in Astoria implemented very often.

Mr. Maciejewski asked if the Commission believed they are on the right path; were they hearing the community's desires. President Innes believed they are on the right track. She was not aware of anything the consultants have missed, but there was still material to review.

Vice-President Cary asked how much it would cost to connect Irving Avenue and Nimitz Street. He liked the idea of the proposed road extension. Mr. Maciejewski stated the extension would cost about \$2,000 per foot if the terrain were not severe. Director Estes estimated the connection would be about ¾ mile long. Mr. Maciejewski added the \$10 million cost estimate is only for the construction of a two-lane road. It does not include rights-of-way. Planner Johnson noted topographic issues could increase the cost.

Vice-President Cary supported the extension being a high priority because it provides an alternate emergency route. He would prefer that it cross the pipeline, but that would be considerably more expensive. Mr. Maciejewski stated a civil engineer on his team could look at some of these projects to develop a cost estimate. Projects outside of the urban growth boundary (UGB) will require discussions with the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) representative who is on the committee. Any new roads built within city limits and outside the UGB would have to be used for emergency response and alternate routes. New roads cannot free up lands for new development that cannot develop today.

Director Estes stated all of the TSP materials are available on the project website. The Planning Commission agreed to email any comments to Planner Johnson within one week. Mr. Maciejewski stated the next update would include a shorter list of prioritized projects. The revenue stream is limited and grants will be the main source of funding for many of the projects. Other financing options will be presented in the TSP.

President Innes recommended that funding be considered at future hearings when looking at the various options.

PUBLIC COMMENT - ITEM 5:

Pamela Mattson McDonald, 1264 Grand Avenue, Astoria, commented that topography is an issue, especially on the local two-way streets. Hills and larger vehicles, like SUVs, reduce sight distances even on one-way streets. A 15-foot clearance should be marked to increase sight distances on two-way streets.


- Replacing traffic signals with stop signs on Commercial Street is unsafe. Commercial Street is pedestrian friendly because speeds are slower; one reason is because of the turn from 8th Street. Marine Drive has a higher speed limit and does not have as many pedestrians.
- The time allowed for pedestrians to cross the intersection at Safeway (Lief Erikson & 33rd) is too short for someone who is disabled.
- The proposed intersection changes at Holiday Inn (W Marine and Columbia) are unsafe for both vehicles and pedestrians.
- She wants pedestrians described as a mode of transportation, not a disruption to transportation.
- She did not understand how the mass transit system works with the TSP; whether the transit system is part of the TSP or jurisdictional situations apply.
- She did not see that the demand side has been addressed. She wanted to know how decreasing the use of cars could also decrease congestion.

Mr. Maciejewski responded that the presentation did not include details of each project. He clarified that the TSP does cover all modes of travel, including the mass transit system. The Sunset Transit routes will be part of the functional plans in the TSP, which reflects that Sunset Transit does its own route planning. Pedestrian and bicycle connections to transit routes generally are ranked as a higher priority versus other facilities. Getting people to transit reduces the number of vehicles used. Bicycle and pedestrian modes of transportation are important modes within the TSP and have their own sections, maps, project lists, etc. These modes are important pieces to demand management as far as getting people out of their cars. These projects are prioritized on their own merits within the Plan and are separate from motor vehicle projects.

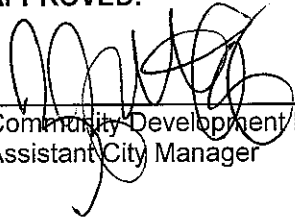
ADJOURNMENT - ITEM 6:

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m.

ATTEST:


Secretary

APPROVED:


Community Development Director /
Assistant City Manager