

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

**Minutes June 14, 2013**

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, June 14, 2013, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

**Commissioners Present:** Mmes. Noecker, Perrus, Porter, reveal, Shively, Thao, Wencl; and Messrs. Connolly, Edgerton, Gelgelu, Lindeke, Makarios, Nelson, Ochs, Schertler, Spaulding, and Ward.

**Commissioners Absent:** Mmes. \*Merrigan, \*Wang, and Messrs. \*Oliver, and \*Wickiser.  
\*Excused

**Also Present:** Allan Torstenson, Lucy Thompson, Merritt Clapp-Smith, Michelle Beaulieu, Hilary Holmes, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

**I. Approval of minutes May 17<sup>th</sup> and May 31, 2013.**

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the minutes of May 17, 2013. Commissioner Shively seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**And**

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the minutes of May 31, 2013. Commissioner Noecker seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**II. Chair's Announcements**

Chair Wencl announced that Paula Merrigan, Chair of the Shepard Davern Task Force, has run into a conflict so she has resigned from being Chair of that task force and Gaius Nelson has been appointed Chair to replace her.

**III. Planning Director's Announcements**

The Acting Planning Director, Allan Torstenson, noted that the Planning Commission's group American Planning Association (APA) membership expires on June 30. Commissioners who want to renew or become a member should send a check for \$50.00, payable to the City of Saint Paul, to Donna Drummond or Sonja Butler by June 21.

**IV. Zoning Committee**

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

Three items came before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, June 11, 2013:

- Johnson Parkway Apartments, renovation of existing nursing home into a 68-unit apartment building and improvements to existing parking lot, 324 Johnson Parkway.
- Ramsey Hill Senior Living, 61-unit assisted living (remodel existing building and construct addition), 484 Ashland.
- O'Reilly Auto Parts, new retail store, 1318 W. Larpenteur Avenue.

Four items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, June 18, 2013:

- Community Dental Care parking lot improvements, 1236 Arcade Street.
- Union Depot East Lot C Parking, 655 E. Kellogg Blvd.
- Diamond Products building demolition for Lowertown Ballpark, 310 E. 5<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Hamline Station mixed-use development, 1319-1333 University Avenue.

**NEW BUSINESS**

#13-186-635 Commodore Squash Club – Change of nonconforming use to allow private liquor service to members of existing squash club. 79 Western Avenue North and 384 Ashland Avenue, between Arundel and Western. (*Hilary Holmes, 651/266-6612*)

***MOTION:*** *Commissioner Nelson moved the Zoning Committee's recommendation to approve the change of nonconforming use subject to additional condition. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

Commissioner Nelson announced the item on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, June 20, 2013.

**V. Neighborhood Planning Committee**

District 9 Area Plan Amendments – Review of public hearing testimony and final recommendation to the Mayor and City Council. (*Lucy Thompson, 651/266-6578*)

Commissioner Spaulding said the Neighborhood Committee reviewed the changes presented at the public hearing (which addressed concerns raised by Commissioners when the amendments were released that some proposed guidelines might conflict or be confused with zoning) and felt that these adequately addressed the Commissioners' concerns. The Committee also raised a concern that some of the DON'T photos might offend some business owners. One particular photo was of the Kessler and McGuire Funeral Home; it was very easy to read the business name in the DON'T photo. Staff was asked to work with the neighborhood to substitute another photo that was more "anonymous." This has been done and is reflected in the version before the Planning Commission today.

Commissioner Reveal asked if the X's are no longer there. Commissioner Spaulding replied that they are still there.

Commissioner Noecker expressed concern that the name of the business illustrating what not to do on page 9 is very visible.

Lucy Thompson, PED staff, noted that the photo is of a business outside the neighborhood. She noted that several other DON'T images were replaced in this current version to address any concern with featuring too many local businesses (whether their names are visible or not).

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Spaulding moved on behalf of the Neighborhood Planning Committee to recommend that the District 9 Area Plan Amendments (as amended) be adopted by the Mayor and City Council. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

Commissioner Spaulding announced that the next Neighborhood Planning Committee meeting on Wednesday, June 19, 2013 has been cancelled.

**VI. Streetcar Study Update** – Informational presentation by Michelle Beaulieu, PED.  
*(Michelle Beaulieu, 651/266-6620)*

Michelle Beaulieu gave an update on the Streetcar Feasibility Study that began last September. Streetcars are rail vehicles similar to light rail vehicles but smaller and operate in mixed traffic. Streetcar lines are typically short (2-3 miles), have close stop spacing similar to local bus service, and focus on trips within a corridor rather than on commuter trips. 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, has been completed. They are now in the middle of phase 2, detailed evaluation, which will be completed by the end of the month. Phase 2 will provide a long term streetcar network vision for the City of Saint Paul. Phase 3 will help determine what initial line or lines to pursue first.

Phase 1 of the study started by screening 30 corridors across the city for fatal physical flaws, such as grade, and for various service attributes. Ms. Beaulieu showed a map of the 19 potential routes that are going through more detailed phase 2 evaluation based on 3 primary criteria (ridership potential, transit supportive land uses, and development potential) and secondary criteria such as the pedestrian environment and how streetcars might impact on-street parking. A handout listing all of the criteria (which is posted on line) was distributed.

Commissioner Ward asked what the shading colors on the map indicate.

Ms. Beaulieu said the red indicates highly transit-supportive land uses, the yellow indicates moderately transit-supportive land uses, and the green indicates minimally transit-supportive land uses.

Commissioner Noecker asked about consideration of transit alternatives such as existing bus service, and the impact of how they would work together, in determining demand for streetcars.

Ms. Beaulieu said the relationship between potential streetcar service and both existing bus service and planned future high capacity transit service is being studied as part of phase 2.

Ms. Beaulieu said the map, based on the Comprehensive Plan, is a good picture of where existing or potential land use would support frequent all day transit service. The study is looking at economic development potential that might be catalyzed by streetcar service, a big part of why cities invest in streetcars.

Commissioner Schertler expressed surprise that the Island Station area is shown on the map as highly transit supportive.

Ms Beaulieu showed a map indicating development potential.

Commissioner Edgerton asked about the difference between the map showing transit-supportive land use and the map showing development potential.

Ms. Beaulieu said that development potential is about filling in gaps in corridors that have potential. The study is examining potential development sites and potential land value increases. The consultants are looking at the average land values per acre along a corridor, then looking at the values of under-developed parcels along the corridor, and using the gap to see which corridors would possibly see the greatest increase in property values with the sort of development one would expect to see along a streetcar line.

Commissioner Connolly suggested they should talk to developers and land owners about that. He asked about what is wrong with the bus system, the cost of developing streetcar lines, and if the study could truly conclude that streetcars are not cost-effective or if it is just going through the motions to back up a political decision that's already been made?

Ms. Beaulieu said the capital cost of streetcar lines is typically about \$60 million per mile, but unlike buses they often help catalyze economic development, which is what motivates cities to build streetcar lines. Streetcar lines are a permanent investment that developers respond to. Though we haven't spoken to any developers yet, there is a sense that developers in the region are familiar with streetcars and their potential. She said that the study, which is being done by a nationally-renowned consultant team that has worked on streetcar projects across the country, is data-driven, objective, and not politically motivated.

Ms. Beaulieu said phase 2 of the study, to be completed by the end of the month, will produce a map with recommended corridors for a long term St. Paul streetcar network, including shortening some of the corridors, where streetcars would replace local bus service. It will go to the Transportation Committee for review, and then phase 3 will recommend what corridors are ready for streetcar investment first.

Commissioner Thao asked about the equity criteria, the perception of buses versus streetcars, and who the riders would be. She said the potential of replacing one group of riders with another and not making such major transit investments in areas needing better service is troubling.

Ms. Beaulieu said the study is looking at corridors across the city. Streetcars are just one tool in the transit toolbox. Ramsey County is leading an East Side transit conversation that will take a broader, multi-modal transit view of the area. While most of the East Side is probably too residential and does not have enough mixed-use or commercial corridors for streetcar service now, it has been acknowledged that there should be some sort of transit improvement there. The study is considering communities of color and areas along the corridors with concentrations of

low income residents and residents that do not own cars. She showed maps illustrating how census data and American Community Survey data are being used to identify those areas.

Commissioner Porter asked about the implementation phase.

Ms. Beaulieu said that after a priority corridor (or corridors) is selected there would be more extensive study of the corridor for all modes of transit, which is required before applying for federal funding for construction of a potential streetcar line. After the “alternatives analysis” there would be further environmental study, and then an engineering and design phase. Implementation could be as soon as five years from now.

Commissioner Ward discussed the equity issue, lessons learned from Green Line, and how to have a community discussion about what the community really wants.

Ms. Beaulieu said they are doing community outreach, focused now on broad questions about transit and development. With each subsequent phase of study there would be more rigorous community outreach. The current study is a citywide technical study, so the degree of community outreach is fairly limited.

Commissioner Edgerton said he would be interested in seeing more of the economic development data from places like Cleveland, Kansas City, or other places that have streetcars. Portland is a unique case, and he would hesitate to say the potential in Portland applies here. He’d rather see data from other communities that might be more representative of Saint Paul. What’s the return on investment in streetcars in those areas?

Ms. Beaulieu said Seattle and Portland are the only two cities with modern streetcar lines like what St. Paul would likely build. While they are unique in some respects, like many cities they use a combination of economic development tools, one of which might be streetcars. Cities such as Toronto have older streetcar systems. Other cities are just studying or constructing streetcar lines, so there’s not a lot of information on the economic development impacts of streetcars. An ITASCA project study showed that the region would get good return on transit investments.

Commissioner Porter asked if streetcars are destination based.

Ms. Beaulieu replied that strong destinations are part of why the Blue/Hiawatha line has been so successful. Streetcars are typically shorter lines for local corridor circulation rather than long regional trips like LRT. She presented a table showing how the various corridors do based on the phase 2 criteria.

In response to a question from Commissioner Makarios, Ms. Beaulieu said alternatives analyses are currently being done for three potential streetcar corridors in the Twin Cities. The City of Minneapolis is the lead agency on the Nicollet-Central Alternatives Analysis. Metro Transit is the lead agency on the Midtown Corridor Alternatives Analysis in Minneapolis. Ramsey County is the lead agency on the Robert Street Alternatives Analysis.

## **VII. Comprehensive Planning Committee**

Commissioner Reveal said they had met on Tuesday to review the Auto Body Text Amendments public hearing testimony and did not finish.

**VIII. Transportation Committee**

Commissioner Spaulding announced the items on the agenda for the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, June 17, 2013.

**IX. Communications Committee**

Commissioner Thao had no announcements.

**X. Task Force/Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Reveal announced that the next West Side Flats Task Force meeting will be on Thursday, July 25, 2013.

**XI. Old Business**

None.

**XII. New Business**

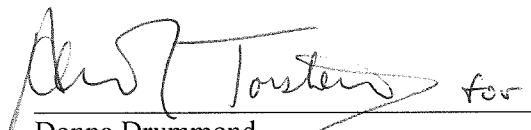
None.


**XIII. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 9:33 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 June 28, 2013  
(Date)  
  
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Daniel Ward II  
Secretary of the Planning Commission