



MINUTES (Approved on 2-1-17)

TIME: Wednesday, January 18, 2017, 4:00 p.m.
PLACE: Room 16, Tacoma Municipal Building North
733 Market Street, Tacoma, WA 98402
PRESENT: Chris Beale (Chair), Stephen Wamback (Vice-Chair), Jeff McInnis, Meredith Neal,
Anna Petersen, Brett Santhuff, Scott Winship, Jeremy Woolley
ABSENT: Dorian Waller

A. CALL TO ORDER AND QUORUM CALL

Chair Beale called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m. A quorum was declared.

B. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES OF JANUARY 4, 2017

The agenda was approved. The minutes of the regular meeting on January 4, 2017 were reviewed and approved as submitted.

C. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Beale opened the floor for public comments. The following citizens provided comments:

- 1) Beverly Bowen-Bennett:
Ms. Bowen-Bennett expressed concern that after reviewing the connectivity component of the plan she had found that it would put streets through currently operating businesses in her neighborhood. She commented that she would like South Alder Street connected instead of having a gated community in South Tacoma. She asked why they didn't install pervious pavements and fix the existing streets first. She requested that they not put 39th Street through the McDonald's drive-through.
- 2) Cam Lehouillier:
Mr. Lehouillier commented that a loop road makes sense in the context of the document, but he would encourage them, for the section north of 38th Street, to consider rerouting it through South Cedar Street instead of South Lawrence Street. He reviewed that the condition of the sidewalk and road on South Cedar Street was more conducive to a loop road for pedestrian and bicycle traffic. He commented that at the north end of the plan area there was a lot of damage on South Lawrence Street from heavy trucks and a significant elevation drop towards South Tacoma Way. He urged them to consider the change to the loop road, commenting there would be a few more turns, but it would be closer towards where people would go on their bicycles.
- 3) John Brekke:
Mr. Brekke thanked Ms. Bowen-Bennett for highlighting the connectivity concerns and the Planning Commission for being willing to consider the concerns of commercial property owners and businesses. He recommended that they not rush into finishing the plan without getting the details right.
- 4) John Burkhalter:
Mr. Burkhalter reviewed that at a previous meeting he had requested that the Commission be mindful of businesses in the area when putting in roads. He requested that they ensure that if the land owners needed to do a tenant improvement or create additional space to accommodate an existing tenant that it not trigger a street requirement if it doesn't make sense at the time. He requested that the language clarify whether there would be dedications needed.

D. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Tacoma Mall Neighborhood Subarea Plan – Connectivity

Brian Boudet, Planning Services Division Manager, reviewed that the connectivity conversation had made it difficult to get to other components of the plan that addressed many of the community's other concerns. He noted that people generally concur with the idea of where they want to get in the long term and there was the question of how they communicate a clear and realistic path forward. He commented that their intent was not to push anyone out but to facilitate a better outcome 20 years into the future, recognizing that if they do nothing the area will continue to change in a way that is not well coordinated and does not facilitate good traffic patterns. Mr. Boudet reported that the intent of the meeting was to focus the discussion on the connectivity issue as progress was needed before they could discuss issues like blight, improving roads, parking, garbage collection, parks, and townhouses on alleys. He commented that the key was to go back to the basic principles of why connectivity was important and consider how they weave the four quadrants of the area together. The other piece was recognizing that they needed to consider a possible range of options for the version of the plan sent out for public comment. He noted that staff had discussed looking at a 10 year vision based on the existing framework, road network, and buildings. There would also be a longer term vision with infill, additional connections, and parks.

Elliott Barnett, Planning Services Division, reviewed that they had heard the concerns of property owners and Commissioners about the issue of connectivity and the serious real life implications for people in the neighborhood. He commented that they saw connectivity not only as a benefit to transportation and walkability, but also as a way to increase access to businesses and provide a catalyst for development. He reported that all of the comments and direction from the Commission had been considered for recommendations that would ease many of the concerns while still making progress towards connectivity.

Mr. Barnett discussed why connectivity was important, commenting that it would accommodate growth, help people choose to walk or ride bicycles, create value, set up sites for development, and provide health benefits by shifting people away from driving everywhere. He reviewed that the area was a regional growth center and the City was tasked with a set of policy directions to create a finer grained transportation system that supports transit, bikes, and pedestrians. If they were successful in creating a plan that made that progress, it would help attract regional infrastructure funding to the neighborhood. Mr. Barnett noted that the number of connections had a lot of influence on people's transportation choices. He discussed how adding additional connections increases route options, makes the area a more attractive place to walk, and makes transportation more distributed. He noted that a smaller number of connections resulted in larger roads and land use more oriented around cars. More connections would allow for smaller roads which are quiet, low traffic streets. Mr. Barnett reported that the big arterials were barriers that pedestrians did not feel comfortable crossing and that moving some traffic off of the main arterial would allow more to be done with the space in the arterial.

Mr. Barnett discussed the original street network map, which included connections based on place-making and urban design goals. He reviewed that they had found that it was difficult for people to see themselves in that network, which was an idealized street network that did not show existing buildings. Feedback had also included concerns that the connections would adversely impact businesses; that they would be a disincentive to investment; that impacts would be disproportionate; that they should improve existing streets first; that they should reconsider the loop road alignment; and that they were too far ahead of the market. He reported that the 10 year vision concept would illustrate the "middle chapter" for reaching the long term vision. For the 10 year vision, they had modified the street network to recognize three different tiers and had followed the existing street grid in the northwest quadrant.

Mr. Barnett reviewed that staff had looked at other jurisdictions with a similar pattern of auto oriented development and large parcels that were being transformed into more of an urban pattern. Based on that analysis, staff identified three main considerations that would structure their approach moving forward. The first consideration was the scale of connectivity, where there were tradeoffs between the urban fine-grained blocks and larger blocks. The next consideration was whether to map the entire system, which would provide predictability, or to not map the roads, reducing up front concerns. The last consideration was for thresholds ranging from any work to only major work.

Mr. Barnett reported that staff was bringing forward recommended changes to the connectivity approach based on the feedback received. The first recommend was to develop a 10 year vision which would focus on the nearer term by primarily showing the Tier 1 projects along with enhancements to the existing street corridors. The 20 year vision would use the illustrative street network originally proposed as an example of a possible application of the connectivity standards. He noted that Tier 1 connections were essential to handle additional traffic in the neighborhood and included the new off-ramp from I-5, a transit connector at the mall, and the loop road. Tier 2 roads would establish the 600 by 600 foot block scale and would help redirect traffic from the congested arterial streets, but would not be mapped. Tier 3 roads would not be mapped and would focus on site access and internal connections. Mr. Barnett commented that they were recommending defining Tier 1 connections as capital projects that the City would take leadership on. Mapping of the Tiers 2 and 3 connections would be postponed until the point at which development was imminent and would be part of a connectivity plan requirement. Mr. Barnett noted that the recommended connectivity standards would only be applicable to Tiers 2 and 3.

Commissioners provided the following comments and questions:

- Chair Beale asked how the connectivity plan would work and what they would be asking the property owners to do. Mr. Barnett responded that they would look at other jurisdictions to develop the process, but it would be similar to a master plan and could be phased over time.
- Chair Beale asked how they defined the threshold for mid-range development activities. Mr. Barnett responded that they would be asking for guidance on the thresholds, but the initial staff proposal was for connectivity requirements not to be triggered by tenant improvements or minor additions.
- Commissioner McInnis commented that focusing on the Tier 1 roads for the first 10 years was a step forward and made it easier to discuss the details.
- Commissioner Santhuff expressed concern that if the Tier 2 roads were not mapped they would not be able to develop those roads in a consistent manner for multiple property owners. Mr. Boudet responded that there would be two visions mapped and that the Tier 2 roads would be shown in the longer term vision.
- Vice-Chair Wamback reviewed that one of the key aspects of the three Downtown Subarea Plans had been that, by doing review at the programmatic level through the subarea plans, developers and property owners would be exempt from certain requirements as long as they developed consistent with the plan. He suggested that the exemptions for Tacoma Mall Subarea Plan should only apply to people who want to abide by the goals of the Plan, while people who want to develop at the baseline would have to go through the regular process.
- Chair Beale suggested that they consider removing the Tier 2 and 3 concepts and instead propose design standards like functionally equivalent parking lots that function like streets without requiring the dedication of streets and easements.
- Chair Beale expressed concern that there were scenarios in mid-range development where an addition might trigger a requirement for an easement through the building gaining an addition.

Ben Thurgood, city staff person in the Continuing Improvements Initiative, facilitated an exercise to discuss ten key decisions that needed to be made across six different categories: loop road alignment options, connectivity principles, thresholds, Tier 2 connections, Tier 3 connections, and funding sources. Mr. Thurgood reviewed the activity in which Commissioners would go through the categories one at a time to vote on the options with and discuss why they voted the way they did.

The first vote, Loop Road Alignment options, was discussed. Mr. Barnett reported that they were seeking feedback on what alignments the loop road should use. Option A followed South Lawrence Street and cut across South 36th Street. Options B1 or B2 would cross private property in the northwest quadrant and create a new alignment. Option C followed South 38th street. Option D followed along the north side of the Madison school site. Commissioner Woolley reported that he voted for option C because it would be better for pedestrian access with respect to topography. Commissioner McInnis commented that he had voted for options C and D, because he wouldn't walk in the industrial area. Commissioner Santhuff reported that he voted for option A, because it was a straightforward loop and created the potential for a connection to the Water Ditch Trail. He also recommended that the loop road go through 35th Street instead and follow Cedar Street to 47th Street. Commissioner Petersen voted for options A and B

because, as a person who would only be in the area to do business, she would have no reason to take the D route. Commissioner Neal voted for option A because it made a more complete route and option B1 because it got rid of the slope at the edge. Commissioner Winship commented that he voted for option B1 because of the topography and option A because it was the path of least resistance. Chair Beale reported that he voted for option A because it fit with the loop road concept and option D because it was a lower volume street. Vice-Chair Wamback commented that he voted for a modified version of option A extending further north and incorporating a segment of the Water Flume Trail because it provided the easiest grade connection to the Flume Line Trail and would clean up illegal encroachment on 36th Street.

The second vote, Connectivity Principles was discussed. It was noted that the options were to continue with the proposed principles of the connectivity plan or to make changes to the principles. Following the vote, Commissioners provided recommendations on what changes to the principles were needed. Vice-Chair Wamback recommended that projects of citywide significance be funded citywide rather than only at the subarea level. Commissioner Neal requested more details on what it would mean to share costs proportionately. Commissioner Petersen expressed concern that they were forgetting about the residents and focusing on the businesses. Commissioner Santhuff commented that they needed to be planning Tier 2 connections purposefully ahead of time. Commissioner McInnis recommended that the Tier 1 projects be looked at as more of a capital improvement.

Commissioners concurred with postponing the vote on thresholds until later in the exercise.

The fourth vote concerned the Tier 2 connections with categories for flexibility in the 600 by 600 foot block size and the funding source. Commissioners discussed their votes on how much flexibility to allow for block sizes. Commissioner Neal voted to support 50-60 feet of flexibility to help align with existing street networks and buildings. Commissioner Petersen expressed support for +50 or -100 feet because she didn't want the blocks to be too large. Commissioner Santhuff supported 30 feet of flexibility because the Tier 2 connections should complete the pattern of the existing street grid. Commissioner McInnis suggested that they needed to consider a design review process to determine if a development meets the goals of the area. Commissioner Woolley commented that he supported 50 feet of flexibility for the northwest and southwest quadrants to continue the established grid. Vice-Chair Wamback commented that if they identify a connection as important they should map it out and not have flexibilities. Chair Beale concurred with Commission McInnis on design review, noting that he had voted for over 100 feet with added flexibility for mitigating features. Commissioner Winship voted to allow as much flexibility as possible so long as it meets objectives for connectivity. Commissioner Neal commented that she would like to see private roads be considered as functionally equivalent. On the issue of funding, the majority of Commissioners voted that costs should be shared between the City and the developer. Vice-Chair Wamback suggested that a cooperative agreement between the City and a property owner on how to develop the street would be a good reason to share costs. Chair Beale reported that he voted to have shared costs with lots of flexibility or have the City pay if there were specific standards. Commissioner Santhuff commented he support shared costs, assuming they wouldn't expect development of Tier 2 streets until there was a threshold of development and a possible development agreement.

The fifth vote concerned Tier 3 connections. Mr. Barnett noted that they were proposing requiring site access, internal connectivity, and for a connection every 300 feet on large block frontages. Voting categories included flexibility, ownership, and what standards would be used. For how much flexibility should be allowed for the maximum street frontage, Chair Beale recommended that Tier 3 connections be done through design review; Commissioner Santhuff commented that he liked the 300 by 600 foot blocks in the Madison neighborhood; Commissioner Petersen voted for 300 feet; Commissioner Neal voted to allow lots of flexibility; and Vice-Chair Wamback, Commissioner Woolley, and Commissioner McInnis concurred that flexibility should be allowed on a case by case basis. For the category of ownership, Chair Beale voted for private ownership; Vice-Chair Wamback voted for private ownership, while supporting roads being deeded over if a LID or BIA were created for maintenance; Commissioner Woolley, Commissioner McInnis, Commissioner Petersen, and Commissioner Neal voted for optional ownership; Commissioner Santhuff voted for optional ownership, while requiring certain standards to be met if they chose to make the connections public; and Commissioner Winship voted for ownership to be optional to the extent that they follow the grid. For what standards would be required, Chair Beale, Commissioner McInnis, Commissioner Woolley, Commissioner Santhuff, Commissioner Neal, and Commissioner

Winship voted for case by case standards with design review; Commissioner Santhuff, Commissioner Neal, Commissioner Winship, and Commissioner Petersen voted for a menu of options; and Vice-Chair Wamback voted for design review from a menu of options.

The sixth vote, whether new or increased funding sources were needed, was discussed. Mr. Barnett reviewed that if they chose to use public funding, it would mean looking at new funding options of some kind. Existing funding sources would still make progress, but the pace would be restrained. Voting options for new funding sources included utilizing existing tools, Impact Fees, Catalytic Street Fund or Local Improvement District (LID) Funding, or other funding tools. For the vote on funding sources, Commissioner Woolley voted for Catalytic Street Funding which would show the community how they were planning to pay for improvements; Commissioner McInnis voted for Catalytic Street Funding as a way to accelerate development; Commissioner Santhuff voted for Catalytic Street Funding, City funds from the general fund, LID, and grant funding; Commissioner Petersen voted to use impact fees; Commissioner Neal voted for LIDs or other funding sources; Commissioner Winship voted that all sources of funding should be on the table; Chair Beale voted that they should utilize existing tools; Vice-Chair Wamback voted that they should consider all funding sources, adding that Tax Increment Financing and Design-Build-Finance-Operate, which were not available under State law, would be optimum funding strategies for development in the Tacoma Mall area.

The third vote, Thresholds, had two components: at what point a plan would be required and what level of development should trigger dedication or construction. Vice-Chair Wamback commented that for the connectivity plan he wanted to require that properties of certain acreage develop a plan by a specific date. He recommended triggering implementation if a development would trigger a SEPA threshold or was anticipated to generate a certain number of new trips. Chair Beale voted for major site redevelopment, for both thresholds. Commissioner Winship voted for substantial additions to trigger the connectivity plan and for implementation to trigger with new construction initially, but with less development over time. Commissioner Neal voted to trigger a connectivity plan with substantial additions and to trigger dedication with new construction. Commissioner Petersen expressed concern that the options for both categories needed specifics. Commissioner Santhuff voted for a major TI or a minor addition to trigger the connectivity plan and for implementation to trigger with either substantial additions or new construction depending on the value of the development. Commissioner McInnis commented that for development of large sites, he preferred the functional equivalent concept. Commissioner Woolley reported that he liked the idea of incorporating property owner sized connections for the connectivity plan and substantial additions for triggering implementation.

Chair Beale recessed the meeting at 6:49 p.m. The meeting resumed at 7:01 p.m.

Mr. Barnett reported that they would return with staff recommendations for areas where there was not a clear consensus from the exercise. He reported that they had a clear direction on the principles. For Tier 3 connections, the consensus was for functionally equivalent design with more flexibility attached to design review. In terms of funding, the direction was to continue to explore more options. For Tier 2 connections, there were two perspectives: that Tier 2 connections should be mapped or that they were not distinct from Tier 3. For thresholds, there was consensus that major construction or redevelopment activities should be the trigger for dedication and construction. On the loop road alignment, the exercise indicated that option A was a clear alternative and C was not ideal.

Vice-Chair Wamback requested that in the draft subarea plan, staff review the language in Action T-4, regarding street and alley vacations, so they don't send a message that the plan forbids street vacations.

E. COMMUNICATION ITEMS & OTHER BUSINESS

There were no communication items.

F. ADJOURNMENT

At 7:09 p.m., the meeting of the Planning Commission was concluded.