

MINUTES

Eugene City Council
Work Session
McNutt Room – City Hall
777 Pearl Street—Eugene, Oregon

June 9, 2010
12:00 p.m.

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Chris Pryor, Mike Clark, George Brown, Andrea Ortiz, Alan Zelenka, Betty Taylor, George Poling (via telephone), Jennifer Solomon

Mr. Clark called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. and noted that Mayor Piercy was attending a rail summit in Vancouver and would not be in attendance.

A. WORK SESSION - West 11th Avenue Setbacks

Transportation Planning Manager Rob Inerfeld provided an overview of the West 11th Avenue setbacks and noted that City staff had been working with the Lane Transit District (LTD) in their efforts to extend LTD's EmX transit service into the West Eugene corridor. He noted that the current development standards called for buildings to be constructed closer to the street and that such standards might constrain the City's and LTD's ability to effectively locate EmX routes along West 11th Avenue.

Mr. Inerfeld noted that the current staff suggestion was intended to prevent additional encroachment along West 11th Avenue.

Mr. Inerfeld noted that staff would return to the council with an additional update regarding LTD's West Eugene EmX Extension (WEEE) project on June 23.

Mr. Inerfeld reported that LTD and City staff had scheduled an open house event regarding the WEEE project for June 9, 2010 at the Eugene Public Library.

Mr. Inerfeld briefly noted the alignment alternatives currently under consideration by LTD for the WEEE project.

Mr. Inerfeld explained the City's current land use code for the benefit of the council members and noted that the code required new buildings in commercial zones to be constructed within 15 feet of the front property right-of-way line. Mr. Inerfeld stated that this code provision might conflict with future corridor enhancements to West 11th Avenue and other City streets. Mr. Inerfeld briefly discussed and provided examples of other unintended development consequences of the code provision with respect to West 11th Avenue and Coburg Road.

Mr. Inerfeld briefly noted the physical characteristics of certain areas of West 11th Avenue and noted that while current City standards called for planting strips with street trees along arterial roadways there were actually very few street trees along West 11th Avenue west of Chambers Street.

Mr. Inerfeld described how special setbacks functioned as a development tool for the City wherein various right-of-way measurements along West 11th Avenue could be altered. Mr. Inerfeld stated that the staff's recommendation was to move forward with amending the right-of-way map to approximately 110 feet which would provide for LTD's EmX lanes and improved pedestrian access. Mr. Inerfeld expressed that the staff recommendation would only pertain to future development and would not impact any existing structures along West 11th Avenue.

Mr. Inerfeld commented that if LTD ultimately chose not to extend its EmX services along West 11th Avenue the council could revise the right-of-way standards back to their current form.

Mr. Inerfeld reminded the council that City transportation planning staff planned to return to council on July 12 to present the results of the West 11th Avenue transportation corridor study.

Mr. Inerfeld stated that the current staff recommendation had been prompted by feedback from members of the West Eugene Collaborative (WEC).

Mr. Pryor distributed copies of an October 2008 letter to the council from the WEC and recognized that the WEC had intended through its actions to preserve certain development options for the future.

Mr. Pryor stated that the staff-recommended motion did not represent any kind of guarantee that the WEEE project would be constructed along West 11th Avenue and noted that the final alignment for the WEEE project had not yet been selected. He further noted that the motion did not represent any sort of prelude to either the demolition of existing buildings along West 11th Avenue or the widening of any sections of West 11th Avenue.

Mr. Pryor maintained that the staff recommendation was only intended to put in place the mechanism to preserve the right-of-way along West 11th Avenue.

Mr. Poling stated that he had served on a Coburg Road Corridor Bus Rapid Transit stakeholder group in 2002 and noted that during his time with that group he had suggested placing a temporary moratorium on certain building code provisions regarding right-of-way setbacks.

Mr. Poling supported the staff recommendation and maintained that it was an important component of future development in the West Eugene area.

Mr. Inerfeld, responding to a question from Ms. Taylor, understood that altering the street setbacks as recommended by staff was a much easier strategy than attempting to declare a moratorium on the construction of buildings too close to the sidewalk on West 11th Avenue.

City Attorney Emily Jerome noted that the current setback provisions of the code applied to the entire City of Eugene. She further noted that the City's street right-of-way map showed intended future right-of-way and did not transform any properties into a right-of-way.

Ms. Taylor believed that the staff recommendation for the special setback would be viewed as a threat that the EmX route would be constructed.

Principal Planner Steve Nystrom, responding to a question from Ms. Taylor noted that the special setbacks would not prevent any future remodeling of existing structures so long as those remodels did not encroach upon established right-of-way or sidewalk areas.

Mr. Inerfeld, responding to a question from Mr. Brown, discussed how past suggestions for special setbacks had been applied to areas such as Coburg Road and how future considerations for special setbacks in other areas might be incorporated into the City's Transportation System Plan (TSP) update.

Mr. Brown asked if a special setback for Coburg Road had been implemented when plans for a Coburg Road EmX extension were being considered. Mr. Inerfeld replied that no such special setback had been implemented for Coburg Road.

Mr. Brown suggested that special setbacks might need to be considered for Coburg Road as well as Highway 99 and River Road.

Mr. Clark asked if the drawings Mr. Inerfeld had presented regarding the proposed travel lanes with the special setbacks were to scale. Mr. Inerfeld responded in the affirmative.

Mr. Pryor discussed how the WEC report on certain transportation concerns for the City had addressed the need for certain lane configurations on a multi-way boulevard that would allow for the rapid movement of large numbers of people but would still also allow for more localized traffic. He noted that the report had suggested the use of special setbacks similar to those that had been recommended by staff.

Mr. Brown noted his concern for owners of property along West 11th Avenue and noted that many of them were worried that they might lose their parking under any Code amendments that would provide for a special setback.

Mr. Inerfeld reminded Mr. Brown that the staff recommendation only affected new development along West 11th Avenue and would not affect existing buildings.

Ms. Ortiz responded to Mr. Brown's comments and noted there were several undeveloped areas in the area west of Fred Meyer along West 11th Avenue and that the special setback being recommended might be helpful toward encouraging development in that area.

Ms. Taylor, seconded by Mr. Poling, moved to direct the City Manager to proceed with Option A: to move forward with amending the Street Right-of-way Map for West 11th Avenue to allow for future improvements to that street. The motion passed unanimously, 8:0.

B. WORK SESSION - Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center

Mr. Poling excused himself from the meeting at 12:24 p.m.

Associate Planner Lydia McKinney presented background information and an overview of the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center project.

Ms. McKinney provided contextual information regarding the Walnut Station Mixed-use Center and noted that it was aligned with the City's growth management policies. She further noted that Eugene's adopted strategy to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as required by the State, also known as nodal development areas, was also served by the project.

Ms. McKinney showed the nodal development areas under the TransPlan and stated that the site for the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center was within the TransPlan parameters.

Ms. McKinney described the boundaries of the plan area for the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center and maintained that the area was well-poised to take advantage of a number of factors that support mixed-use development projects.

Ms. McKinney outlined the public engagement process for the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center and noted that five open house events and several meetings with stakeholders and property owners regarding the project had already taken place.

Ms. McKinney reported that the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center stakeholders group was comprised of representatives of the City of Eugene, the Fairmount Neighborhood Association, the University of Oregon and the Eugene Chamber of Commerce. She further expressed that the purpose of the stakeholder group had been to provide a forum to discuss and mediate a variety of concerns surrounding the project.

Ms. McKinney described how staff's public engagement work had led to the creation of the vision statement for the project, "Walnut Station Vision: A Gateway to the City." Ms. McKinney further noted that the vision statement was intended to demonstrate the City's determination to increase density while maintaining the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Ms. McKinney discussed traditional zoning codes as they had applied to previous development in Eugene. Ms. McKinney maintained that such codes had historically resulted in highly unpredictable development.

Ms. McKinney defined form based zoning codes as a method of regulating development to achieve a specific urban form. She further discussed how form based codes would be applied to the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center. She added that existing City building codes would still apply to the Walnut form based code.

Ms. McKinney presented a series of images that demonstrated how the development of the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center would affect the development of the Franklin Multi-way Boulevard.

Ms. McKinney noted that staff proposed a special setback for the Franklin multi-way boulevard and had commissioned a great deal of conceptual design work to demonstrate the minimum right-of-way needs for the area.

Ms. McKinney noted that the Franklin multi-way boulevard project was part of a series of United Front Partners projects and had been strongly supported by Congressman Peter DeFazio.

Ms. McKinney described the adoption process for the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center project and also described the various code and plan amendments that would be required.

Ms. McKinney noted that the City's Planning Commission had held a public hearing on April 20 and had also finalized their deliberations at a hearing on May 24. She noted that the Planning Commission had unanimously recommended approval of the adoption package..

Ms. McKinney noted that the council had scheduled a public hearing on the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center for June 21, 2010, and were expected to act on the adoption process at their July 26 meeting.

Mr. Pryor was impressed and excited by the development potential indicated by the Walnut Station vision and hoped that the project could be successfully implemented with a minimum of adverse impacts to the community.

Ms. Ortiz was very pleased with the staff presentation and looked forward to the successful development of the project.

Ms. McKinney, responding to a question from Councilor Brown, addressed how building height provisions would function under the Walnut form based code.

Ms. Ortiz asked how the University of Oregon had been involved in the development and planning of the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center project. Ms. McKinney replied that University representatives had attended various stakeholder meetings regarding the project and had been very supportive.

Mr. Zelenka commended City staff for their public engagement efforts surrounding Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center project. He further noted his support for the mixed-use elements of the multi-way boulevard.

Mr. Zelenka noted his concerns regarding elements of the form based code and its impact on neighborhood livability in the community. He suggested that the City needed to more clearly understand the potential negative impacts of the use of a form based code so that such impacts might be avoided.

Mr. Clark asked why the travel lanes planned for the multi-way boulevard appeared to deviate from existing City standards. Ms. McKinney responded that City planning staff had attempted to establish the minimum right-of-way necessary for the multi-way boulevard in order to preserve enough space for sidewalks and medians along the multi-way boulevard, but that the Planning Commission supported travel lanes to be 11 feet in width, as per City standards.

Mr. Clark commended the work of Ms. McKinney and her colleagues and further noted his appreciation that the stakeholders had been highly involved in the process.

Mr. Brown noted his concerns regarding the form based code being applied to the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center project and stated that he intended to investigate elements of the code in greater detail.

Ms. McKinney, responding to a question from Mr. Brown, confirmed that the Walnut form based code would only apply to new development and would not affect existing buildings.

Ms. McKinney, responding to a question from Mr. Brown, described the maximum building heights for the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center under the form based code.

Mr. Brown noted his concern that the Walnut form based code might reduce parking requirements for development in that area.

Mr. Brown supported the idea that taller buildings would be suitable for the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center area, particularly on the north side of Franklin Avenue.

Ms. McKinney, responding to a comment from Mr. Brown, described how developers could apply for development paths alternative to the provisions of the form based code.

Mr. Zelenka noted his concerns of how Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center could affect traffic patterns in the area and hoped that more specific information in that regard would be provided by staff in the form of a comprehensive traffic impact assessment as the project progressed.

Mr. Zelenka agreed that the language that had been used in the Planning Commission's deliberation materials was stronger and more effective.

Mr. Zelenka commented on previous development discussions regarding the University arena and noted that the issue of University use with respect to mixed-use development was very ill-defined. Mr. Zelenka maintained that the matter needed further clarification and hoped that such clarifications could be provided by the Planning Commission within the next year.

Mr. Clark thanked staff for their presentation regarding the Walnut Station Mixed-Use Center.

Mr. Clark adjourned the meeting at 12:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Forrest

Beth Forrest,
City Recorder

(Recorded by Wade Hicks)