

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

**Minutes January 24, 2014**

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, January 24, 2014, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

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

**Commissioners Absent:** Mmes. \*Merrigan, \*Perrus, \*Porter, and Messrs. \*Connolly, \*Schertler, and \*Spaulding.

**Absent:** \*Excused

**Also Present:** Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Sara Swenson, Allen Lovejoy, Merritt Clapp-Smith, Bill Dermody, Michelle Beaulieu, Hilary Holmes, Jamie Radel, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

**I. Approval of minutes January 10, 2014.**

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Reveal moved approval of the minutes of January 10, 2014. Commissioner Thao seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**II. Chair's Announcements**

Report of the Nominating Committee and Election of Officers.

Commissioner Shively reported on behalf of the Nominating Committee. The committee offered the following slate of officers: Barbara A. Wencl for Chair, Elizabeth Reveal for First Vice-Chair, Paula Merrigan for Second Vice Chair, and Daniel Ward, II for Secretary.

Chair Wencl called for nominations from the floor. There were none.

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Shively moved to approve the slate of candidates. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

**III. Planning Director's Announcements**

Donna Drummond announced that the Mayor's nomination of two new planning commissioners was approved by City Council the previous Wednesday. Wendy Underwood and Anne DeJoy will be sworn in on February 7, 2014. A summary of the parking retreat that the Commission held after the January 10<sup>th</sup> meeting was distributed. At the February 7<sup>th</sup> time will be set aside on the agenda for the Commission to discuss what it heard at the retreat and potential follow-up actions it would like to take.

**IV. PUBLIC HEARING: Saint Paul Streetcar Feasibility Study – Item from the Transportation Committee. (Michelle Beaulieu, 651/266-6620).**

Chair Wencl announced that the Saint Paul Planning Commission was holding a public hearing on the Saint Paul Streetcar Feasibility Study. Notice of the public hearing was published in the Legal Ledger January 9, 2014, and was sent to the citywide Early Notification System list and other interested parties.

Michelle Beaulieu, PED staff gave a brief presentation on the Streetcar study. She talked about why the study was done, and addressed some questions that came up the last time this was at the Planning Commission and at the open houses held last week.

Ms. Beaulieu briefly reviewed the results of the study. She also noted that 277 comments were received, including from Open Saint Paul, the four open houses, and several letters and emails. Approximately 30% were negative comments, 63% were positive, and 7% were neither negative nor positive, but questioning.

Commissioner Ward asked for more information about how development potential for the proposed streetcar routes was analyzed.

Ms. Beaulieu said that they did a preliminary analysis of what the development potential would be along these corridors. The study looked at potential major development sites where they could expect to see dense and mixed use development and they also looked at the potential for property values to increase along those corridors.

Commissioner Makarios asked if the public comments that had been received had been incorporated into this draft of the study.

Ms. Beaulieu said that the second phase of the overall study did have a community comment section, the final phase did not because they had their open houses recently and they wanted to get this public hearing set as close to those open houses as possible. However, a copy of all the public comments received to date was distributed to the commissioners today. These will all be summarized, along with the public hearing comments, for consideration by the Transportation Committee and the Commission.

Chair Wencl read the rules of procedure for the public hearing.

The following people spoke.

1. Kirk Thoren, a Saint Paul resident, asked a question before giving his testimony. Mr. Thoren said that Ms. Beaulieu mentioned something about streetcars being able to do cross flow traffic; he asked how that will work on University Avenue.

Ms. Beaulieu said that he must be referring to streetcars operating in mixed traffic and what that means is that they are in the same travel lane as cars, buses, freight trucks etc. This is different from what is seen on University Avenue, where the light rail is in a dedicated lane and no other vehicles can travel in that lane. Streetcar tracks are imbedded in the roadway, similar to the way the light rail tracks are embedded at intersections so that cars can cross them safely.

Kirk Thoren said the City paid this company a sum of around one hundred fifty thousand dollars to see the feasibility of putting in streetcars in our corridors. He continued to say we don't need to have excessive spending on frivolous public transport ideas that are not needed. More money could be spent on roads for people that pay to put their cars on them. (Mr. Thoren also submitted a written copy of his testimony.)

2. Harold Buss, a Saint Paul resident, said that he attended one of the meetings and this study is a very good study, however he has a lot of problems with it. He said this is not an investment; none of us would ever invest this kind of money and know that you're not going to get money back on it. At that meeting someone said what about safety, why do people not ride buses they're afraid for their safety. And someone else said streetcars don't have that problem because it's nostalgia, and if I'm a hoodlum I don't care about nostalgia I'll do robbing whenever I want. Also from 7<sup>th</sup> Street coming into downtown there will be buses and streetcars together plus all the cars and that does not make any sense. The City cannot continue to spend money that we can't get anything back on, we are taxed to the max in Saint Paul and it's time to quit doing this kind of thing.
3. Peter Berglund lives in Shoreview, is employed in Saint Paul, and previously has resided in Saint Paul. He uses buses all the time. To show his credentials he presented 150 bus passes dating back to 1984. He said that streetcars are not bad, but they are expensive. He is happy with the buses because buses have improved a lot over the decades; they are warmer in the winter, cooler in the summer, and the seats are better - everything's better. In order to work the best the mass transit system's vehicles need to run quickly and frequently. We have a limited number of dollars and however those limited dollars can be spent best to get frequent and fast trips is what's most important. (Mr. Berglund also submitted written testimony.)
4. Bob Plaster said he is a long time Saint Paul resident and he has seen streetcars, has ridden streetcars, and has seen everything torn up to be replaced with buses and now you want to redo that. The main thing is where does the funding come from? It's really all from the taxpayer. Mr. Plaster asked: Who advanced this idea of streetcars?

Ms. Beaulieu said that the City Council passed a resolution to begin the Streetcar Feasibility Study and that the Mayor also supported it. The Streetcar Feasibility Study was funded about 85% by foundation grants, with the remainder split between the City and Ramsey County.

Mr. Plaster said we will all be taxed for this, and not everybody rides those things. That type of public transportation is good for cities like New York and San Francisco that don't have open spaces. The buses that we are using right now are really a top end bus and they built a huge garage facility on Mississippi Street and all that stuff would be going down the tubes. We just can't spend money that we don't have.

5. Bill Hosko is a resident and business owner in downtown Saint Paul. He has not owned a vehicle in twenty years and relies on walking and using Metro Transit buses for day-to-day transportation. He noted the extensive existing bus service that is available, and asked about the impacts to existing on-street parking. He expressed doubts about the economic development impacts and concerns about the cost of streetcars for the benefit received. He thought the existing bus service could be made more attractive by addressing bus rider behavior. He said that light rail transit to from downtown to the airport and Mall of

American should be considered instead. (Mr. Hosko submitted a written copy of his testimony.)

6. Bill Heime a business owner was not able to attend this public hearing so he submitted a letter, which Mr. Hosko read. Mr. Heime is very concerned about the loss of on-street parking for his business, and instead of streetcars on West 7<sup>th</sup> and in other areas of the city where streetcars are being studied he believes consideration should be given to having smaller buses serving the public. Perhaps they can be powered by electricity or natural gas and make them look like old-time streetcars and have them be open air in the summer. Mr. Heime believes that his business and others on West 7<sup>th</sup> Street cannot afford to lose their on-street parking. (Mr. Heime submitted a written copy of his testimony.)
7. Mark Bayuk, a Saint Paul resident, said that East 7<sup>th</sup> Street doesn't look like much right now, not too much economic development; in fact it's kind of an economic waste land. There's bus 61 and 64 and it's still an economic waste land, bus 70 and 74 there's no change. No matter how many buses you have running down East 7<sup>th</sup> corridor it's not going to make any impact on the future improvement of East 7<sup>th</sup> Street. He knows from studies and experiences people have had in other cities streetcars do bring development. He strongly believes that streetcars will bring economic development. He believes it is also a more sophisticated, more developed transportation system and that gives you an ability to compete for human capital attraction. We want to bring people here who are mobile and live in downtown urban areas; we have to make the downtown attractive. He believes the streetcar in a very critical corridor will help enhance the livability of our downtown urban area and allow Minnesota companies who want to attract people to work here from other regions to say look at what we've got. So come here and work for us and help develop the Twin Cities into an international economic competitor.
8. Bob Rohland, a resident of Saint Paul, said that his biggest concern is the energy efficiency. His background is energy production, primarily electricity, with 33 years at a nuclear power plant. His comments were about the energy required for this system, not just the streetcars but buses as well. The concern is about oil, and global world oil production. The current declining rate of all global world oil is at about 6% a year, and for most of the counties that export oil that is their primary income. The US Defense Department has come out with several reports in the last 6 years talking about their concern about global world oil production. Bottom line the days of cheap oil are gone. In 2005 the CEO of Chevron came out with a full page ad in papers across the country talking about this very fact, that the days of cheap oil are gone. So whatever the City decides to do it has to be energy efficient.
9. Gregg Rosenberger has owned a business on West 7<sup>th</sup> Street for over 40 years, and he said that he see's buses go by every day and he has never seen a full bus, especially in the morning, maybe in the afternoon. They run about every 15-20 minutes. Another thing is that there is a huge amount of cars that come from the local area and outside the city and they come in through East 7<sup>th</sup> Street because it is such a main artery. He cannot see how there will be room for another object like a streetcar to be driven up and down those streets. Another issue is snow removal, start throwing that into the equation with the trains and it just doesn't seem practical. Also can somebody in the City show us folks what the bus company is making for money, are we working in a deficit, are we showing a profit and when are we going to show a profit so that maybe we can afford to have another vehicle to move people around in. Cars are not going to go away. About the federal funding, where does this federal funding come from? Our government is just about belly up right now and the cities are not

too far behind. Ramsey County and Saint Paul being the capitol city, the people in this city need to sit down and figure out a plan that the rest of the country and the rest of the states can actually say we're surprised that this city did something to teach the rest of the people how to spend money wisely.

Ms. Beaulieu said that fare box returns cover about 30% of the operating cost of the buses in the Metro Transit system, and that fare box returns cover about 40% of the operating costs of the Light Rail in the Metro Transit system.

10. Lisa Radzak, Managing Director of Public Affairs & Government Relations for Minnesota Public Radio, said with respect to the downtown alignment they know that a lot more work needs to be done and there are many options still to be looked at and studied. They have concerns about any potential alignment that would run along the south part of their building on West 7<sup>th</sup> Street connecting West 7<sup>th</sup> Street from the east and West 7<sup>th</sup> Street from the west. In 2008 MPR opposed the proposed alignment for the light rail to come down Cedar Street between 12 and 14 feet from their building. Preliminary test results are showing that the system that the Met Council designed and constructed has been successful in mitigating the noise and vibration from the trains themselves, which is good news. However it is not successfully mitigating the noise and vibration from the traffic running along West 7<sup>th</sup> Street particularly as it crosses over the tracks at Cedar and West 7<sup>th</sup>. They are experiencing serious problems in the recording studio along the south part of their building along West 7<sup>th</sup> that is why they are opposed to any alignment of this that would go there. They understand that it's a little more tedious to figure out a solution than anyone could have imagined; it's taken about a year and they still do not know how it will be fixed. So she asked that this be considered with the streetcar planning. (Written comments were received from MPR)
11. David Dermer, a Saint Paul resident, said that as far as he knows there isn't a complete plan, man power, equipment or budget for removing snow on University. He has seen SUV's getting tied up on the hard crusted snow in the last few weeks. And if there are several storms that would drop a lot of snow, he doesn't know what the City would do, in the past it was left up to the business owners to hire a bobcat operator and it took about 2 weeks to clear all of the snow. He would like to see the City push Met Council for low cost or now cost alternatives. Also he never has seen taxies brought up as a viable source of mass transit or strategies for using taxies with mass transit. Right now University Avenue does not have cab stands and people getting off the bus along University would be able to come up to a taxi that's parked maybe 20 feet away from the bus stop. He would like to see bump outs for cabs, expand the number of cab stands, taxies should have the right of egress and taxies pay for themselves.
12. Tabitha BenciDurango with the Dayton's Bluff Community Council, said while listening to all of the comments today she felt that she would interject a few things that are happening on the eastside of Saint Paul to help round out the picture of why or why not streetcars on the eastside of Saint Paul. There is a legitimate concern about funding for the projects that comes up constantly in community meetings and gatherings held on the eastside. However there are many people on the eastside of Saint Paul that are transit dependent who do not have cars and have stated that the bus system is very inefficient for them to use. East 7<sup>th</sup> is a state highway for the eastside. It runs through one of their bigger commercial corridors, right now there are millions of dollars invested in that corridor from Metro State University down to the Beacon Bluff site. For example; Metro State has put in proposals to do \$66 million worth of development on their sites on East 7<sup>th</sup> Street in the next 5-10 years. There are many different

things happening block by block such as economic development activities happening. East 7<sup>th</sup> Street does present itself to be the perfect corridor for some type of transit. If a transit opportunity were to appear for East 7<sup>th</sup> the streetcars are going to be the least invasive way to keep parking for those businesses, because they allow for tracks in the roadway that other cars can travel with. Ms. BenciDurango wants the Commission, Chairperson and the people here to be aware that there are many things happening that are not visible now and in order to complete these pictures of economic development and adding economic sustainability to our neighborhoods we need to think about what mass transit may or may not do in that realm.

13. Leslie DuClue resides on 7<sup>th</sup> Street West so his place would not be affected yet and that is what he is concerned about. The property he purchased is at Montreal and Lexington, "the intersection of death;" it is very dangerous and there are accidents all the time. He has had two cars run up on his property lately. He cannot believe if a streetcar goes to Randolph that it won't eventually extend to the Mall of America. Even though it's everything to the contrary of what's been said he's concerned about a decrease in his home value on his first home. He does not believe in the potential business growth based on streetcars or light rail as seen in Minnesota. The public transit system in Minnesota is terrible and it needs to be better. His wife has epilepsy and she is very active in the Epilepsy Foundation of Minnesota and she does rely on public transportation but what she has seen with the light rail coming is that the number of bus lines has decreased rather than increased. In fact her bus is being cut out, the route #144 from the University of Minnesota, so she is going to be forced to take route #54 and she would actually be affected by this as well. He is opposed to the streetcars and not a big fan of the light rail. What should be done and is more cost effective is to look at how our bus system could become more efficient, more energy efficient buses and increase bus lines. And lower the cost because \$2.75 to ride during rush hour is not going to make the money back on a streetcar.

***MOTION: Commissioner Ochs moved to close the public hearing, leave the record open for written testimony until 4:30 p.m. on Monday, January 27, 2014, and to refer the matter back to the Transportation Committee for review and recommendation. Commissioner Ward seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.***

## V. 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, January 28, 2014:

- Gracewood Senior Living, addition to existing assisted living facility and expand parking lot at 1388 Prior Avenue South.
- Hazeldon, demolish existing residential facility, build new 58 unit community residential facility and expand outpatient clinic. Approximately 55,000 square feet of new construction at 680 Stewart Avenue.
- Caribou Coffee/Bruegger's Bagels, new building for coffee shop and restaurant at 280 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street.

Two items to come before the Site Plan Review Committee on Tuesday, February 4, 2014:

- St. Thomas University South Campus Facilities Building, operations building for central receiving, recycling, grounds crew etc. at 2115 Summit Avenue.
- Capitol Parking Ramp, New 4-Level parking ramp on site of existing parking lot at 390 Rice Street.

## NEW BUSINESS

#13-260-500 Ramsey County Midway Waste Site – Conditional use permit to allow source-separated organics collection. 1943 Pierce Butler Route, NW corner at Prior Avenue.  
(Bill Dermody, 651/266-6617)

**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.*

#13-260-676 Ramsey County Sims at Frank Waste Site – Conditional use permit to allow source-separated organics collection. 0 Case Avenue, property lying SW and SE of the intersection of Duluth Street and Case Avenue. (Bill Dermody, 651/266-6617)

**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.*

#13-260-295 The Waters Senior Living – Conditional use permit for 1 ft. 2 inches additional building height (46'2" total). 678 Snelling Avenue South, between Scheffer and Eleanor.  
(Merritt Clapp-Smith, 651/266-6547)

Commissioner Thao asked if they have already seen that rezoning case or will it be coming to the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Nelson replied yes, it was at the Planning Commission about two meetings ago and they recommended approval of the rezoning to the City Council and the City Council has not as of yet heard and passed that, so it will be contingent upon the City Council making that determination.

Commissioner Ward said that in some of the comments received there was a letter from Mr. Andrew Rose that was written to staff person Merritt Clapp-Smith and in the letter it addresses concern about lighting along the front of this development along Snelling. How will that be addressed and will that be a part of the overall plan review that looks at the site and those requirements?

Commissioner Nelson said that the issue of lighting is not something that really was part of their purview at this particular hearing. If there are any ordinance items that need to be considered to the site plan review and staff still need to consider that, typically the code deals with limiting the amount of lighting that crosses a property line as opposed to large amounts of lighting. Snelling Avenue does have lighting as an arterial street, so staff and the site plan review will be looking at whether there is adequate lighting along that.

**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.*

#13-253-080 The Water Senior Living – Variances for driveway setback and minimum green space per resident in a traditional neighborhood district. 678 Snelling Avenue South, between Scheffer and Eleanor. (Merritt Clapp-Smith, 651/266-6547)

Commissioner Noecker had a question regarding page two of the resolution, which talks about the tension between the Comprehensive Plan goal of greater density along transit and commercial corridors and the green space requirements in traditional neighborhood districts. She would like to know if there is anything that they can do to resolve that tension. Because if they are trying to encourage density in traditional neighborhoods they should consider adjusting the green space requirement or they will continue to see these kinds of variances. So is there a process for talking about that?

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, said that that requirement is unique to senior residences, and that is a requirement which she was not familiar with, and she thinks that it is something they should take a look at.

Commissioner Nelson said that there was discussion regarding that at the hearing and there are a number of considerations that can be made if near a park area, a 300 foot distance that can count towards that green space area. There was discussion about newer techniques that people are proposing, for example, the Shalom project on Victoria Park has a number of roof top terraces and taking a look at different ways of considering the green space. Actually accessible green space to the residence is more important than the green space that they cannot get to, so looking at different aspects was something that came up and was discussed and maybe an agenda item that they look at in the future with regard to that particular item.

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

Commissioner Nelson announced the items on the agenda at the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, January 30, 2014.

## **VI. Comprehensive Planning Committee**

Text Amendments to Chapter 64 – Signs – Approve resolution initiating study.  
(Jake Reilly, 651/266-6618)

Commissioner Thao said that the action is to approve the resolution to initiate a study about signs particularly as it relates to signs that don't accommodate areas such as the new Lowertown Ballpark. The current chapter references the Midway Stadium as well as other facilities but doesn't specifically name the Lowertown Ballpark. Also, the study will consider signs on the Green Line LRT advertising kiosks, which originally Met Council had not planned for, so the study would update and clarify language in the Zoning Code Chapter 64.



**MOTION:** *Commissioner Thao moved the Comprehensive Planning Committee's recommendation to approve the resolution initiating a study. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

Parkland Dedication and Park Impact Fee Study – Approve resolution initiating a new, broader parkland dedication and park impact fee study. (*Jamie Radel, 651/266-6614 and Allan Torstenson, 651/266-6579*).

Commissioner Thao said that the Committee had looked at this a while ago, and is now coming back with clearer information about the differences and exploring the ways that the fees are going to be set up. There was some change that happened with legislature which gave some more clarifying language definition so the study would then start looking at the implications of this language in the code.

**MOTION:** *Commissioner Thao moved the Comprehensive Planning Committee's recommendation to approve the resolution initiating a study. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

Commissioner Thao reported that at their last meeting they discussed testimony in response to the Transit Street Zoning Amendments public hearing at the January 10<sup>th</sup> Planning Commission meeting. They also discussed the Parkland Zoning Study, looking at initial issues as staff begins to explore the topic.

## **VII. Neighborhood Planning Committee**

Commissioner Oliver announced that the Neighborhood Planning Committee's next meeting on Wednesday, January 29, 2014 has been cancelled.

## **VIII. Transportation Committee**

Commissioner Ochs reported that at their last meeting they had 3 items on the agenda, the Western Avenue reconstruction and Montreal Avenue reconstruction presented by Public Works staff person Barb Mundahl. The third item was a report on Transportation Planning in the Shepard Davern area presented by Mark Finken, also from the Public Works Department. Commissioner Ochs also announced the items on the agenda for the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, January 27, 2014.

## **IX. Communications Committee**

Commissioner Thao announced that the committee will meet immediately after today's Planning Commission to have their annual meeting to review the 2013 report. They will present their report at the next Planning Commission meeting on February 7, 2014.

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

Commissioner Nelson reported that at the Shepard Davern Task Force last meeting they talked about transportation issues, including the impact of the heavy traffic on that western portion of W. 7<sup>th</sup> St. and ways to mitigate that, which is an important aspect of anything that occurs down on that gateway into Saint Paul. So coming up with a good solution to that situation is desired on

everyone's part. The task force's work will be wrapping up in about one or two more meetings and the zoning study will continue after that.

Commissioner Reveal announced that the West Side Flats report is not ready, and the final draft is being worked on by staff and consultants. There were two late issues that came up after the entire process was finished. One has to do with height limitations and they are doing several additional view studies to look at it from the Saint Paul Kellogg Park side of the river. Those were requested by Saint Paul Riverfront Corporation and Friends of the Mississippi River. The other issue was the Port Authority's objection to the proposed smaller grid pattern east of Robert so that has been under discussion with staff, but she is not sure where it stands right now.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, added that Lucy Thompson and Hilary Holmes are doing a little more study and research about what is an appropriate size for a development parcel for more modern industrial uses. They are also trying to interview some business owners from sectors that you would find in those types of parks, asking what they're looking for in terms facilities and property sizes and also contacting a national organization for industrial development to get input. So that information is being gathered and will be brought to the task force.

**XI. Old Business**

None.

**XII. New Business**

None.

**XIII. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 10:10 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 February 21, 2014

(Date)



Daniel Ward II  
Secretary of the Planning Commission