

**Saint Paul Planning Commission  
City Hall Conference Center  
15 Kellogg Boulevard West**

**Minutes December 6, 2013**

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, December 6, 2013, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

**Commissioners Present:** Mmes. Merrigan, Noecker, Perrus, Reveal, Thao, Wang, Wencl; and Messrs. Connolly, Edgerton, Gelgelu, Lindeke, Makarios, Nelson, Ochs, Oliver, and Schertler.

**Commissioners Absent:** Mmes. \*Porter, \*Shively, and Messrs. \*Spaulding, \*Ward, and \*Wickiser.  
\*Excused

**Also Present:** Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Allan Torstenson, Michelle Beaulieu, Bill Dermody, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

**I. Approval of minutes November 1<sup>st</sup> and November 15, 2013.**

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the minutes of November 1, 2013. Commissioner Makarios seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

and

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the minutes of November 15, 2013. Commissioner Thao seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**II. Chair's Announcements**

Chair Wencl announced that the Planning Commission will have a retreat immediately after the January 10, 2014 meeting which will last until noon. The retreat will focus on parking policy. Commissioners are asked to put this on their calendars.

**III. Planning Director's Announcements**

Donna Drummond added that the Steering Committee has met several times to organize the retreat. Based on the survey that was distributed to commissioners, scheduling the retreat right after a regular Planning Commission meeting would be the most convenient. The steering committee decided to focus this retreat on parking and its impact on urban form. More details will be forthcoming

At Wednesday's City Council meeting, the Alcohol Production Zoning Study amendments and

the Highland Village Sign Amendments were adopted. Also, Ms. Drummond received an email from the national American Planning Association regarding its planning board publication for commissioners. Every issue highlights a different planning commission from around the country and they would like to feature Saint Paul in an upcoming issue. A group photo of the commission will be taken immediately following the Dec. 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

#### IV. Zoning Committee

**SITE PLAN REVIEW** – List of current applications. (*Tom Beach, 651/266-9086*)

Three items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, December 10, 2013:

- American Engineering Testing, new storage building at 550 North Cleveland Avenue.
- Sun Ray Library, expansion of existing building and parking lot at 2105 Wilson Avenue.
- Highland Library, expansion of existing building and parking lot at 1974 Ford Parkway.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

#13-247-486 ABRA Auto Body & Glass – Conditional use permit for an auto body shop. 1190 University Avenue West between Griggs and Dunlap. (*Jake Reilly, 651/266-6618*)

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Nelson moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the conditional use permit subject to additional conditions. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

#13-247-501 Transition Homes Corporation – Conditional use permit for transitional housing facility with modifications of the permitted number of residents (25 currently permitted, 31 proposed). 1956 Feronia Avenue, SE corner at Prior. (*Jake Reilly, 651/266-6618*)

Commissioner Ochs asked about the reason for the 16-resident limit in the OS district.

Commissioner Nelson said that a difficulty with this kind of use is that there are several types of supportive housing, and zoning requirements vary by type and by zoning district. There's a maximum percent of planning district population requirement that applies generally. Size limits for individual facilities vary by type and zoning district, with some allowing larger facilities. Limits on number of residents seem to be about integrating such uses into neighborhoods.

Commissioner Merrigan noted that the original conditional use permit for this facility was for 25 residents, and the county has asked them to increase the number. We're considering the ability of this particular facility and location to accommodate a larger number.

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Nelson moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the conditional use permit. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

#13-247-474 BLD Property Management – Establishment of legal nonconforming use status as an administrative office. 260 Aurora Avenue, SE corner at Galtier.

(Hilary Holmes, 651/266-6612)

*Commissioner Nelson announced that this case has been laid over to the December 12, 2013, Zoning Committee meeting.*

Commissioner Nelson announced the items on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, December 12, 2013.

## **V. Transportation Committee**

Saint Paul Streetcar Feasibility Study – Release draft for public review and set a public hearing on January 24, 2014. *(Michelle Beaulieu, 651/266-6620)*

Michelle Beaulieu gave an update on the Streetcar Feasibility Study. The study is to evaluate the feasibility of developing streetcar service in St. Paul and prioritize potential streetcar corridors. Phase 1 of the study, corridor screening, and Phase 2 of the study, detailed evaluation, are completed. Ms. Beaulieu said phase 3 of the study has determined a starter line and identified a strong starter network. Phase 3 evaluation criteria includes ridership potential, development potential, capital costs and operating costs. Phase 3 was broken into two components, one looking at the evaluation results to make a recommendation on where the starter line should be, and the other to refine the initial line. Ms. Beaulieu showed a map of the proposed starter streetcar line and the proposed long term streetcar network. The Planning Commission is being asked to release the study for public review and set a public hearing date for January 24, 2014. City staff is doing additional public outreach and scheduling some open houses. They will be attending district council meetings and meeting with regional partners to coordinate with other ongoing studies.

Commissioner Ochs asked if in evaluating development potential there was consideration of whether there was a work center, a higher density housing project, or a retail center that would give people a destination along the line.

Ms. Beaulieu said that yes, strong anchor or terminal points were a major consideration both in defining the lines on the long-term network and in refining the initial starter line. To do that refinement, the West and East 7<sup>th</sup> lines were broken into segments, and each segment had a strong anchor point as a transit transfer point, an activity node, or a major redevelopment site.

Commissioner Reveal asked about the potential for federal Small Starts funding to help pay for the line.

Ms. Beaulieu said that the federal Small Starts program is extremely competitive. The Small Starts program is a subset of the New Starts program, limited to projects that have under \$250 million in capital costs, and are only eligible for \$75 million in federal funding. This line has comparable ridership estimates to other streetcar projects applying for federal funding, but the amount of money available through this program is likely to shrink moving forward.

Commissioner Reveal noted that the West Side Flats Master Plan is about to be released for public hearing and it may affect ridership estimates. There are three catalysts for development in the plan. The first is the planned greenway from Plato to the river, the second is what happens along Robert, and the third is the West Side Flats housing project or some other catalytic housing project. And if the second phase of the starter projects includes Robert then that is probably the right timing for this plan.

Commissioner Lindeke said that if you look at the actual economic development predictions combined with the estimated costs Robert is easily the number one line. So what was the thought process when deciding whether to go with that for the first line or not.

Ms. Beaulieu said that the economic development potential numbers are the result of an analytic exercise for comparative purposes between corridors studied, and not necessarily a prediction of how much property value increase is expected in these corridors.

Commissioner Noecker asked how this feasibility study relates to the Robert Street transit alternatives study. Also when will we have a sense of the downtown alignments?

Ms. Beaulieu said that the City has been working with the County on the Robert Street Transit Alternatives Study, which is a more in-depth study of this corridor. It has different objectives than the Streetcar Feasibility Study, and may have different results. However, streetcars are compatible with any non-streetcar recommendations that may come out of the County study. Downtown alignments would have to be determined as part of the subsequent study.

Commissioner Thao asked about the timeline for moving forward. Is it all completely dependent on the Small Starts federal funding?

Ms. Beaulieu said that next steps are to be determined based on finding funding for the subsequent phase of study, and coordinating with other studies being completed by Metro Transit and the Ramsey County Regional Rail. This has to happen first before there can be an application for federal funding. Small Starts is only available for capital costs.

Commissioner Nelson said it seems that the \$250 million cap and the \$246 million estimated cost for the starter line are close. Public works projects tend to escalate in costs. Has there been any look at potentially shorter lines in order to make sure that we stay within the cap? Looking at some of these incremental increases it seems like some of the segments in order to gain only 100 riders on a weekly basis you're spending a lot of money. The per rider cost is significantly higher and the half a million dollars a year in operating cost for 100 riders, not to mention the capital cost, seems like a lot.

Ms. Beaulieu said that the benefits of streetcars come from more than just ridership, but that the line could potentially be shortened through the process of the subsequent study, during which time capital costs would be refined further. Examining downtown alignments may also change the proposed length of this initial starter line.

Commissioner Edgerton noted the \$246 million estimated cost versus the development potential of \$134 million. So even with \$75 million in federal funds we're still talking \$170 million for the local match. The benefit cost analysis doesn't seem to hold up or is there something that he is missing. Is there another reason that we want to spend \$170 or \$250 million in cost investment for \$134 million in development potential. Are there other benefits that we would be getting that would make this worthwhile? He is all for streetcars but you have to look at the dollars and whether it makes sense.

Ms. Beaulieu that the numbers in the study are not meant as a projection but as a tool to compare the corridors to one another. There are many non-quantifiable benefits to streetcar service as well, and even the transit benefits to the residents and workers along these corridors are not captured in these dollar amounts.

Chair Wencl stated that a few years ago on West 7<sup>th</sup> we were considering a rapid bus way and ultimately it was turned down. What is different about this project and why would people be willing to have this one go ahead when they didn't support the other?

Ms. Beaulieu said that the bus way proposal included the widening of the roadway and other major street infrastructure changes that made the project unappetizing to the residents of the area. Streetcar projects work within existing right of way, and in this study the assumption is that streetcars would not require additional roadway space. Curb bump-outs or widened sidewalks would be installed at streetcar stops. These design considerations have been welcomed by the community. Discussions with members of the community on West 7<sup>th</sup>, as well as with other staff and officials, who were a part of the West 7<sup>th</sup> bus way conversations, have indicated a preference for the streetcar project.

Commissioner Ochs said regarding the phase 2 analysis of development potential, were there points or values assigned to anything that would be occurring in the future or known developments that are coming in advance? Because it seems that the streetcar line would coincide nicely with the Green Line LRT corridor in helping support its numbers and both feeding off one another. So the Snelling South line would seem to magnify the ridership on the Green Line and vice versa, so there are additional benefits.

Ms. Beaulieu said that the streetcar study considered major redevelopment sites and Green Line transit stations as strong terminal locations for streetcar lines. The Grand Avenue and Selby lines were extended to make connections to the Green Line. When analyzing the various segments for the initial starter line, strong terminal locations were considered for each segment.

Commissioner Schertler said there is competition for transit resources, with more asks than sources with the transit sales tax currently being collected. He was also concerned about the potential impact of City operated and built transit facilities opting out of the regional evaluation of transit need and resource allocation. So there has to be an honest conversation among the governmental entities about how to move people in the most cost effective way. He knows there will be further study but talked about his experience riding the bus for 15 years along Randolph & 7<sup>th</sup> and is concerned there will be reductions to bus service to support streetcar and an increase in forced transfers from bus to streetcar to make it viable. He's researched what other cities have

done and noted the inability of charging riders enough to cover operating and capital cost debt service. He said there needs to be a variety of potential sources evaluated to pay for the balance, including potential property owner assessments and the City's general levy. The City will need to carefully evaluate the total costs and benefits before it decides to move ahead.

Ms. Beaulieu said the streetcar planning avoided forcing transfers. The second line that Metro Transit is considering for arterial bus rapid transit is the West 7<sup>th</sup> line, which would be an improvement to the 54 bus. This line would serve the long trips in the corridor, while a streetcar could serve the local trips in the densest part of the corridor.

Commissioner Schertler said transit investments need to be looked at on a regional basis. If streetcar is serving primarily a local need, he expressed doubts there are the local resources to fill the gap based on the expected benefit of the new development.

Ms. Beaulieu said that as we look at a bigger regional picture or even state wide, we subsidize roads and freeway interchanges, so if we are going to increase the capacity in the central cities and have the kind of population and employment growth the Met Council says that we have to have, then this is the sort of investment we need to make on a regional level—accommodations for more people and jobs in these sorts of dense neighborhoods.

Donna Drummond added that those are really good points and these are the debates that we will have in more depth, especially as we get into the second phase study. There is a regional discussion happening now about the role of streetcars and whether or not that becomes incorporated into the whole system that Metro Transit operates. It is not a given that the City would be operating this at all so there is still more conversation about that. It makes sense that there is a transit agency that runs all of the transit.

Commissioner Connolly would like to know what insights can be shed on the estimated development potential. What does the \$134 million mean? Is that the present value of the increment of taxes over 20 years or is that how much capital is going to be invested that wouldn't otherwise?

Ms. Beaulieu stated that the \$134 million development potential represents potential total property value (including that of potential building improvements) increase that could be seen once a streetcar line is built. It is based off current average property values along the line, and assumes under or un-developed properties would improve in value to a value based on the average property value for that corridor.

Commissioner Noecker suggested putting in a section in the report comparing streetcars to buses. She also suggested adding more explanation about what would happen in the next phase of the study so people don't think that if this is approved tomorrow that there's going to be a streetcar going down W. 7<sup>th</sup>. Also, add more information on the downtown alignment, funding and possibly the timing of the next phase.

Commissioner Wang asked about the comparison between increasing or adding bus service versus a streetcar line. Do we say that increased bus service doesn't impact development potential like streetcar?

Ms. Beaulieu said that there is limited research showing the impact of bus improvements on economic development, and particularly on the sort of bus improvements being discussed (which are not using dedicated right of way for the bus route).

Commissioner Wang stated that when this study started she thought we would get to a clear decision point about whether we are moving ahead with streetcars or not. It seems that we are moving forward and there hasn't been a consideration of whether this makes sense. So when cities do streetcar feasibility studies do they ever say no?

Ms. Beaulieu said that the consulting team looked at various attributes of the corridors throughout Saint Paul, and based on their expertise believes that streetcars would be feasible on the corridors identified as part of the long-term network. It will be up to the City Council whether or not to move forward with additional study for a potential starter line, as recommended by this study. The Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the City Council before that decision is made.

Commissioner Perrus asked if the ridership numbers took into account the Met Council's plan for arterial bus transit down the same route. How does this affect ridership for both?

Ms. Beaulieu said that the proposed arterial bus transit line is similar in many ways to the existing 54 bus, which is what the ridership numbers here take into account. Additionally, the bus improvements are several years out as Met Council has yet to identify the full funding for that project. Lastly, the arterial bus transit would be a longer distance connection with wider stop spacing, while the streetcar would serve a local market in the denser part of the corridor. Combined these services will serve multiple markets and complement, not compete with, one another.

Commissioner Perrus said that her question relates to operating cost over more than one system if we're assuming an operating cost of a streetcar but yet we're losing ridership off the bus service. We've got to find a way to spread those costs out over everything we're providing. We're spreading ourselves more thinly rather than creating a new base of support to cover those costs.

Ms. Beaulieu said that it is expected that the streetcar system would attract new riders to the system, but that funding for the streetcar's capital and operating costs have not yet been identified.

Commissioner Nelson said that segment b of the starter line is 100 riders. Looking at the operating costs it's not \$5.00 a trip but \$20.00 per rider trip just for that last 100 riders. There is an increment of \$500,000 for 25,000 weekday trips. So \$20.00 per trip for 1/3 of a mile and you could take taxi cabs all day for a lot cheaper. So having a finer grained analysis might help people understand where that breaking point is and whether it's worth doing or not.

Ms. Beaulieu said that these numbers, though more refined than in previous phases of this study, are still very rough and that in further studies, would be looked at on a finer grain. Because this was a citywide feasibility study only, there was a limit to the amount of detail that could be analyzed.

Commissioner Merrigan said regarding the south and west area, Shepard Davern is an automobile gateway to the city. There is consideration of balancing traffic between Shepard and West 7<sup>th</sup> with roadway changes and with all this transit being looked at for the corridor, there needs to be a lot of coordination so that we're not ripping things up again after initial investments are made.

Ms. Beaulieu said that the upcoming Riverview Corridor study, being run by the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority, will examine multiple modes on multiple alignments through this corridor, and that the City is coordinating efforts and studies with them to assure that everything works together well.

Commissioner Thao said that similar to Central Corridor, there needs to be consideration and thought about the impact on small businesses during construction and after with rising property values they may not be able to afford. Development potential usually means bigger developers coming in and kicking out all the folks there.

Commissioner Connolly expressed doubts about the \$134 million in development potential and roughly calculated the taxes that might be generated by that at \$4 million more a year in taxes. He thinks it could be less because there will be people driven out of business causing buildings to sit empty for a couple of years. The \$134 million doesn't mean anything to him because it's not revenue coming into the city.

Ms. Beaulieu said that they are using those numbers as comparative figures only.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, added that this was just a methodology to compare these corridors one amongst the others so that there could be an evaluation of which of these corridors really has the best potential. It's not a true estimate of the development that's going to happen but it's just a methodology rank these corridors. Also, property tax revenue is just one factor to look at. There are so many other factors of benefit to the community that have to be evaluated.

Commissioner Edgerton suggested that maybe they should change the term from development potential to something different, because reading that we make an assumption about what that means. We're thinking of it as development potential and you're now saying it's really not supposed to be that. So maybe think about calling it something different so people don't jump to that conclusion.

Commissioner Merrigan said that it's difficult to say we have enough data to determine X, but we don't have enough data to really say a lot about X. It's really crucial that you do present things as methodology or some of the suggestions Commissioner Noecker made because otherwise people are going say how can you be so sure about this and not know about that.

Commissioner Reveal has done many of these in her life and two years from now none of these numbers will mean anything and the capital cost will be higher and the operating cost will be higher and the ridership will be lower. She predicts that in the end we may think about streetcars in a much narrower sense as almost an environmental amenity that is triggered towards certain specific kinds of development in very narrow areas. She suggested pulling out all the cost numbers in here and adding a clear description of what the methodology was, what the limitations are, what's likely to be different when you actually get down to the engineering and see if you can't get the discussion away from that.



Ms. Drummond added that people need to understand you have to start somewhere and you can't have this initial study answer all these questions to the level of detail and satisfaction you have to reach to actually decide yes we're going to make this investment. We need to clearly explain this and get people to understand really what this means, and that we are going to be doing a lot more analysis if we decide to move forward.

***MOTION: Commissioner Wang moved on behalf of the Transportation Committee to release the draft for public review and set a public hearing on January 24, 2014. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

Commissioner Wang announced the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, December 9, 2013 has been cancelled.

**V Comprehensive Planning Committee**

Commissioner Merrigan had no report.

**VI. Neighborhood Planning Committee**

Commissioner Oliver announced the items on the agenda at the next Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting on Wednesday, December 11, 2013.

**VIII. Communications Committee**

Commissioner Thao had no report.

**IX. Task Force/Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Reveal announced that the West Side Flats task force had their open house, which was very successful. The next step is the final draft and the key issue is whether T4 zoning with some modification on the height in the master plan is going to be acceptable or not. The T4 zoning as it stands is higher than what the task force has recommended and there is considerable pressure from riverfront interests to have it much lower so that will be going on for the next month. Another issue is that in order for all the stormwater improvements that they contemplate in the plan to be feasible there needs to be in a watershed management district created.

**X. Old Business**

None.

**XI. New Business**

None.

**XII. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 10:08 a.m.

Recorded and prepared by  
Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary  
Planning and Economic Development Department,  
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,

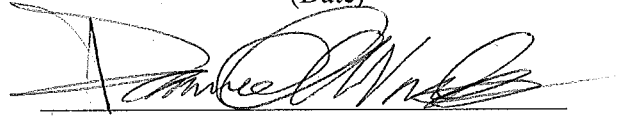


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Donna Drummond  
Planning Director

Approved December 20, 2013

(Date)



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Daniel Ward II  
Secretary of the Planning Commission

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