

City of Takoma Park
Takoma Junction Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 26, 2011

The City of Takoma Park Takoma Junction Task Force met on Thursday, May 26, 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, Ellen Zavian, Steve Dubb, Linette Lander, Lorig Charkoudian, and Andy Kelemen.

Members Absent: Jeffrey Trunzo, Billy Coulter, Megan Gallagher, Hailu Aichehi, James DiLuigi, Lorraine Pearsall, and Jennifer Sisane.

Staff Present: none

Others Present: J.J. Smith.

1. Welcome and Agenda Review

A quorum being present, the meeting was brought to order at 7:40 pm. The agenda was found acceptable to all.

2. Review, Corrections, and Vote on May 11 Minutes.

The May 11 minutes were not available for review, so this item was tabled.

3. Status of follow-up with Cedric Ward, SHA.

It was reported that Lorraine Pearsall was taking the lead on this follow-up, which was still in process. Mr. Ward is looking up information on timings, most recent recalibrations, etc. He will also be asked for his general thoughts on roundabouts and about the question of aprons in roundabouts (to allow for large vehicles to pass through). Questions were raised about Mr. Ward's level of experience or expertise with respect to roundabouts. Seth Grimes stated that the TF is taking Mr. Ward as a trustworthy state representative, and added that Subcommittee C is free to package Mr. Ward's input along with other inputs as they see fit in their research and summary later in June.

Seth Grimes will ask for a memorandum that the State cooperate with the City in any redevelopment insofar as such redevelopment may impact state-controlled portions of Rt. 410. Lorig Charkoudian suggested that it would be valuable for the TF to be involved in 410-related

issues now, as the city negotiates its degree of control with respect to Rt. 410. There was some disagreement over whether the State's current proposal for Rt. 410 is good for the City.

4. Report on Near-Term Improvement Work.

Seth Grimes and Howard Kohn have arranged a direct meeting with Daryl (Public Works) and Sara (Housing and Economic Development) at the Junction to discuss Jeff Trunzo's questions related to the items on the draft resolution for near-term improvements. The goal is to determine what can be done administratively, without a Council resolution.

5. Report on the TPSS Co-op Expansion Task Force.

Lorig Charkoudian reported on the status of the TPSS Co-op Expansion Task Force's work. The CETF has met with Co-op membership now. In this meeting, consensus was reached around the following elements of the expansion plan: a community room will be included; 63 parking spaces will be provided for the store; 25-30 additional spaces (or enough parking for other Junction businesses) will be provided; a public-private partnership and/or a long-term lease are worth investigating further; a micro-enterprise development kitchen should be incorporated into the design; and a commitment should be made to work with an architect with historic district experience. Consensus was NOT reached around the question of whether to vacate the Turner building or to use it as a base but build to the west, under various scenarios of ownership/lease. There is also not a clear vision yet with respect to parking. Sara Daines will be invited to the next meeting (June 7) to share information but not to represent elected officials.

The CETF is moving toward getting some preliminary drawings. The current TPSS Co-op is 6,500 square feet; the goal of expansion would be to expand to 12,500 square feet.

The CETF has talked about using nearby spaces, such as the former T.J.'s across the street. The CETF sees the use of noncontiguous spaces as a possibility but considers the priority to be establishing a viable grocery store first, which has to be a minimum of 10,000 square feet. Spin-off operations such as a bakery and a coffeeshop could then potentially locate across the street.

The question of food affordability at the Co-op was raised by Linette Lander. Lorig Charkoudian and Steve Dubb responded by acknowledging that organic, whole, local foods are not subsidized and thus more expensive as a result; by noting that Co-op prices are comparable with those of Whole Foods on many items; by mentioning that there are legal issues associated with allowing volunteering in exchange for discounts; by mentioning the 5% discount for seniors; and by emphasizing that while the Co-op alone can't buy down costs, a partnership with the City or a non-profit might make lower prices possible. Andy Keleman suggested that a City partnership with the Co-op might be a tide to greater Co-op availability for lower-income people, such as through lower pricing of staple items as "loss leaders." Steve Dubb noted that on the 50 most-used items in the store, the Co-op is more expensive than Whole Foods at present because a standard mark-up is applied to these items. Seth Grimes concluded this discussion by

suggesting that the TF could consider including recommendations about affordability in a recommendation about City assistance for a Co-op expansion.

Kay Daniels-Cohen expressed concern about a Co-op expansion leaving the Turner property “fallow” or leading to an overall shortage in parking. She pointed out that a key question is whether a larger Co-op can exist along with adequate parking for the Junction’s needs.

Susan Robb asked that a more careful analysis be conducted of the assumptions that 25-30 spaces for general Junction use, and 88-93 spaces total in the City lot, are the right allocations.

As parking was under discussion, Seth Grimes asked that the TF jump ahead to have Subcommittee C share its investigation of parking needs:

- Subcommittee C is looking at what types of parking meters the City would use, i.e. the City’s current vision for the Junction.
- In looking for potential parking spaces, Subcommittee C has strategized: more parking for employees on Carroll Avenue; stopping overflow parking on Manor Circle; gaining control of the lot behind the Lee Avenue apartments; and diagonal parking on Carroll Avenue.

Seth Grimes mentioned that Historic Takoma hopes to have a handicapped space designated in front of their new headquarters, and added that the allocation of handicapped accessible spaces is a consideration in calculating parking requirements.

Lorig Charkoudian expressed concern that the TF might lose sight of the larger conversation about what to do with the City lot if it begins to lean toward maintaining the status quo (the City lot serving solely as surface parking).

Other questions related to parking were brought up briefly: Howard Kohn advised that the CETF should figure out realistically how much parking it needs as a business. It was noted that it is unclear whether the Co-op’s employee parking needs have been taken into consideration in its estimates of needed parking under the expansion scenario. The idea of a shuttle was brought up again. The difficulty of managing flow of traffic into and out of the parking areas was also noted.

6/7. Review of the Task Force Mandate and Time-Line; Subcommittee Status and Plans.

Seth Grimes said that it is time for the TF to turn what it knows (outreach, research, etc.) into products.

Reporting on Subcommittee B’s work, Roger Schlegel said that “B” will prepare a report that summarizes interests expressed by residents and businesses, and that also presents significant proposals and ideas brought forth via the outreach effort. “B” is still concluding business surveys and hopes to carry out some pedestrian intercepts. “B” also is publicizing a June 2nd “wrap-up” outreach meeting and may put out a published request for input. Later in the

summer, “B” has committed to holding a forum to share emerging recommendations with the interested public, including participants from earlier outreach efforts.

Seth Grimes asked “B” to provide the TF with an inventory or outline by June 7th and a full report by June 22nd. It was agreed that “B” would provide “A” and “C” with any information or summaries gathered as soon as possible to assist these subcommittees in the production of their reports.

Discussion of Subcommittee C’s work turned to the question of sidewalks. Seth Grimes asked whether the City owns anything farther off-street than the sidewalk in any spots. If so, the extra space might be used to move the sidewalk farther from traffic, to put in a bike lane, and/or to plant grass and trees. Ellen Zavian noted that in the town where she lives in New Jersey, the sidewalks were widened to allow businesses to display merchandise on the sidewalks, and that this seemed to have a positive effect for atmosphere and commerce. Seth Grimes noted that it is possible at present for vendors to apply for a sidewalk sales permit, provided that 5 to 7 feet remain clear for pedestrians.

Returning to the question of parking, Howard Kohn reiterated the importance of gaining a realistic estimate of parking needs.

8. Adjournment.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeff Trunzo, Secretary

Roger Schlegel, Secretary