

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

**Minutes January 11, 2013**

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, January 11, 2013, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

**Commissioners Present:** Mmes. Merrigan, Noecker, Reveal, Shively, Thao, Wang, Wencl; and Messrs. Edgerton, Gelgelu, Lindeke, Nelson, Ochs, Spaulding, Ward, and Wickiser.

**Commissioners Absent:** Mmes. \*Perrus, \*Porter, and Messrs. \*Connolly, and \*Oliver.  
\*Excused

**Also Present:** Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Allen Lovejoy, Scott Tempel, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

**I. Approval of minutes December 28, 2012.**

***MOTION:*** *Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the minutes of December 28, 2012. Commissioner Noecker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**II. Chair's Announcements**

Chair Wencl reported that the nominating committee for officers for 2013 is Commissioner Shively, Commissioner Spaulding, and Commissioner Wickiser.

**III. Planning Director's Announcements**

Donna Drummond announced that the next meeting is the annual meeting, which is always the second Planning Commission meeting in January.

The 2013 Neighborhood STAR Loan and Grant Program orientation workshop is on February 13, 2013 and the applications will be due on March 28, 2013. There is approximately \$1.3 million available for distribution of grants and loans. This program only funds capital improvements, which can be on public or private property.

On Wednesday night there was a community meeting to discuss the issue of the District 6-District 10 boundary and whether or not the area south of Lake Como should be moved to District 10 instead of being in District 6. There were almost 200 people present, with nearly all being from that affected area. The purpose of the meeting was to let people give their opinion about the issue. Michelle Beaulieu, the city planner working on this, has written an analysis of the issue, which was provided to interested parties and which is posted on the City's Open Saint Paul site. Open Saint Paul is the City's online forum where people post comments about various topics and

the District 6/District 10 boundary is one of the topics.

Also, the National American Planning Association (APA) conference this year is in Chicago on April 13<sup>th</sup> through April 17<sup>th</sup>. Interested commissioners should register by February 14<sup>th</sup> to take advantage of an early registration discount.

#### **IV. Zoning Committee**

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

Five items came before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, January 8, 2013:

- Buffalo Wild Wings, renovate existing commercial space for restaurant. Add new outdoor trash area and reconfigure existing parking lot at 80 Snelling Avenue North.
- Dairy Queen, enlarge existing fast food restaurant and add drive-thru window at 1537 White Bear Avenue.
- Roosevelt Elementary, enlarge and reconfigure existing parking lot. Relocate delivery dock at 160 Isabel Street East.
- O'Reilly Auto Parts, new retail building and parking lot at 1318 Larpenteur Avenue West.
- Metropolitan State University, new science education center, 60,000 square-foot, 3-story building connected to the main campus by a new skyway over 6<sup>th</sup> Street at 654 6<sup>th</sup> Street East.

Commissioner Nelson reported that there was no business for the January 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting; however at the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, January 17<sup>th</sup> he announced the item on the agenda.

#### **V. Neighborhood Planning Committee**

West Side Community Plan – Approve resolution recommending adoption of the plan to the Mayor and City Council. (*Scott Tempel, 651/266-6621*)

Scott Tempel, PED staff said that the plan has gone through extensive community input which started in 2011. After the close of the Planning Commission's public hearing the Neighborhood Committee received an additional comment from a resident regarding the former green stairs that used to provide pedestrian access up the bluff. After Neighborhood Committee discussion the committee recommended a change to the plan to add a recommendation to reconstruct the stairs following the historic reconfiguration. Also the Historic Preservation Commission made some various wording changes that are outlined in the report.

Commissioner Merrigan asked if there was any underlying assumption with the stairs that the City would be responsible for funding the rebuilding of those stairs versus the pursuit of grants or other options.

Mr. Tempel said that the strategy is written just to pursue funding, whatever that may be, and it does not obligate the City to do so.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director added that when there was funding to do this it was federal funding that had triggered ADA requirements, which made the project too expensive, but there still is a lot of interest in re-establishing those stairs on the west side.

**MOTION** – *Commissioner Ward moved on behalf of the Neighborhood Committee to recommend approval of the resolution and forward to the Mayor and City Council for adoption of the plan. The motion carried 13-0 with 1 abstention (Noecker) on a voice vote.*

**VI. Transitway Planning Projects Update** – Informational presentation by Allen Lovejoy. (*Allen Lovejoy, 651/266-6226*)

Allen Lovejoy gave a power point presentation update on the transitway planning projects. The corridors are Central Corridor/Green Line, Rush Line, Robert Street, Red Rock, Gateway and Minnesota High Speed Rail. Most of these projects are being led by other agencies – rail authorities, Metro Transit or the State.

Mr. Lovejoy stated that the Green Line a/k/a the Central Corridor project is 87% complete. Construction will be finished in late-2013, and the testing will be done in 2014.

The Rush Line Corridor runs from downtown Saint Paul to Hinckley and currently there are a few express buses that run from northern Ramsey County into downtown Saint Paul. The work to-date includes an Alternative Analysis.

Commissioner Lindeke asked if future transit would conflict with the existing bicycle trail?

Mr. Lovejoy said that the bicycle trail will stay in the public right-of-way, but if rail is built in the same right-of-way there might be some reconstruction of the trail, but it will remain. In addition, it is unlikely under any circumstance that rail would be built through Swede Hollow Park.

The Robert Street Corridor is very wide (I-35E to the Mississippi River near Pig's Eye Lake), but that only two alignments will likely be reviewed: Highway 52 and Robert Street. The Corridor extends south to Rosemount in Dakota County. The Alternatives Analysis currently underway will consider LRT, BRT, Rapid Bus and Streetcar options. Work to-date includes a Scoping Report – 2009 and the current Alternatives Analysis.

The Red Rock Corridor runs from downtown Minneapolis through downtown Saint Paul to Hastings, but most of the work has been done between downtown Saint Paul and Hastings. The short-term considerations are for re-doing express bus. In the long term, commuter rail or bus rapid transit (BRT) will be considered. Work to-date includes an Alternative Analysis in 2007, a Feasibility Study in 2009, Station Area Plans in 2011, and now an updated Alternative Analysis in 2013, which will look at BRT.

The Gateway Corridor is the most active corridor in terms of current planning. Washington County is the lead. This corridor runs from downtown Minneapolis to Eau Claire, focused on the segment between downtown Saint Paul and Hudson. The primary alternative being considered now is BRT in an exclusive running track within the I-94 right-of-way. The BRT alternative runs in an exclusive track from downtown Saint Paul to Manning in Washington County then in mixed traffic from Manning to Carmichael Road in Hudson. The work to-date is to complete the Alternative Analysis next week or in February. The EIS work will begin later in 2013.

Commissioner Spaulding asked if they talked about the distinction between running in the center of the road versus Old Hudson Road.

Mr. Lovejoy said one of the alternatives had proposed using center lanes of the freeway and dedicating them to HOV, bus or LRT exclusively. The analysis found that such an alternative does not yield much ridership. So the conclusion of the AA was to have the track along the northern edge of I-94, within the existing interstate right-of-way. The EIS will look at both BRT and LRT but the comparable ridership suggests that LRT may not be worth the added expense.

Minnesota High Speed Rail will connect the Twin Cities, Wisconsin Dells, Milwaukee and Chicago, along the Mississippi River to Winona and then on rail tracks to Milwaukee. The Minnesota High Speed Rail Commission's participating counties and cities are working to design bus connects at each station to communities all along the River. Current analysis assumes six to eight round trips a day and a projected annual ridership of 1.7 million trips by 2030. This segment of the Amtrak service is the most heavily used service outside of the Acela Line between Boston and Washington, D.C. It is also possible that the State will try to get one additional Amtrak round-trip per day as an interim step.

The Rapid Bus Concept, which is new to the Twin Cities and fairly new in the nation, uses existing high transit use corridors. In this concept, buses will run in the right travel lane, employing off-board ticketing (allowing passengers to board and alight at all bus doors), equip buses with ability to use Signal Preference and have enhanced station design with real-time bus arrival information. By speeding up bus operations, Metro Transit can – with the same number of buses – increase frequencies along the route, greatly reducing wait times between buses. Metropolitan Council did a region-wide analysis and came up with two corridors that they felt would be the best to begin implementation now. The top rated route is Snelling, from Rosedale down to Ford Parkway, and west to the 46<sup>th</sup> Street LRT station on Hiawatha. Met Council would like to have this one in place by the time the Green Line LRT is completed in mid-2014, but they are having trouble securing capital funding to make this project move forward that quickly. The other one route is on West 7<sup>th</sup> from downtown to the Mall of America. The City is requesting consideration of extending the line along East 7<sup>th</sup> Street to Arcade Street.

Commissioner Edgerton assumes that the impacts on land use are being evaluated. For example, the closing of Macy's department store in downtown Saint Paul reminds us that improving transit connections to MOA may hasten commercial decline in downtown. This is the sort of thing that needs to be thought through carefully.

Mr. Lovejoy said that the City has long thought about the relationship between land use and transportation investments. The last two City Comprehensive Plans have emphasized land use planning in these types of transit corridors. The City has developed a good sense of where it wants development and then taking best advantage when transit is developed to ensure the appropriate positive impacts on development activity. Most significant for this transit alignment is that it would connect three of the five largest employment concentrations in the State of Minnesota: downtown, the Mall of America and MSP airport.

Bus Service improvements within the Central Corridor is almost as exciting as the LRT itself. Regular route North/South bus service will be greatly enhanced on all routes: Rice, Dale, Lexington (new), Snelling and Raymond. Metro Transit has committed to taking all of the

savings they get from discontinuing Rt 50 and reduced service on Rt 16, and putting it into expanded feeder bus service. This service change over will happen in advance of LRT's opening in 2014.

Commissioner Ward said in addition to the improved North/South service, Met Council and a few other groups have explored the possibility of adding trolleys in a couple of those north, south routes. How does that dovetail into some of the planning that is being done right now in order to improve those routes and improve the connectivity?

Mr. Lovejoy said they are looking at a variety of routes in this area that might lend themselves to streetcar investments. Financing of streetcars is much different than LRT, and this Feasibility Study will be very helpful in determining whether we can locally-fund such improvements. The assumption is that streetcars can be built within existing streets, thereby not requiring substantial, and expensive, land acquisition. Some of the current bus routes are being considered in the current Streetcar Feasibility Study.

Streetcar Feasibility Study is underway. The Study includes an educational piece to stakeholders, vehicle type selection, and route feasibility. Would an historic or modern streetcar work best in Saint Paul? What evaluation criteria should be used in assessing individual routes? And which routes are most feasible? Minneapolis has been helpful in working with the City; since they completed a streetcar feasibility study a few years ago. They would like to explore joint ventures for streetcar development. When streetcars are built, they will be in current traffic lanes shared with the automobile.

Commissioner Wang asked about the advantages local streetcars have over local bus routes.

Mr. Lovejoy said that there is a feeling of greater security and cleanliness on streetcars than on buses. Public perception of reliability and permanence is also a factor in attracting ridership. And permanence of having the infrastructure of rails and overhead electrification has demonstrated positive economic development impacts. There is a lot more to come on this in the coming months.

Union Depot refurbishing is now complete and the Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority had a huge open house attracting over 20,000 visitors. A fundamental piece for success of the Union Depot and regional passenger rail is the uses of existing freight rail corridors for passenger rail. The RCRRA has just completed the East Metro Rail Capacity Study, which defines the necessary rail improvements needed between the Union Depot and Hastings. This Study required the collaboration among 6 cities, 4 counties, 1 corridor commission, 5 freight rail companies, Amtrak, FRA, FTA, MnDOT, and 3 community groups. The Study calls for three phases of development. And Ramsey County is seeking funding for the first and second phase: more detailed engineering. The Governor's Forum on Passenger Rail has recommended \$1 million to do this required study.

The overall transit funding picture at the federal and state level alternately looks promising and grim; it is hard to tell where we are going as a nation. There is more and more traction for transit investments as the business community begins to turn up the heat on politicians, driven by our loss of international competitiveness as a result of decaying infrastructure.

Commissioner Spaulding asked about the lack of capital funding for the Snelling Avenue Corridor.

Mr. Lovejoy said that he does not know exactly where Metro Transit is currently in seeking such funding. Capital investment dollars are hard to come by for transit projects currently, but that could change depending on actions of the State Legislature and Congress.

Commissioner Spaulding said that this isn't a specific legislative roadblock; they just draw from their general fund allocations.

Mr. Lovejoy said that capital projects tend to be funded on a project-by-project basis.

Commissioner Ward asked what advice or direction would be given to someone who is a community resident, and wanting to be involved with regional and local transit discussions, since there are so many agencies/organizations doing transit planning? What would a person be told who is coming to the Twin Cities or just a person who wants to have all these options?

Mr. Lovejoy said that if he were moving into a big city and he chose a transit-dependent lifestyle, he would look at the primary corridors where strong transit already existed. If already there and trying to ascertain what's going to happen in the future, he would look at what his particular mobility needs are or his family's needs are and go from there. If someone in the region is really interested in all the activities, they could call him.

Commissioner Ward asked about what type of discussions are being held regarding these corridors that include other needed public investment, beautification, and art.

Mr. Lovejoy said that the work that was done on Central Corridor, although not perfect, was very comprehensive in looking at a variety of all the things mentioned by Commissioner Ward. Central Corridor can act as a "check-list" for consideration on a variety of issues on other corridors in the city.

Commissioner Ward asked if we are ahead of the rest of the nation or not.

Mr. Lovejoy said we're not catching up, but rather falling further behind other regions in the U.S. And we are losing even more ground to Europe and Asia. Transportation, including transit investments, is a critical economic development issue and the business community is beginning to understand to the point of taking action. Our Chamber of Commerce has been very active in these discussions and understands that this infrastructure investment is critical. In particular, the Chamber was instrumental in getting approvals for the Green Line development. But at the same time, we are trying to catch up at a time of really austere budgets. Right now it is unclear as to whether new budgets will respond to the need to catch up.

## **VII. Comprehensive Planning Committee**

Commissioner Merrigan said that they had met on Tuesday and discussed the Industrial Zoning Study. They reviewed the staff report based on the public comments in June and they will be bringing a resolution forward at the next Planning Commission meeting.

**VIII. Transportation Committee**

Commissioner Spaulding announced the items on the agenda for the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, January 14, 2013.

**IX. Communications Committee**

Commissioner Thao had no report.

**X. Task Force/Liaison Reports**

None.

**XI. Old Business**

None.

**XII. New Business**

None.

**XIII. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 9:58 a.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

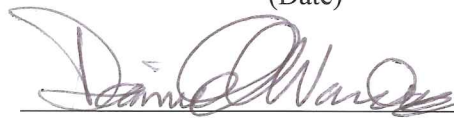


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Donna Drummond  
Planning Director

Approved January 25, 2013

(Date)



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Daniel Ward II  
Secretary of the Planning Commission