

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

**Minutes February 21, 2014**

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, February 21, 2014, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

**Commissioners Present:** Mmes. DeJoy, Noecker, Padilla (Perrus), Reveal, Thao, Underwood, Wang; and Messrs. Edgerton, Gelgelu, Lindeke, Makarios, Nelson, Oliver, and Wickiser.

**Commissioners Absent:** Mmes. \*Merrigan, \*Shively, \*Wencl, and Messrs. \*Connolly, \*Ochs, and \*Ward.

**Absent:** \*Excused

**Also Present:** Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Allen Lovejoy, Michelle Beaulieu, Hilary Holmes, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

**I. Approval of minutes January 24, 2014.**

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Nelson moved approval of the minutes of January 24, 2014. Commissioner Noecker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**II. Chair's Announcements**

Commissioner Reveal, the Commission's First Vice-Chair, chaired the meeting and she had no announcements.

**III. Planning Director's Announcements**

Donna Drummond reminded the Commissioners to turn in their committee preference sheets today.

**IV. Zoning Committee**

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

One item came before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, February 18, 2014:

- Schuler Shoes, new shoe store at 2083 Ford Parkway.

Four items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, February 25, 2014:

- Carver Auto Sales, expand existing car sales lot at 1328 Point Douglas Road.

- Form A Feed, new fertilizer storage/distribution facility with barge unloading operation at 637 Barge Channel Road.
- Metro State University, new 2-story, 27,000 square foot student center at East 7<sup>th</sup> Street and Maria.
- Metro State University, new parking ramp with 755 spaces at 400 Maria.

## **NO BUSINESS**

### **V. Comprehensive Planning Committee**

Commissioner Reveal announced that they had met on Tuesday and they are continuing their discussion of the West Midway Area Plan. There are two pieces to the plan that are not subject to Planning Commission or Council approval; one is a “white paper” on job policy for the city going forward and the other is a potential working agreement among the key lead agencies, in terms of implementation of the plan. They had a very thorough discussion and their next meeting will be on March 4<sup>th</sup> to continue that conversation.

### **VI. Neighborhood Planning Committee**

Commissioner Oliver announced that the Neighborhood Committee has no business for the commission today, but they will be meeting on Wednesday, March 5<sup>th</sup> to discuss the testimony from the Hamline Midway Community Plan’s public hearing.

### **VII. Transportation Committee**

Citywide Streetcar Feasibility Study – Approve resolution recommending adoption of the long-term network of feasible streetcar lines and authorization for staff to proceed to a more detailed study of the starter line. (*Michelle Beaulieu, 651/266-6620*)

Michelle Beaulieu, PED staff gave a brief update on the Streetcar study. She talked about the recommendations coming from the Transportation Committee and discussed the process that they’ve already had and about the context moving forward. The Transportation Committee has reviewed the public testimony that has been received so far, they have received a few additional letters from members of the community and the West 7<sup>th</sup> Business Association since the public hearing was closed and those letters have been distributed. There is a draft resolution with recommendations from the Transportation Committee.

Commissioner Oliver asked what the cost might be for the next phase of study and where the funding is coming from if the Planning Commission approves this resolution.

Ms. Beaulieu said that right now they are not totally clear what the next phase of study would have to look like. And that’s largely because of all the other studies that are going on and the desire to not do the same study through multiple avenues. Typically what is seen for these studies is that they are dictated by what sort of funding is received down the line to build them.

Commissioner Noecker is skeptical about the second part of the recommendation for two reasons.

First, she doesn't think that a study is a neutral proposition. It's not cost neutral, time neutral or value neutral, because once you do a study you'll want to do an additional study to justify the previous study or to proceed because you've done the study. She also is skeptical of the feasibility results, she thinks they saw that it is feasible to do this and it is very expensive and there's a lot of community opposition. She doesn't feel comfortable recommending that they proceed with the next phase of study without knowing what it's going to entail. And she is not comfortable with the second part of the resolution as it is now.

Commissioner Edgerton was in agreement with Commissioner Noecker. He said it's like we're trying to figure out yes or no and at what point does the City make the yes or no decision. He thinks that if this moves forward and we're not at a point where we want to say we're ready or we know enough, but at some point we'll have put in a chunk of money for additional study and that money could have been used for something else. Then you feel like we're this far along and there is this momentum to continue, so he's uncertain what to do with today's resolution. He would like to get an idea of what type of financial commitment are we are making if this resolution is approved.

Commissioner Thao said that this is a good recommendation, which took parts of both sides of what we've heard very clearly from the public testimony, and it is making a statement about value and judgment. She feels that it balances the best of both worlds. She said we're going to take a lot of lessons learned from Central Corridor which has been a much larger build out. Streetcars are going to be a little less intensive than that but they have these lessons learned from constructing the Green Line. She appreciates that they are working smart on this project and not trying to duplicate but learning from other efforts so she fully supports this recommendation because it moves the City in a direction to get data that's more helpful in making a final decision. Streetcars are a form of economic development and these days we have to be looking at different ways that we can redefine the role of the City in this area.

Commissioner Oliver clarified his earlier statement. He feels this is a very preliminary study and we are nowhere near the point of saying yes or no to streetcars. There are lines going all through the city and the study had to pick one to focus on, which is the West to East 7<sup>th</sup> corridor. Ultimately the concern about financial resources goes to the City Council, but it is still worth knowing the timeline on this because the preliminary analysis of economic impact in the study was not that promising as far as the numbers went. It would be more comforting to him to know that the next phase of the study would be done at lower cost in house. The Planning Commission recommends to the City Council and he is not for recommending to Council that they put a significant level of resources into this next phase of study, especially if it is contingent on some outside plan.

Commissioner Wickiser said his thought the City should go forward on the next phase of the study. The study will look at the potential for TOD and it's going to show very clearly that the majority of buildings on the corridor are not going to be functional anymore in terms of economic value. They're going to be looking at buildings getting scraped for higher densities along 7<sup>th</sup> Street and it will be very clear within the community if there's support for that. The Riverview study will also look at improvements along Shepard Road and the Ford rail spur and there will be economic impacts to those too. Each one of these situations is going to have consequences and studying that isn't a bad thing. Getting this information is clearly going to help the community make a final decision on this.

Commissioner Lindeke said that this study and the concerns it brings up is a way for the city to call more attention to the needs of the community and how the transit should actually operate so he is in favor of moving forward with this.

Commissioner Noecker said that they do need more information and perhaps this can come from some of these other studies that are being done. Maybe the first part of the resolution makes sense, to approve the long term network and where it would make sense to start if the City moves ahead with streetcars. But the resolution also includes this urgency to move ahead with this detailed study. Perhaps it could be worded that the City wait to see what's learned from these other studies, specifically in terms of the bus comparison, and then determine what further analysis is needed.

Commissioner Makarios said that he supports the resolution and is excited about the potential development that a streetcar line can bring into the city. It's clear that before the Green Line LRT even opens there has been a massive amount of development, really good development that being brought into the city. He's intrigued about the potential for development along the streetcar line and it's important to dig deeper to do some detailed analysis. We must make sure that existing businesses are part of the process, that we are looking hard at what the impact on existing businesses would be during construction as well as after the line is up and running.

Acting Chair Reveal asked if Donna Drummond or Michelle Beaulieu could comment about the timing and urgency of this. Is this something that needs to proceed forthwith or is there some time for further discussion?

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, is not sure given the pace of the other studies that are underway if we will have a lot of clarity in the near term about what the next phase of study might cost. We will participate in these other studies and see what information we can get from those additional studies. We will then figure out what work needs to be done to fill in the additional information required to decide whether or not to move ahead with streetcars for 7<sup>th</sup>. There is not a particular deadline, but these other studies are moving forward and staff feels it's important for the City to make it clear that we think streetcars are an important element to be considered in these other studies so that streetcar get the kind of attention it deserves in these studies, especially in the Riverview study.

Commissioner Padilla (Perrus) supports the resolution as is and her concern is that part of the additional analysis needs to focus on where they're going to achieve ridership. They will continue to face the question of whether new types of transit will just shift existing riders from one mode to another or will generate new riders. This question is important given the cost of investing in streetcars.

Commissioner Edgerton does support this, but hopes this next study will provide a lot of the information needed and answers to the questions that have been raised so far such that at the end of the study we're not going to say we need to study this some more. Hopefully this next study will provide the information needed to make informed decisions about moving forward.

Commissioner DeJoy has seen this presentation before at a business association meeting and there were a lot of unanswered questions. For example, on Payne Avenue in some areas the road right-of-way is only 66 feet wide so that would imply that parking would have to go. In a parking study done a few years ago for Payne it found we're 1,800 parking stalls shy of meeting

commercial parking requirements in the area, so the street parking is very valuable to the businesses. This study does not answer some of those questions, so she would move in favor of more information that would answer some of the questions that were raised that were not answered.

Ms. Drummond said that the study did look at potential parking losses on each of these corridors. Also streetcars usually run in existing traffic lanes so it normally would not require taking out parking except at the stops.

Ms. Beaulieu said this study did a very preliminary look at potential impacts on parking. It assumes that they would maintain the existing on-street parking on these corridors where possible. For the most part that's possible except as specific locations where there is a stop. The study also assumed that they would be using existing bus stop locations for most of the streetcar stops, which limits the number of existing parking spaces that would have to be removed to create a station location. On Payne Avenue it looks like a total of about 30-34 parking spaces might be lost along the length of Payne Avenue from the edge of downtown to the northern edge at Maryland. That's very preliminary based on existing conditions and looking at aerial photos.

Commissioner Noecker made a motion to amend the resolution to keep the first part as is, approving the long term network, but changing the second part to authorize staff to determine what would be required to answer the key questions that have been raised and a sense of the cost and time to do this.

Acting Chair Reveal asked for a second to the motion, and there was none. The motion failed.

Commissioner Oliver made a motion to amend the resolution by deleting the entire paragraph that starts with: This next study will include.

Acting Chair Reveal asked for a second to the motion, and there was none. The motion failed.

Commissioner Wickiser commented that when looking at a corridor that's bordering the Mississippi River and talking about transit oriented development, the reason the train is going on the street is to provide development. The existing businesses won't be there for the most part so what we're talking about is zeroing out buildings and the streetscape and that's the bigger issue for him. It should be very clear with the next study whether or not there's community or political support for this. He thinks that further study is going to show all these factors and be very clear to him whether there is support in the community. So we're going to know without a shadow of a doubt what the community wants and if there is political support for it. The next study should uncover all this information.

Commissioner Underwood said that we know that there's a lot of other work happening by other organizations on this exact issue and we also know that the one organization that makes the City of Saint Paul its number one priority is the City of Saint Paul. It's critical that we have an active seat at that table, that we ask the questions that we want to ask, believe in the answers that we find, and work with those other entities to make the right decisions. Because of that she supports the resolution.

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Lindeke moved on behalf of the Transportation Committee to*

*recommend approval of the resolution. The motion carried 12-2 (Noecker, Oliver) on a voice vote.*

Commissioner Lindeke announced the items on the agenda at the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, February 24, 2014.

#### **VIII. Communications Committee**

Commissioner Thao said the final printed 2013 Annual Report of the Planning Commission along with the cover letter that accompanies the report had been distributed this morning and will get sent out to a number of our community partners.

#### **IX. Task Force/Liaison Reports**

Acting Chair Reveal reported that the West Side Flats Task Force meeting on Monday, February 24<sup>th</sup> has been postponed to later in March. No date is set as of yet but a notice will go out when a date is set.

#### **X. Old Business**

Parking Policy Retreat Follow-up Discussion – Reflections on what we heard and implications for future policy.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, said what was handed out was a list of possible directions that they could head in terms of exploring new policies for parking management in the city. The Commission had an interesting set of presentations from the panelists, which raised some questions and possible directions that the staff and Commission could go in exploring these issues further.

Commissioner Lindeke said he interested in the parking improvement districts idea. We tried to do this at the Snelling/Selby area and Craig Blakely has been pushing this and it seems like they came close to cooperating with businesses. In the light of this development is there a way to have this conversation more broadly with businesses to talk about parking improvement districts and the benefits of that? It would be great for the city to start having that conversation because it takes a while to learn about an issue like this and see the pros and cons.

Ms. Drummond said that this idea ran into some problems at Selby because businesses got a sense of what the assessments might be to pay for leasing that land from Associated Bank and paying for the ongoing maintenance and operations. Hopefully that isn't taken as an indication that these would never work anywhere, because it does work on a smaller scale at Grand and Snelling where there is a small shared commercial lot where the benefiting businesses are assessed to maintain that and manage it, which works very well.

Commissioner Lindeke said that one of the big keys is to also tie that parking lot cost to on-street meter revenue. That's the parking improvement district idea that the revenue from the meters is going to help off-set the cost of free parking in a different spot. So if people want free parking they can park in a ramp or lot that is less convenient. A lot of people don't want to pay for parking but there are people who want convenience and want to park in front of the business and might have to pay a few dollars to park. What they are paying for is convenience.

Commissioner Thao said these are good suggestions but part of it is what situation they're going to apply to. At the retreat they had a bigger discussion about the impact of these and parking solutions have to be developed that fit and make sense for the specific geographies. Parking improvement districts are really part of a bigger issue of business improvement districts. To the extent that they can these two ideas should be rolled together so that parking is not looked at in isolation and the business association understands it needs to come together to talk about what is needed for the area.

Commissioner Padilla (Perrus) likes a lot of the things on the list, and she echoed what Commissioner Thao said. The Planning Commission just approved a two story Goodwill development on University Avenue with significant off-street parking and that was a concern by a number of people. One of the things that should be looked at as we move toward more transit is how we should regulate and restrict additional new parking opportunities. She likes the potential prohibition on new surface parking lots downtown specifically and that's a direction she thinks the City can move in. We should look at the overall picture of where we want parking and whether there should be ordinance amendments to restrict that before we have new developments coming in that want to build additional surface parking in areas where we are looking for much more intense development.

Commissioner Noecker asked if the City makes money on meter parking and how it decides where to put meters. Also, has there been any discussion about eliminating parking minimums entirely citywide?

Ms. Drummond said that excess revenue over the cost of maintaining the system and paying for parking meter enforcement people goes to the general fund. She thinks that there is some extra and it would be a policy question about whether or not that revenue from new meters, for example, could go back to the area that's generating it to pay for off-street parking or help pay for off-street parking. That policy question would have to be wrestled with by the City Council. The idea of eliminating minimum parking requirements completely and letting the market decide how much parking is needed is being tried along the Green Line. So far the indications are that it's working great as there are a number of new developments coming in that are providing less parking than the citywide minimum parking requirements. So it's the businesses or the development that decides how much parking is needed. She added she is not sure how it's decided where new meters go, but she thinks that it comes up where parking has become a more precious resource and is more in demand.

Commissioner Edgerton said that at some point they should look at a way to manage those parking improvement districts. He talked about the potential benefits of shared stacked green infrastructure and incorporating stormwater management green infrastructure into shared parking facilities. That this could potentially help fund that type of feature is something they should consider. In general he supports market based pricing and what does that mean in terms of on-street parking?

Ms. Drummond said an example would be downtown where parking meters go off at 5:00 pm. The on-street parking is very valuable in the evening around the Xcel and places where there are events and should there be a way to reflect the demand for the on-street parking, not just who happens to get there at 5:00 pm to get that free on-street space. People pay for the convenience of being able to park there and shouldn't the price reflect that and also to have dynamic pricing. So

if the demand goes up the price can be adjusted. That would be another thing to look at.

Commissioner Padilla (Perrus) said that she would support extending the parking meter hours on event days like they do in Minneapolis, but her concern is about this flexible rate without having a full transit model in place. Until they have the incentive to provide people to try another way to get downtown she struggles with the idea of saying one day she parks and it's going to be \$4.00 and the next day it's going to be \$10.00. That needs to remain consistent until she has the option of taking the BRT downtown because parking is going to be \$10.00 or get on a streetcar or the Green Line so there's the incentive that she has to not take up that valuable parking space. It has to be a system decision there.

Commissioner Nelson said he is skeptical of letting the market decide how much parking to provide. From his experience developers don't want to spend the money up front even if they need parking. The recent Metropolitan Council forecasts just came out and there's going to be another 60,000 residents in the city of Saint Paul by 2040. And for some reason Minnesotans don't like to go into a parking garage. Every time he goes to Trader Joes he can go right into the garage and park during rush hour or anytime while there are people sitting at the surface lot waiting for parking spaces for whatever reason and it's all free. So Minnesotans need to be trained that parking in a structured lot is a good thing. If it snows you don't have to scrape windows or brush the snow off your car and if it's raining you don't get wet so we need to encourage that. The biggest problems occur within the one block off the commercial districts. This whole city is built upon commercial corridors that have commercial businesses on both sides of the street and across the alley are houses. The entire city is like that except for downtown and that's the biggest conflict we are dealing with. He has always felt that the businesses, developers, and owners want to spend as little money up front to start their business, which is only natural and they don't think about the bigger issues that are involved.

Commissioner Lindeke said that nobody wants to drive into a parking garage because they are terrible places. They're so cramped and you just feel weird inside them. The only reason someone would do that is if it is cheaper than the alternative or if that's the best cost. He said getting that market signal correct, especially about the relationship between on-street parking and garages, is really important and right now it's backwards. We're saying that you can park free after 5:00 pm on the street anywhere in front of a restaurant downtown but it costs a lot to park in a ramp so it's about getting the economics reversed. And this conversation about waiting for a transit system to arrive and then making changes - there's such complicated feedback loops between land use and transportation. He thinks parking policy is one of the big levers that cities have to accelerate this kind of virtuous cycle and there are not a lot of other tools. But parking is something the city can actually do something about.

Commissioner DeJoy said that parking is a huge issue in the commercial corridors that she is familiar with on Payne and Arcade. Where there's intense usage there's a lot of parking demand and it creates parking wars and traffic problems and then people go and park a block down the street. The problem over there is that the vacant buildings allow for a lot of street parking but when somebody goes to look at purchasing that building and starting a business there's no off-street parking and a lot of people have been discouraged from making investments because of the parking regulations. Some of these recommendations make sense for downtown but she's not sure that all these recommendations are going to work in commercial corridors. As far as someone making an investment, she worked on a parking lot not too long ago and a 24 space lot cost \$370,000 so it's a huge expense. There are not a lot of people in favor of building more



surface parking lots but they know that there is a shortage.

Acting Chair Reveal said that it would be helpful for there to be more clarity about what the parking rules are in Zoning staff reports. It is often mentioned in the body of the report but it's not a separate item as it is. And they have had number of cases at Zoning Committee where it was ambiguous at best as to what was required and she is particularly concerned about site plan review because they've had at least a couple of instances where it was questionable whether the development met the parking requirement even though it was a legal requirement. So is it possible to develop a check list of some kind or a matrix that shows by zoning area what the parking rules are or where there aren't any requirements? That would be very helpful.

Acting Chair Reveal commented that as a long time city finance director in many parts of the country she can assure everyone that most cities make money on their parking. She urged Saint Paul to look at Bethesda, Maryland as an example. It has the most aggressive parking program she has ever seen. It's an important part of the discussion about public finance and it is universally dedicated to the general fund. Also she is curious about whether there are any significant parking studies being planned or underway. She thought that there was a discussion about a revised downtown parking plan and there are other ideas from this discussion that are worth more consideration. What is planned as a staff follow-up for this discussion?

Ms. Drummond said that they are looking at doing a downtown parking study. It is something that's recommended in the current Comprehensive Plan and there has been some money allocated by the Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) and City Council to help pay for that. The idea of parking improvement districts – Craig Blakely PED staff on the Economic Development Team has done a lot of analysis of these - have a lot of potential for helping key commercial nodes to take off. She would like to bring some thought out recommendations to the Neighborhood Committee to talk about it in more detail and then potentially bring back to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission could approve a "white paper" that could be discussed and voted on and be available to the Mayor, City Council, and operating departments who deal with parking and hopefully get some traction on some of these issues.

#### **New Business**

None.

#### **XII. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

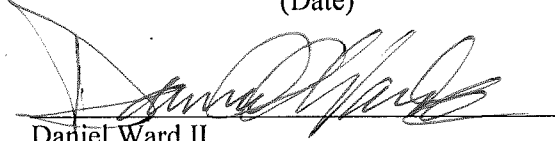
Recorded and prepared by  
Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary  
Planning and Economic Development Department,  
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,



Donna Drummond  
Planning Director

Approved March 21, 2014  
(Date)



Daniel Ward II  
Secretary of the Planning Commission

Planning Team Files\planning commission\minutes\February 21, 2014