

City of Takoma Park
Takoma Junction Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 23, 2011

The City of Takoma Park Takoma Junction Task Force met on Wednesday, February 23, 2011, in the Hydrangea Room of the Takoma Park Community Center, Takoma Park.

Members Present: Seth Grimes, Kay Daniels-Cohen, Howard Kohn, Barbara Muhlbacher, Katrina Oprisko, Susan Robb, Roger Schlegel, Jeffrey Trunzo. Linette Lander and Jennifer Sisane arrived after the meeting began.

Members Absent: Billy Coulter, Megan Gallagher, Andy Kelemen, Steve Dubb, Lorig Charkoudian, Hailu Aichehi, James DiLuigi, Lorraine Pearsall, and Ellen Zavian.

Staff Present: none

Others Present: J.J. Smith, of Takoma Patch; Diana Kohn

1. Call to Order and Agenda Review

A quorum was not present at the beginning of the meeting. The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m. J.J. Smith and Diana Kohn were introduced. No meeting minutes were distributed.

After agenda review, it was decided to address item #4 on the agenda first, as it did not require a quorum.

2. Proposed Council Resolution on Near-Term Improvements

Seth Grimes reported that Ward 3 Councilmember Dan Robinson will cooperate with the Task Force on creating a resolution and helping to formulate language, with TF feedback and with Dan coordinating with the Mayor and the City Council to include the resolution in an upcoming Council agenda.

Related discussion followed, which focused on phasing and timing issues related to the traffic signals. Apparently the lights cannot be timed easily by the county because they are “obsolete” and cannot be retrofitted for the county to control and adjust them from a central location. Per Susan Robb, Lorraine Pearsall has reached out to the SHA and is working with the mayor to find the appropriate SHA person to talk to. The sense of the TF was that a meeting with the SHA should precede any request to the Council regarding interim light timing experiments. If it is the case that the lights must be replaced, this would seem to be an expensive proposition that might require getting the state delegation involved.

Katrina Oprisko reported that an SHA representative would likely be meeting with Subcommittee C during the week of March 7. Seth suggested that the subcommittee invite Councilmembers Robinson and Clay as well as Mayor Williams to this meeting. Katrina agreed to do so.

Seth Grimes observed that according to custom that seems to be observed in other local matters, replacement of the lights may require a formal request from the City to the County.

The tentative target date for the Council to consider a resolution on interim, short-term actions at the Junction is late March.

3. Community Outreach Meetings and Feedback Questions

[Item #5 on the agenda (review of discussions about a Takoma Junction Market) was skipped.]

The first community outreach meeting was held on Tuesday, February 22. “Stone’s-throw” neighbors of the Junction were invited. The meeting took place in the Co-op community room. Several members of the Task Force were present, including Jeff Trunzo and Susan Robb, as well as four Subcommittee B members. Those present described the meeting as very positive and shared major themes and trends that arose in the discussion. Improvement of the pedestrian experience was seen as the most significant issue raised. It was noted that those present included a nice mix of long-time residents and newcomers, as well as older and younger residents.

Additional outreach meetings with community associations are scheduled, and Subcommittee B will collate and summarize outreach findings in May, after all outreach meetings, including those to businesses, are concluded. When the TF prepares tentative recommendations during the summer, Subcommittee B will share these with those who attended the outreach meetings for their comment.

Kay Daniels-Cohen passed around the six-part questionnaire that Subcommittee B is using as a tool for gathering data from all participants at outreach meetings. She encouraged TF members to fill out the questionnaire themselves.

4. Subcommittee Reports and Discussion (items not covered earlier in the agenda)

It was shared that Tebabu Assefa is trying to move his coffeehouse idea forward, and has a targeted opening of 2012-2013 in mind. He has an interest in locating at the Junction if possible. Roz Grigsby, executive director of Old Takoma Business Association (OTBA), has encouraged him to move up his timetable and has offered OTBA’s help.

Jeff Trunzo reported that the City has a new round of façade improvement money available. A grant of up to \$2,000 can be received; an additional \$9,000 in 50% matching funds is also available. Façade improvement is fairly broadly defined and can include items such as outdoor furniture, for example. The property owner has to be supportive of the application.

Also, an “Architect in Residence” program, a free service, is available to business owners. It was agreed that TF members, while not acting in any official capacity, are free to try to drum up interest for these and other initiatives.

5. Review and Adoption of February 8 TF Meeting Minutes.

A quorum having been achieved, the TF returned to this agenda item which it had skipped earlier. One correction to the draft February 8 minutes was noted. With this correction, the February 8 minutes were unanimously adopted.

6. Roundabouts Discussion.

With a quorum now present, the TF returned to this item, which had been skipped earlier in the meeting. This discussion had been requested by Barbara Muhlbacher at the previous TF meeting.

Seth Grimes introduced the item by briefly summarizing the Kittelson Associates roundabout feasibility study which had been carried out in 2007. The Concept A roundabout would create a cross intersection at Carroll and Sycamore by relocating the B.Y. Morrison Park structure; this intersection would be constructed as a mini-roundabout. The Concept B roundabout would reroute eastbound Columbia Avenue up the hill through the City lot to align with Grant Avenue, and a mini-roundabout with five entrances would be constructed to handle the flow of traffic of those two streets plus Carroll Avenue and Ethan Allen Avenue. Seth Grimes commented that he sees “B” as a non-starter because it destroys the wooded lot, takes away the development value of the City-owned property, and takes away sidewalk from the former corner store at Grant and Carroll.

Historic preservation issues would also come into play. Measurements made independently by Seth Grimes, and by Howard and Diana Kohn, suggest that the widest point of the intersection currently in front of the Co-op is in the range of 77 feet. A fact sheet on the modern roundabout that was distributed at an earlier TF meeting mentions 130-250 feet as a common width of a modern roundabout. Seth made the point that the challenge in considering roundabout possibilities is how to get the benefits of the roundabout given the narrow width and topography of the current intersection, especially given the Historic Preservation Commission’s aversion to changes in the existing rights-of-way.

Barbara Muhlbacher then made a presentation on the possibilities for fitting a mini-roundabout into the existing rights-of-way at the B.Y. Morrison/Co-op intersection. She began by noting that a mini-roundabout can be as small as 10 feet across in the center and that there are a great variety of types of mini-roundabouts. She then provided an “overlay” demonstration of two possible roundabout designs, one at the Co-op and one at the fire station, using tracing paper placed over the Junction map that was given to all members in the fall. TF members discussed in some detail the potential merits and downsides of the roundabout that might fit in front of the Co-op.

7. Adjournment.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:15 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeff Trunzo, Secretary

Roger Schlegel, Secretary