

City of Takoma Park
Takoma Junction Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 21, 2010

The City of Takoma Park Takoma Junction Task Force met on Tuesday, December 21, 2010, in the Takoma Park Community Center, Takoma Park.

Members Present: Kay Daniels-Cohen, James DiLuigi, Steve Dubb, Seth Grimes, Andy Kelemen, Howard Kohn, Linette Lander, Barbara Muhlbacher, Katrina Oprisko, Lorraine Pearsall, Susan Robb, Roger Schlegel, Jennifer Sisane, and Lorig Charkoudian.

Members Absent: Hailu Aichehi, Billy Coulter, Megan Gallagher, Jeffrey Trunzo, Ellen Zavian.

Staff Present: None

Others Present: J.J. Smith.

1. Welcome (including introductions if any outsiders are present) and agenda review.

A quorum present, the meeting was called to order at approximately 7:37 p.m. J.J. Smith introduced himself as a local reporter.

2. Review, corrections, and vote on December 8 minutes.

The agenda for the December 8 meeting was still in preparation and will be reviewed for approval at the next meeting on January 11, 2011.

3. Route 410 status & January 11 discussion.

Discussion: TF members were asked for their comment on the state delegation's recent letter to SHA, which advocated for full transfer of ownership of Rt. 410 to the City, throughout the City. Observation was made that the letter recommended that the City receive permitting and pedestrian control authority, but that the letter did not address traffic signal control. Signal control includes both timing and phasing. Peter Franchot has offered to talk to state officials to see if engineers could address timing changes, which can be made remotely by engineers. It is unknown whether SHA has made progress in locating documentation of the current ownership of all Rt. 410 sections within the City. City Attorney Sue Silber is pursuing these issues. A concern was expressed that the D-20 delegation seems to be speaking for the Council on the 410/Flower Avenue questions. It was announced that Suzanne Ludlow would like to attend the January 11 TF meeting, and members generally accepted this proposal.

Action: Howard Kohn volunteered to follow up with Peter Franchot, who had offered to contact a state highway engineer regarding the possibility of signal timing adjustments or experiments. In preparation for the planned attendance of Suzanne Ludlow at the January 11 TF meeting, Andy Keleman will draft questions, send them to the TF listserv for suggestions, and then send the final questions to Ms. Ludlow.

4. Subcommittee reports & discussion.

A) City lot/business district.

Lorig Charkoudian presented Subcommittee A's developing work plan, which it had shared with the TF. Some elements of the work plan don't have deadlines, as they will be coordinated with other subcommittees. Recently "A" members conducted a walkabout of the Junction, which led to more thinking about parking. The group feels that "a sense of a town square" ought to exist somewhere in the Junction, and suggested that the B.Y. Morrison Park might fulfill that function.

Discussion: Since Subcommittee C has also been thinking about the park's use, it was suggested that park-related questions be assigned to Subcommittee C in order to avoid duplication of efforts. A broader discussion ensued about the question of overlap in subcommittees' scope of work. Susan Robb observed that B.F. Morrison Park's design and proximity to residences require that careful consideration be given to its increased use, particularly if that would involve musical events or other noise-generating activities. There seemed to be general agreement with this view, although Andy Keleman shared the impression that the preserved filling station structure was intended for use as a bandstand.

Action: It was generally agreed that overlap is acceptable and perhaps advantageous in the early phases of the TF's work, because it will allow for a diversity of possibilities to emerge, and for some synergies to develop across the work of the subcommittees. Where subcommittees' work results in conflicting concepts for the same aspect of the Junction, commonalities can be worked out in the full TF meeting. However, it was agreed that duplicate inquiries to the same stakeholders or experts ought to be avoided, and that this can be achieved by keeping the Co-Chairs apprised of each subcommittee's research and outreach activities.

B) Research and outreach.

Subcommittee B has met once since the previous TF meeting. The group has not revised its work plan. Ellen Zavian has completed a list of business owner contacts, which does not include property owner contacts, and plans to organize an outreach meeting for neighborhood association leaders in January. Per an assignment given at the December 8 TF meeting, Kay Daniels-Cohen, with Linette Lander, has been refining the list of questions for potential consultants. Roger Schlegel is preparing a digest of relevant material contained in the Task Force Resource Note Book, with the goal of summarizing past initiatives, resolutions, and recommendations which the TF may need to acknowledge in its deliberations. As examples, the

Council-adopted report of the Task Force on Environmental Action strongly recommends the installation of a mini-roundabout at the Junction; and the 2000 Master Plan, which is still in effect, recommends bicycle and pedestrian improvements in the Junction as well as treatment of the Junction as an extension of the Old Town commercial district.

Discussion: Concern was expressed that the TF should not feel restricted by the findings or recommendations of past initiatives such as those referenced in the TF Resource Note Book. In addition, it was pointed out that the Note Book contents omit important elements of the background and context that could help to frame TF discussion. For example, the extensive work of the Sherman Avenue group and other area residents to organize businesses and seek livability and traffic improvements is not acknowledged. Lorraine Pearsall shared concerns about county rezoning efforts going on now. She described how Kensington is struggling with recent Planning Board proposals that would incentivize density by relaxing parking requirements for new developments. Jim DiLuigi, pointing out that many area jurisdictions have sought to emulate Clarendon (in Arlington) as a “model” for successful density increase, suggested that the motivation for such redevelopment is usually money, and that it is often difficult to translate/apply the same “model” approaches to areas elsewhere.

A broader discussion ensued about the list of potential consultants to be contacted, as well as the continuing question of when and whether to involve consultants. An attempt was made to define a list of potential consultants. Those mentioned were:

- Gabe Klein, recently departed DC Transportation Director;
- Farol Hamer, a Takoma Park resident who works with Alexandria planning issues;
- Natural Resource Design, which designed rain garden improvements for the end of Hancock Avenue near Opal Daniels Park;
- Urban Land Institute;
- Jim Cohen, a planning professor at the University of Maryland; and
- Bruce Levin, a small local developer who is familiar with Takoma Park development issues.

As in previous TF meetings, a range of views were expressed about the consultant question. Steve Dubb emphasized the view that time is of the essence, that potential consultants should be contacted as soon as possible, and that the general scope of work under consideration would be scenario planning per Subcommittee A and C work plans. Jim DiLuigi felt that the TF needs to get more clarity about the issues it wants to consult about. Katrina Oprisko said that, as the TF is comprised of local residents who have been looking at the Junction for a long time, the issues are already clear. Linette Lander pointed out that it is not necessary to assume that a consultant must have worked in this geographic area for a long time in order to provide useful assistance; she also pointed out that much information about consultants’ expertise and fit for the project can be gleaned from their websites and other sources before approaching them. Linette also cautioned that the TF could fail to get the full benefit of the expertise of a consultant if the scope of the issues under consideration is presented too narrowly. Lorraine Pearsall suggested that the TF would benefit more from working with consultants who are detail

researchers, such as traffic engineers, rather than with “generalists.” Andy Keleman pointed out that the best arrangement with a consultant would be one in which the TF assigned specific work which the consultant could then complete independently, rather than an arrangement in which the consultant had to be in constant contact with the TF. Jim reemphasized that the key to success with a consultant is to define the problem -- to make clear what you want addressed vs. what you don’t want addressed – and that this requires that we refine what we’re looking for as the end result before approaching a consultant. Kay Daniels-Cohen identified our [community’s] problem as a continuing failure to define what we want at the Junction, despite the efforts of a many groups over many years to address Junction issues.

Action: Seth Grimes proposed a final discussion of the inquiry to consultants at the January 11 meeting, with agreement to be reached on whom to contact. The TF affirmed this plan by consensus. Kay Daniels-Cohen agreed to send out a list of potential consultants to all TF members, with TF members being invited to add other potential consultants to the list.

C) Traffic, pedestrian, streetscape, and livability.

Katrina Oprisko presented Subcommittee C’s developing work plan, which it had sent to the Co-Chairs. In response to comments received at the December 8 TF meeting, the group has generalized its work plan, organizing its work into three phases: identification of issues and priorities (December-January); individual work on developing draft resolutions/recommendations (January-March); and solicitation of more input from Subcommittees A and B to help refine resolutions/recommendations (April-August). The group has also recognized a need to define “livability” more clearly.

Discussion: Subcommittee C was praised for its responsiveness to TF comments in revising its work plan. Asked to provide an example of the subcommittee’s first-phase work of identifying issues and priorities, Katrina Oprisko described how the group has discussed the broad topic of “pedestrian safety” and broken it down into specific issues related to crosswalks, ADA accessibility, etc.

Action: Subcommittee C will meet next on January 5. It will share its work plan with the TF.

5. Subcommittee coverage, coordination, adjustments & (other) general discussion.

Barbara Muhlbacher mentioned that Subcommittee C has been investigating the costs that would be associated with hiring a roundabout engineering consultant, and has received one estimate of either \$6,000 per intersection or \$178/hour. Jim DiLuigi responded to the effect that it at this point in the TF’s process, the group should emphasize open-ended exploration of pros and cons, as overfocusing on a specific proposal could cause division. Observation was made that traffic questions involve much more than just the roundabout proposal. There was general agreement that traffic should be a priority issue for the TF.

The question of coordination with the TPSS Co-op was introduced. There was general agreement about the value of meeting with representatives of the Co-op Expansion Task Force, perhaps at the January 26 TF meeting or, as an alternative, in February. In a more general sense, Seth Grimes proposed that the TF talk in January about coordination of outreach efforts.

6. Workplan assembly and next steps.

Discussion: Howard Kohn and Seth Grimes announced that they will be regularizing the three subcommittee work plans so that they can then be integrated with agenda-setting for the whole-TF meetings, which can be discussed on January 11.

A discussion ensued about which topics might be considered to be “Tier One” issues within the context of TF agenda-setting. Addressing and resolving these overarching or “lynchpin” issues could help to clarify, focus, and coordinate the subsequent work of the subcommittees.

Members suggested that a preliminary list of “Tier One” issues would include:

- (1) traffic flow and control options, including the impact of these options on access to parking;
- (2) environmental issues related to commercial properties as well as the City lot, e.g. properties known to require cleanup or already involved in voluntary cleanup efforts through the State of Maryland;
- (3) concerns and preferences of residential neighbors within a “stones throw” of the Junction;
- (4) Historic Preservation parameters; and
- (5) any Fire Department needs or requirements.

With reference to #4 above (Historic Preservation parameters), Lorraine Pearsall pointed out that the Environmental Action task force’s mini-roundabout recommendation did not reference the Junction’s designation as a historic district, with the review and approval requirements thereby associated with any proposed hardscape changes; she pointed out that the [Takoma Junction] TF binder omits a letter from the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission which expresses reservations about the roundabout alternative. With reference to #3 above, Roger Schlegel suggested that Subcommittee B could make it a priority to set up a meeting with nearby residential neighbors of the Junction.

Action: Subcommittees will send revised work plans to the TF Co-Chairs, who will regularize the work plans. The Co-Chairs will seek to round out a list of “Tier One” issues and prioritize discussion/consideration of these issues. The TF affirmed this approach by consensus.

7. Adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted

Roger Schlegel, Secretary

Jeff Trunzo, Secretary