



## PLANNING BOARD WORK SESSION

Monday, June 12, 2017 6:00 PM  
Council Chambers, City Hall

### MINUTES

APPROVED 7/10/2017

Mr. Wahrlich called the work session to order and asked for a roll call.

#### I. Roll Call

**Present:** James Short, David Putnam, Bruce Kolenda, Richard Wahrlich, Charlene Lovett, Victor Bergeron, Marlene Jordan

**Absent:** Nicholas Koloski, Marilyn Harris, William Greenrose

**City Staff:** Michael McCrory, City Planner

#### II. Review of Minutes –

##### a. May 22, 2017 Work Session

**Motion:** To accept the minutes as complete

**Made by:** Mr. Short   **Second:** Ms. Jordan

Mayor Lovett asked if other board members were clear on the meaning of this statement on pg. 2:

- Section 4.4.2, 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet: *Socially and physically cohesive neighborhoods.*  
Mayor Lovett asked what this means. *Mr. McCrory said the intent is to have a sense of place and a social network integrated into the neighborhood.*

Board members said they were comfortable with Mr. McCrory's clarification. No changes were made.

**Vote:** Unanimous in favor

#### III. Master Plan Update – *Transportation* chapter

Mr. McCrory said he had been peripherally involved with this chapter. He said he wanted to introduce the chapter at this meeting and then give the board an opportunity to review it for the next work session. The layout of this chapter is somewhat different in that there is less in the narrative and more in the goals.

In general, the chapter has the same overall format – introduction, vision statement, quick summary of existing conditions. It matches the prior chapter's format where a lot of the functional pieces of the chapter are in the goals and objectives

There are a fair number of appendices:

1. Traffic reports (average daily traffic volumes are for different roads); reports which are generally on a 3-year cycle; these reports are done by RPC under contract with DOT; sometimes the counts are done at the request of the City
2. A table of roads and intersections in need of service; these have been identified by City staff; it basically a list of priority issues
3. Road Safety Audit Report done in 2011 for Washington Street; conducted by DOT with assistance from RPC and City staff; this report yielded some further access management analyses and studies; they in turn yielded some investigation into zoning changes; the report has some bearing on other planning initiatives that the board will be seeing in the near future

Mr. McCrory read the vision statement for the benefit of the viewing audience:

*By providing a safe, well-maintained network of roads, sidewalks and alternative transportation modes Claremont can foster the growth and development of infrastructure that is adequate for all users. Through the thoughtful development of the road network, Claremont will enhance the built environment welcoming further improvement and development. Additionally, this would provide an easily navigable network for residents, employees, and visitors alike.*

The introduction contains a broader definition of the transportation network. Mr. McCrory asked the board members to see if it reads well and consider a consistent lexicon of phrases (system vs network). Roads, sidewalks, bike trails, off-road/on-road vehicles, trails, the rail trail, and so on are considered transportation – transportation of goods and individuals. Discussions at the steering committee level are looking at Claremont enhancing its assets and recreation is an important asset for Claremont.

### **Goals**

**Goal 1** The subcommittee discussed parking extensively – downtown parking in particular. Relationship to transportation? You need a place to put your cars. In the rural context that surrounds the downtown – there is only about a dozen acres of functional downtown core area – the rest is residential neighborhood areas – we are trying to draw commercial interests into the downtown – uses, customers, residents in the upper stories of the downtown buildings – parking becomes a critical issue – hence the reason for Goal #1. It addresses the perception that there is inadequate parking or parking as needed.

**Goal 2** The airport is a regional attraction for some of the services it provides. The Amtrak station is also an important asset. They need to stay in Claremont to have that robust transportation portfolio.

**Goal 3** Claremont has a very strong off-road vehicle advocacy group that does a lot of good work in the City. There is also the rail trail and bicycle trails at Moody Park. This goal addresses transportation as it gets into recreation.

**Goal 4** Starting to get into the concept of the complete streets program – all modes and aesthetically pleasing streetscapes in the downtown environment. Will probably need further emphasis on bicycle facilities.

**Goal 5** Incorporate Complete Streets design into the central business district.

**Goal 6** Public transportation resources – the City recently committed to helping the local transit service, but there are other transit opportunities that would serve the community on both the local and regional contexts.

**Goal 7** Goes back to the safety audit in the appendix – primarily Washington Street and Charlestown Road.

**Goal 8** Goes into more of a roadway management program and communications to make sure that Claremont puts appropriate emphasis on planning for and implementing projects to maintain a good roadway infrastructure.

**Goal 9** When the federal government came out with recovery grants in 2009-2010, the City tried but was unsuccessful in obtaining grants for certain “shovel-ready projects”. Mr. McCrory said we don’t want to lose that opportunity again in the future. Identifying, properly planning for, and properly documenting the plans for transportation projects will put the city in a good position to take advantage of those grants in the future.

Mayor Lovett asked if the City has figured out what the reasons were for not getting the recovery grants. Are we better prepared to be successful today? Mr. McCrory said the City has been steadily improving its skill set in writing these applications. The City has certain strengths for writing for certain programs, but for transportation programs, being a smaller rural community we don’t hit all of the achievement levels that the federal government grant programs look for. It is usually based on vehicle miles traveled, which in turn is based on population density and congestion statistics. Put Claremont on a nationally competitive scope and we need to be stronger in other facets of the application.

Mayor Lovett said it would be helpful in the budget process to understand where our shortcomings are; if the City needs to put more money behind that to make it more successful. She said that’s a “huge force-multiplier when we don’t have the resources locally to do the improvements we need to make to our transportation system.

Mr. McCrory said there have been changes in the funding structure at either the state or federal level that make it harder for us to anticipate what funds will be available. It requires us to be agile. We have to be aware of what grants are available and be ready to shift our thinking about how to approach them. We have staff capable of doing what needs to happen. What’s beyond our control is knowing what the grants are until they are published. And sometimes we struggle to meet the criteria.

Mayor Lovett said feedback she has received from City Administration is that we don’t have the infrastructure to administer the grants. Mr. McCrory said we don’t have staff to focus just on grants, but the personnel we have are capable of responding to grants.

Mayor Lovett said, “What are the barriers that keep us from becoming more successful in accessing that money. And if any of those barriers are due to a lack of funding, then I think that should be discussed. ... We talk about a Master Plan - I’m reading these objectives and I’m shaking my head because we’ll go through this year after year in the budget process – fund this, fund that – well, unless you have a plan, it’s not going to happen.”

Mr. McCrory said part of the grant application process requires that it be identified in a plan.

Mr. McCrory said the CIP filters the projects for the five-year planning cycle – that’s where priorities are set and where we need to work harder on identifying what grants are available. We have a hard time looking out more than a year on available grants – that’s the challenge. The CIP can be more discerning in determining what the immediate needs are.

Mr. Putnam asked, “Is it reasonable to understand where we were when we implemented the current Master Plan that we are using now and understanding where we were with our transportation goals and then comparing it with CIP plans and budget work and actual success in getting projects done – understand a history of the work that’s been accomplished over the last 7-8 years using the current Master Plan. I think that history would important for us to acknowledge so that we know how to change trends, how to forecast better what we can do and help focus better on what we really need to do.”

Mr. McCrory said, “There is discussion at DPW about asset management programs and this transportation network would be part of that except they need to phase into it and they are looking at highest need-highest priority of the asset management program which tends to be underground infrastructure. We are at the initial stages right now.”

Mr. Putnam said a lot of the parking issues in the city center are due to lack of enforcement. He said we need to focus on making that complaint go away.

Mr. Bergeron said the City has had shovel-ready projects in the past that did not get funded and ended up sitting on the shelf. As far as parking, he said the City just completed a study on downtown parking that found there is plenty of it, but people won’t use it. He said there are things that can be done to make it better, though it will be tough.

Mr. Bergeron said he has received complaints about the condition of the roads. He said there just isn’t the money to fix them

Mayor Lovett said it is clear that the City needs outside help funding infrastructure. We do not have the capacity to take care of our infrastructure. She said she wanted to know where we can improve in getting grants and what resources do we need to make that happen. She said this is the best way to carry out the Master Plan.

Mr. Putnam said Claremont is a crossroads in all directions and it takes its toll on the City’s roads.

Mr. Bergeron said he was happy to the recommendation for the road maintenance program. It will help the highway department set priorities objectively.

Discussion on the chapter ended here.

Washington Street Access Management Study (Draft)

After hearing about the study at a previous meeting, Mayor Lovett read both it and the Road Safety Audit Report. She asked the RPC for a version that wasn't a draft – they referred her back to Mr. McCrory. Mr. McCrory said it never was finalized. Last Friday at the Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting, The P & D department stated that they want to review the draft with the TAC, update it and finalize it. The TAC agreed. They will revisit the corridor management study in earnest after the master plan work is done.

Mayor Lovett said that was good news, because what was disturbing to her when she read it that there was information in it that was never executed. For example, the funding had already been approved at the state level to address the Bowen/Washington intersection, but the project was not done. She asked why.

Mr. McCrory said 90% of the funding for that project comes from the state and the state has found other priorities. There is a conceptual design for that project that the staff has been discussing with the state. The project has been pushed back multiple times because of DOT funding issues. He said the funds were approved, but not obligated. He said he is hopeful it will be a 2018 project.

Mayor Lovett said that is information that would be very helpful for the Council and representatives to know because they could be advocating for it. Mr. Wahrlich said this had been brought to the Planning Board several times. It has not been talked about at the Council level though. Mr. Bergeron said Council had been given updates about the project. He said the Council knew about the possibility of the project being funded, but the City never got the money.

Mayor Lovett asked when the discussion will be had at the Planning Board level about doing some of the recommendations from this management study. She said if the City is going to do these studies, she would like to see a more responsive timeline. These studies should also be brought into the discussion when reviewing applications that may be affected by them.

Mr. Kolenda and Mr. Wahrlich said these topics have been discussed multiple times over the years by the Planning Board., but that's as far as it goes. They were not sure why this has been so.

Mayor Lovett called for a special work session to focus on Washington Street. Mr. McCrory asked that it after the Master Plan work is done.

**IV. Other**

**V. Adjournment**

The work session adjourned at 6:53 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
*deForest Bearse*