



CITY OF CONCORD

NEW HAMPSHIRE

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES OCTOBER 26, 2012 7:30 A.M.

The meeting convened at 7:30 A.M. in the City Council Chambers, 37 Green Street, Concord, NH.

PRESENT: Allen Bennett, Tim Bernier, Christopher Carley, Byron Champlin, Mark Coen, Larry Gloekler, Stephen Heavener, John Hoyt, Jan McClure, William Norton, Keith Nyhan, Dan St. Hilaire, and Claudia Walker

ABSENT: Walter Chapin, Peter Cook, Brad Hosmer, and Connie Rosemont

STAFF: Carlos P. Baía, Deputy City Manager – Development
Bev Rafferty, Administrative Assistant

GUEST: Mayor James Bouley (arrived 8:30 A.M.)

1. MINUTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER 7, 2012 MEETING

Allen Bennett made a motion to accept the minutes as submitted; seconded by Byron Champlin; motion passed unanimously.

2. DOWNTOWN COMPLETE STREETS PROJECT

The Downtown Complete Streets Improvement Project (DTCSIP) committee has asked several groups to provide input on the project and EDAC is one of those groups. Chairperson Carley asked what recommendations would EDAC like to make to the committee.

Carlos Baía provided a brief synopsis of what has transpired thus far. He noted that the committee had set up a page on the City's web site where e-mails and other documents are posted for the public viewing. Byron Champlin noted it is very helpful to see everyone's comments.

The DTCSIP Committee has examined a variety of issues pertinent to the Main Street project including lane configuration and parking. The application that was sent to the federal government to contemplated the creation of a complete street accommodating multiple modes of transportation (cars, bikes, pedestrians, and transit). Mr. Baía explained several concepts ranging from three lanes with parallel parking and dedicated bike lanes to two lanes modified with angle or parallel parking on both sides or three lanes with both parallel and angle parking but shared travel lanes for bikes. He explained the sidewalk widths, median buffer size and noted that if the entirety of the project corridor were converted to parallel parking, there would be a loss of up to 100 parking spaces. He continued that some parking spaces could be gained from Storrs Street or some other side streets but even with pull-in angle parking, some spaces could still be lost. He also noted that some of the spaces here today are not ADA compliant.

Mr. Baía explained that the benefit of back-in angle parking, as was done in Concord in the early 20th century, has benefits for ease of unloading, i.e. children and goods when unloading now are in travel lanes; back-in parking would have the sidewalks there instead. Vision with back-in parking is also better as when starting to pull out of the parking space, drivers would have a clear view of oncoming traffic including bicyclists.

There was lengthy discussion on this issue. Mr. Baía noted the complete streets policy went to City Council two years ago. The Transportation Policy Advisory Committee (TPAC) created it. Concord is one of the few communities taking that direction.

Jan McClure inquired if with the spaces we may lose, can the parking garages make up for them and it was noted there is capacity in the garages and on the side streets if we had to lose some of the parking on Main Street.

Jan McClure left the meeting at 8:00 A.M.

Chairperson Carley inquired how this project is being funded. Mr. Baía noted there is a \$4.7M grant which represents 60% of the complete cost, 20% is the city's responsibility, and the other 20% (\$1.57M) will be private sector cash. Mr. Baía also noted the Community Development Investment Program is one avenue that may be a viable piece for funding purposes.

Mark Coen inquired what is the end result as far as economic development is concerned. What does it do to incentivize people to move to the upper floors downtown? Would the goal be to reenergize the downtown? Mr. Baía noted the argument has been made that a complete street means the community is more livable.

Byron Champlin noted as far as the parking goes, people stop, run in and get what they want, and leave. This project invites people to stay; it's an experience for people to enjoy; it creates an environment for shopping, dining and living downtown.

Tim Bernier noted that the DTCSIP Committee needs to come up with broad ideas on what they want to do so the engineering company does not have to keep redesigning concepts. They need to define the approach to move forward. There has been very poor information to date and no information on if buildings will be handicapped accessible. Guidelines need to be established.

Stephen Heavener inquired if there is a checklist to follow. Carlos Baía noted the Mayor's objectives that were provided the DTCSIP Committee in the beginning of this process. Some EDAC members were of the opinion that the Mayor did not want to lose any parking spaces. Parking is a tension the community is dealing with at this time.

Keith Nyhan noted from an economic perspective, if we eliminate parking it will draw more people but then we have the political backlash. What would be best for Concord? If we spend \$7M to do the project and Main Street does not look any different, why spend the money?

There was discussion about other communities, i.e. Keene, Littleton, Portsmouth, Manchester. Byron Champlin noted that if people are going to pay high rents for space downtown, we should give them something to work with. Claudia Walker noted we need to be sure there is some way we are going to have a strong, sustainable retail downtown.

Bill Norton observed that Portsmouth is based on tourism which is not applicable here. Keene has been redeveloped four times over the last 34 years with the help of the Monadnock Regional Development Council.

Byron Champlin mentioned side street development and how nothing is being done to help those businesses but other members noted it seems side business are doing fine now. There are some businesses not doing so well and they are scared.

Bike lanes were discussed at length. Some members felt it was a waste of resources to include bike lanes as there is an incredibly small percentage of people who bicycle downtown. Keith Nyhan noted it was TPAC's decision to include a bike lane and some members felt there had to be a better way for bikers than creating a specific lane for them.

Carlos Baía showed the TPAC concepts which included (1) parallel parking with bike lane, median strip, and 22' wide sidewalks; (2) parallel parking with a 10' center turn lane, bike lane, and 21' wide sidewalks; and (3) parallel parking on one side and back-in angle parking on the other with a 10' center turn lane, shared bike lanes both sides, 16' wide sidewalks; and (4) pull-in angle parking both sides, 14' wide sidewalks, 4' wide median strip, and shared bike lanes.

Some members felt the bikers should share lanes and not have designated lanes. Some members questioned the affect these changes would make on steps in to businesses and Mr. Baía noted that the project was not going to reduce accessibility.

It was asked if the bike lanes were diverted elsewhere would the project still comply to receive federal funding. Tim Bernier noted that in his opinion bicycling is a fad and questioned why the project would incorporate bicycle infrastructure into a limited area. Mr. Bernier also criticized the City's management of the project to date.

Tim Bernier left the meeting at 8:30 A.M.

Mark Coen asked if there is an ideal time when construction can be done. It was noted that the plan is to do the bulk of the work at night. We also need to set up something to let people know Main Street is still open during reconstruction. A lot of things were noted regarding this project: wider sidewalks, bike lanes, real estate, and more.

The report from the DTCSIP Committee is due to City Council November 16th with a public hearing on November 26th. The engineering consulting team would need to start doing surveys, bid specs would have to be prepared and approved by the federal government, and the project cannot go beyond September 30, 2013 as that is the end of the federal fiscal year so funds must be committed by then. It was also asked what would happen to this preliminary timeframe if someone were to put in an injunction to stop the project and, as of this date, the DTCSIP Committee had not thought of that.

Mark Coen recommended having a Main Street Bike Lane but noted it should not diminish the quality of the design and make Main Street less likely to be economically successful. Byron Champlin noted to maximize the infrastructure (i.e. heated sidewalks, heated streets, WI-FI, etc.), energize the downtown environment for shopping and living, and some members felt bike paths would do significant damage to the design so provide bike paths somewhere else.

It was also noted that a significant amount of resources are going to be needed to preserve businesses on Main Street and make sure people on Main Street know it is reasonable to stay on Main Street.

Stephen Heavener noted there will be damage to some of the businesses so there will be casualties. It was asked if there is some way to help them. Keith Nyhan mentioned businesses offering parking vouchers during construction in order to get people in. The loan and grant program from the city was also mentioned.

Claudia Walker inquired about maintenance being critical because if we are going to do this project, we will need to maintain it to keep it looking good for years to come. Business Improvement Districts were mentioned and Special Assessment Districts were noted for the capital piece of this project.

There is going to be a workshop by *NH Listens* on Wednesday, November 7th at 5:30 P.M. (tentative time) at the Grappone Conference Center and anyone can come and talk about the project.

It was agreed that this project is a good idea but with conditions. The bulleted items EDAC would like to present to the DTCSIP Committee are as follows:

- (1) Parking is extremely important but if the design does not increase the width of the sidewalks, is there any value in doing this project;
- (2) Bike lanes may damage the design of the streets;
- (3) Disruption during construction will need to be addressed;
- (4) Collateral damage to existing businesses; and
- (5) Enhance the infrastructure (heated streets and sidewalks, etc.).

EDAC reached a consensus on these items.

Keith Nyhan left the meeting at 8:45 A.M.

Discussion also noted that the premise is that Concord's downtown is in a good state, however, the Hoyle-Tanner report states just the opposite – that it is in a fragile state. People are investing in the South end but not so much in the North end.

3. OTHER BUSINESS

- There will not be a November EDAC meeting – the next regularly scheduled meeting will be Friday, December 7th at The Nature Conservancy, hosted by Jan McClure.
- Byron Champlin, referring back to an earlier comment about what could be done to help the business casualties on Main Street, asked if at a future EDAC meeting could staff provide information on what the city has to offer to help start-up businesses/entrepreneurs and are we doing what we can to help economic development in Concord? Carlos Baía will add that to the December 7th EDAC agenda.

4. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business and upon a motion duly made and seconded, the meeting adjourned at 8:55 A.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverly A. Rafferty
Administrative Assistant