

City of Takoma Park
Takoma Junction Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 11, 2011

The City of Takoma Park Takoma Junction Task Force met on Tuesday, January 11, 2011, in the Azalea Room of the Takoma Park Community Center, Takoma Park.

Members Present: Hailu Aichehi, Lorig Charkoudian, Billy Coulter, Kay Daniels-Cohen, Steve Dubb, Megan Gallagher, Seth Grimes, Andy Kelemen, Linette Lander, Barbara Muhlbacher, Katrina Oprisko, Lorraine Pearsall, Roger Schlegel, Jeffrey Trunzo, and Ellen Zavian.

Members Absent: James DiLuigi, Roz Grigsby, Howard Kohn, Susan Robb, Jennifer Sisane.

Staff Present: Suzanne Ludlow, Deputy City Manager

Others Present: J.J. Smith, Patch; Jeremy Crandall, Legislative Aide to Delegate Heather Mizeur

1. Call to Order and Agenda Review

A quorum present, the meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. The agenda drafted by the steering committee for January 11, and meeting minutes from December 8 and December 21, 2010, were distributed. Draft work plans and updates submitted by the subcommittees were also distributed. A list of potential consultants has been compiled, and was included in the distribution for review during the meeting.

Roz Grigsby has withdrawn from the TF. She will continue to be available to the TF in a consultative capacity in her role as Executive Director of Old Town Business Association. TF membership is now 20, therefore quorum is 11.

2. December 8 and December 21 Meeting Minutes

Action: The meeting minutes of December 8, 2010 were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to accept the meeting minutes of December 8, 2010 as drafted. The meeting minutes were accepted as drafted.

Vote Results: **Yes-15, No-0.** The motion passed.

Action: The meeting minutes of December 21, 2010 were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to accept the meeting minutes of December 21, 2010 as modified. The meeting minutes were accepted as modified.

Vote Results: Yes-15, No-0. The motion passed.

3. Route 410 Status & Maryland State Highway Administration Interactions

Previous Discussion: At the TF meeting of December 21, members discussed the state delegation's recent letter to SHA. Noted in the letter was lack of traffic signal control. Members also expressed interest in documentation of ownership of the road, City Attorney progress in reviewing history and documentation, District 20 Delegation coordination with Council, and involvement of State Comptroller Peter Franchot. TF was informed that Suzanne Ludlow, Deputy City Manager, would like to address TF concerns about these issues at the January 11 meeting. TF agreed that an opportunity for an update from the Deputy City Manager would be useful and timely. Members were invited to compose questions, send them to Andy Kelemen for compilation, for sharing with Suzanne Ludlow in advance of the discussion.

Discussion:

Suzanne Ludlow, Deputy City Manager, and Jeremy Crandall, Legislative Aide to Delegate Heather Mizeur, joined the meeting. They provided the history of the interactions about these issues to date and plans for continuing the negotiations. The substantive points discussed follow:

Ludlow:

History:

- State maintained Route 410 for about 60 years
- The road was designated as Route 410 in the 1930's
- Recent efforts imploring the State to make overdue repairs resulted in the State "discovering" that the City owned the roadway, thus implying that the City was responsible for its maintenance
- Records research about ownership are inconclusive at this time. This is normal. Public roads were not recorded in the same way as private residential property records.
- Ownership of the road is a "right-of-way." It was originally someone's property, that use evolved into a roadway as the need for access increased.

- Abandonment impact is unclear. Does it mean that ownership reverts to private ownership, regress to another form of public ownership, or something else?
- Negotiation will be required to resolve the issue, litigation is not appropriate.
- Boundaries are not clear, how & when information is entered into records is not controlled. Descriptors are identified by mile markers.
- The records discovery process is ongoing at this time
- The section of Route 410 which is four-lanes wide through the Junction (overlapping with Route 195 – Carroll Avenue) is not in dispute. It is State owned.

Plans & Issues:

- City Attorney is working with SHA
- City Staff is working with Council, more strategic direction from Council is needed
- SHA standards are applicable to the Junction, therefore it can be assumed that recommended alterations to signage, reconfiguration of crosswalks, etc., that conform to SHA standards, can be implemented.
- Practical matters such as snow removal will continue to be the responsibility of the State
- Policy and Best Practices of SHA priorities will prevail. This means that the safe and efficient movement of public transportation, commercial vehicles, and public safety vehicles is the highest priority. Lesser SHA priorities, though important, are sidewalks, pedestrian movements, snow storage areas, bicycle lanes, commuter vehicle passage.
- There are equipment limitations in regard to the present traffic signal. Equipment upgrades are currently underway to the signal at Route 410 & New Hampshire.
- Differences sometimes emerge between local, County, and SHA authorities over issues of “speed & scale.” Example: SHA requires a large font on signage which can be read at higher speeds; local use at lower speeds may allow clarity of signage with a smaller font.

Crandall:

History & Plan:

- Delegate became aware of maintenance issue in summer 2009

- Delegation wants the road restored by any funding means possible (State, Federal, multiple sources).
- This is a Delegation high priority; making sure the road is in excellent shape before any “official” transfer of responsibility from the State to the City.
- Intent of recent Delegation letter is two-fold: 1) Get the roadway repaired, and 2) Maintain City ownership
- Negotiation strategy is that the designation as State Route 410 obligates the State to provide maintenance. Taxpayer burden on a municipality would be too high to assume total local responsibility for maintenance for a State route.
- Desirable outcome would be for a full rebuild to improve the roadway to current standards before any local responsibility for future maintenance is transferred.
- Full City ownership is unlikely; therefore priorities and division of responsibilities may be the desirable outcome for all parties.

TF Questions/Comments & Guest Responses:

The function of the road and the liveability impacts on the Junction are the priorities for the TF. [Seth Grimes]

Is Delegate Hucker engaged? [Andy Kelemen]

“Yes” [Crandall]

Are all parties in agreement at this point? Did Council review the content of the Delegation letter? [Roger Schlegel]

“Yes, informally” [Crandall]

Is it conceivable that the roadway could not be State Route 410 – could wayfinder signage move the highway traffic through or around the City on an alternate route? [Roger Schlegel]

“No. The State declares the routes. It is not a municipality function. State controls municipalities, they are not equal. Issues involving highways are addressed through negotiation processes, they are not legal contests. [Ludlow]

Is Flower Avenue decoupled from Route 410? [Roger Schlegel]

“Yes” [Ludlow]

Please clarify statement about backlog of State highway work. [Ellen Zavian]

“State has a \$2 Billion backlog of road projects, previous statement about 2-year backlog was a misstatement.” [Crandall]

Are the demarcation points of State ownership, and disputed State or City ownership, clear or in contention? [Barbara Muhlbacher]

“Segments are clear. Junction section is State owned and not in dispute.” [Ludlow]

Issues around the capacity of the roadway and its congestion extend beyond how it functions in the Junction area. The impact areas extend to New Hampshire, Piney Branch, Georgia Avenue, etc., and beyond. How are these larger issues being incorporated into this discussion? [Roger Schlegel]

“True. By way of example, the Junction traffic light infrastructure is outdated. It is controlled by the State. County management of the signal could more easily allow for coordination of impacts across the larger area. Note that infrastructure work to the signals at Route 410 and New Hampshire are currently undergoing an upgrade which could be a component of such a plan. Also, the future use of the Washington Adventist Hospital site could be a significant factor to be coordinated into the Junction signal. There are State standards for emergency vehicles that must be followed, including for the movement of fire and rescue vehicles. [Ludlow]

Closing Remarks by Ludlow:

Multiple overlapping issues influence what will happen in regard to the ownership issue of Route 410. The Council will be providing more guidance to Staff for the negotiations. An issue important to the discussion is the evolving movement towards “Green Streets.” Another important consideration is the Historic District. The general appearance of the Junction area, as well as the factors which are important to the City residents, such as the safe movement of pedestrians and bicycles in the area will influence negotiations.

In regard to the roundabout, there is no initiative to proceed with an alternative roadway configuration in the Junction. The SHA concept was simply a “thought-exercise” undertaken by SHA staff. It does not take into consideration any of the components that would be necessary to begin a discussion about a reconfiguration. Any such effort would have to start completely from scratch, taking into consideration all of the factors which must be evaluated to construct a proposal. The State has not taken any action to initiate that process.

4. TPSS Co-op Coordination

Discussion: Lorig Charkoudian provided an update to the TF about expansion plans. On January 12th, the Co-op’s expansion task force will meet. As TF members may be aware, the Co-op is interested in expanding, has created an expansion task

force, and has committed funds in the amount of \$500,000 to explore expansion. TF Subcommittees “A” & “B” are logical liaisons to the Co-op’s expansion task force. More information should be available after their January 12th meeting.

5. Work Plan Coordination and January 31 Presentation to Council

Discussion: A presentation to Council is scheduled for January 31. TF members are welcome to accompany and support the presenters. The TF concurred that the near-term improvements discussed previously should be brought to the Council attention. These include the City lot, traffic signal timing, pavement markings, cross walks, and signage for parking.

Coordination of the subcommittee work plans is a high priority item for Seth and Howard. Once created, the coordinated plan will be circulated to the TF for review. Confirmation of subcommittee spokespersons was requested. The spokespersons are: “A” Howard, “B” Roger, “C” Katrina.

6. Historic District – Meeting with Montgomery County Office of Historic Preservation

Discussion: Scott Whipple, Historic Preservation Supervisor for the Montgomery County Office of Historic Preservation, is available to meet with the TF subcommittees on Thursday, January 20th, in a “Committee-of-the-Whole” session. The location is Historic Takoma’s building on Carroll Avenue, meeting time is 7:30 pm. Mr. Whipple will be able to provide insights and guidance about the process for building or alterations within the historic district. TF members expressed interest in understanding the basis for historic district designation, differences (if any) in types of historic designations, how the districts are administered, and which Codes (Chapter 24A Montgomery was mentioned) are relevant.

Seth Grimes offered to compile and organize questions and topics of interest to facilitate the discussion. Members were asked to formulate questions or points about what issues they would like to see addressed, and to forward them to Seth, preferably by this weekend (January 16). He will then share the compiled document with the TF, and arrange for Mr. Whipple to review the topics of interest in advance of the meeting.

Ellen Zavian noted that she would be unable to compose questions in advance, having no familiarity with the Historic District legal construct, and in particular adjudications. She requested the meeting minutes reflect her statement, “Mr.

Whipple's statements are only an opinion, and that the Historic Preservation Office is "not God".

7. Inquiry to Consultants

Discussion: The consultant list created and updated by Linette and Kay was reviewed. Recommendations for corrections, exclusions, and inclusions were presented and accepted by the TF. An updated list incorporating these changes will be created and then distributed to the TF.

8. Subcommittee Reports and Discussion

Discussion: Each subcommittee had an opportunity to update the TF on their progress. In addition, coordination across the subcommittees was discussed.

a) Tier 1 Issues: The lynchpin issues that help clarify, focus and coordinate the subsequent work of the subcommittees. Traffic flow and control options, access to parking, environmental issues related to commercial properties and Cit lot, concerns of residential neighbors, Historic preservation, Fire Department requirements, (see December 21 minutes).

b) Subcommittee A: Tasks are divided amongst the members and individual work is proceeding. The subcommittee has not met since their last report to the TF. Work on the environmental data is in progress. Historic district issues, the Co-op, and a potential art market are in development.

c) Subcommittee B: Finalization of the contact list is expected soon. A plan for outreach about events and to nearby residences and neighborhood associations is underway. Suggestion to develop naming protocols for public documents was suggested.

d) Subcommittee C: Met on January 5. Work is progressing, issues and interests continue to be defined.

e) Subcommittee coverage, coordination, adjustments & other general discussion: Howard and Seth are creating a shell report, with Seth taking the lead. Suggestion made that subcommittee work products continue to be forwarded by the designated spokespersons to help with version control.

Seth will not be in attendance at the meeting of January 26.

Next Topics

Discussion: The group agreed to include the following items on the next agenda:

- Progress and feedback on coordination of subcommittee work plans
- Presentation of subcommittee work plans and progress at every subsequent meeting
- Subcommittee meeting schedules and locations provided when ready
- Review Council presentation update topics

The group agreed to provide the steering committee with any additional topics for the next agenda.

The meeting schedule dates and rooms are as follows:

Wednesday, January 26	Hydrangea Room
Tuesday, February 8	Hydrangea Room
Wednesday, February 23	Hydrangea Room
Tuesday, March 8	Azalea Room
Wednesday, March 23	Hydrangea Room

The TF website is www.takomajunction.org

9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeff Trunzo, Secretary

Roger Schlegel, Secretary