

Takoma Junction Task Force

Minutes – June 7, 2011

Present: Lorig Charkoudian, Billy Coulter, Kay Daniels Cohen, Megan Gallagher, Seth Grimes, Andy Kelemen, Howard Kohn, Linette Lander, Barbara Muhlbacher, Katrina Oprisko, Susan Robb, Roger Schlegel.

Absent: Hailu Aichehi, Jim DiLuigi, Steve Dubb, Lorraine Pearsall, Jennifer Sisane, Jeff Trunzo, Ellen Zavian.

Visitors: J.J. Smith, Joe Klockner.

A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 7:40 pm.

1. Agenda Review: The agenda was accepted as proposed.
2. Vote on May 11 minutes: This item was postponed pending completion of draft May 11 minutes.
3. Status of follow-up with Cedric Ward of State Highway Administration: Follow-up with Cedric Ward is still pending. When the TF Steering Committee (Kohn, Grimes, Trunzo, and Schlegel) met at the Junction last week with City staff members Daryl Braithwaite and Sara Daines to discuss short-term improvements, staff suggested that the TF work with planner Ilona Blanchard to get in contact with Ben Myrick, an SHA traffic signal specialist. Seth Grimes will make this contact. In discussion, TF agreed that the state delegation can help if needed with SHA contact.
4. Near-term improvement work: The topics and outcomes of the Steering Committee's meeting with City staff at the Junction (described above) were as follows:
 - a) Signage for parking in City Lot: Daryl Braithwaite said that the City will put up temporary metal signs on City land in front of the parking lot, so that they don't have to conform to state sign/pole requirements. She was noncommittal about putting signs up anywhere else, i.e. along streets approaching the City lot.
 - b) Closure of the "temporary" driveway closer to co-op: The City lot currently has two driveways – the original driveway (closer to the Takoma Auto Clinic) and the "temporary" driveway (closer to the Co-op) that was constructed prior to installation of the temporary fire station. Daryl Braithwaite prefers to keep both driveways open for the time being. Jeff Trunzo brought up the idea of narrowing the driveways. Options include closing one or the other, or making one entry and one exit. No conclusion was reached, other than that the City has three engineering firms on contract, and that Daryl Braithwaite will consult with those three to see if they have any expertise relevant to making a recommendation about what to do about the driveways.
 - c) City lot resurfacing: As of last week, Daryl Braithwaite did not know when lot resurfacing (planned as part of the close-out of the Fire Station project) was supposed to be done. By tonight, the project had been completed, including re-stripping as well as stripping of the concrete slab. Roger Schlegel counted that there are now 35 painted spots. Howard Kohn notes that there were formerly about 63. It was also noted

that Takoma Auto Clinic uses some of the spots for car dropoff/storage. City staff agreed to look into the Co-op lease to see if it is the Co-op's responsibility to paint/mark spaces reserved for employees.

d) Request that the city repaint the side street crosswalks: Daryl Braithwaite received this request without making a commitment. Those assembled noted that the Sycamore Avenue crosswalk is faded and needs repainting, and that Grant and Lee Avenues do not have crosswalks. Kay Daniels Cohen noted that Daryl Braithwaite made a commitment to paint/repaint crosswalks some time ago (at a "Ward 3 night" of the City Council). In discussion, TF members floated (again) the idea of painting crosswalks unilaterally, by direct citizen action. It was also noted Carroll Avenue needs a crosswalk at Lincoln Avenue, but that this is a State Highway issue.

e) Adding a right turn from the center lane on inbound Carroll Avenue: As this change would require SHA action, it was taken off the list of potential short term improvements.

f) Adding a left turn lane from outbound Carroll Avenue onto Philadelphia Avenue: Similar to #5 above, this was taken off the list of potential short term improvements since it requires SHA action. Andy Kelemen noted that the crosswalk of Carroll Avenue at the Fire Station (just west of Philadelphia Avenue) is due to be painted as part of the Fire Station project close-out.

ACTION: Seth Grimes will ask City staff about the 3 side street crosswalks (Sycamore, Grant, and Lee), and about the crosswalk at Carroll and Philadelphia. Kay Daniels Cohen will find the minutes from Ward 3 night regarding the crosswalk-painting commitment.

Additional comment: Andy Kelemen suggested that, as the Fire Station project agreement was to re-set the City lot to its pre-construction configuration, the county should remove the second driveway apron. Seth Grimes and Howard Kohn did not recall a commitment to this in the agreement.

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(At this point in the meeting, Howard Kohn introduced guest Joe Klockner as the leader, a generation ago, of an effort to stop a development on what is now the City-owned Lot.)

5. Report on the TPSS Co-op Expansion Task Force (Lorig Charkoudian): The TPSS Co-op Expansion Task Force met today with Sara Daines of City staff for 90 minutes. The following key points from that meeting were relevant to TF deliberations:

- Even a Co-op long-term lease of the City lot (as opposed to an outright purchase) would require an RFP on the part of the City. The City, however, could do an RFP with criteria, i.e. favoring a tenant./project which would advance job creation, accessibility to healthy food, the best interests of the community, etc.

- The City doesn't have a formal vision of a public-private partnership, with joint ownership and joint business interests. Historically the City hasn't acted in this way, although the City has assisted business development, by helping businesses access available County and State money.

- A parking facility was discussed, with the notion that a City-Co-op partnership would make sense. In theory, the City could own the parking underground and lease the building.

- The Expansion Task Force asked Sara Daines how the Co-op expansion TF might effectively support the Takoma Junction Task Force. Sara Daines advised against putting together architectural drawings, suggesting instead that the Co-op continue market analysis and perhaps develop simple conceptual presentations of its vision. The TJ Task Force could bring these to the Council; then, if the Council liked the idea, TPSSCETF could prepare architectural drawings. At issue is the lack of certainty about which combination of properties the Co-op would use in an expansion (the Turner-owned lot, the City-owned lot, both, or first one, then later the other as well). Sara highlighted how expensive the drawing/permitting process is, and that it makes no sense to start down that path until one knows where one will be located.

In discussion, Howard Kohn stated that he favors sketches at this point in the process because they allow people to envision what is under consideration. Kay Daniels Cohen and Andy Kelemen agreed. Lorig Charkoudian noted that drawings can provoke controversy or frustration.

Summarizing outcomes of the Co-op meeting with Sara Daines, Lorig Charkoudian said that the interest of the Expansion Task Force between now and the conclusion of the Takoma Junction TF work is to refine market analysis and clarify types of uses needed in the expanded space.

Andy Kelemen, observing that a public-private parking lot proposal in Old Town (involving John Urciolo) was supported by staff but opposed by the Council, suggested that the Co-op Expansion TF look to the Urciolo case for lessons, and that at this juncture the Co-op should be cautious about sharing too many details of the expansion ideas it is considering.

Summarizing the tone of the Co-op's meeting with Sara Daines, Lorig Charkoudian stated that the broad conversation with Sara Daines about funding sources and the financing process was very helpful, and that Sara Daines was very positive overall.

The next step for the Co-op expansion committee is to have another meeting on June 28. There is talk of coming up with a scope of work for a market analysis.

Seth Grimes asked whether the TPSSCETF's market analysis would look beyond the Co-op's own interests to consider other businesses using newly constructed space, or to consider the overall impact of Co-op expansion on the Junction. An expanded analysis exploring impacts of expansion could perhaps include projections about financial benefits for the city.

Responding, Lorig Charkoudian stated that the question of whether other tenants would be in a new Co-op building is unresolved.

NOTE: Additional Item #5 discussion occurred later in the meeting – see below.

6. Review of task force mandate and time-line: Seth Grimes expressed the continuing assumption that the TF report will be presented to the Council before its term expires on September 30., and that the TF should aim to complete its work on time if possible. The Council has the option of extending the TF's mandate if they desire to do so.

With the report deadline approaching, the TF should transition into a report-writing focus. Seth Grimes will put together a proposed outline for the report.

Discussion followed about the content of the report. Questions and concerns raised included:

- Content: What level of detail to include in the report.

- What types of recommendations to include: Whether to include definite recommendations, a set of strong options, or a catalog of ideas. In discussion, TF members generally agreed that at this point, it's not necessary to reach a decision about whether the TF will make any recommendations about (for example) roundabouts. The decision about whether to make recommendations – or to offer a set of options -- can wait until later in the summer.

- TF membership going forward: Noting the possibility that later TF meetings may include votes on potential recommendations, Barbara Mulhbacher expressed a concern about the need for quorums at meetings. The question was raised as to whether any TF members who have had difficulty attending most meetings might be interested in resigning, particularly as many TF members will be traveling during various periods in July and August. Responding to these concerns about attendance, quorums, and voting, Seth Grimes indicated that the TF could use non-quorum meetings in productive ways and that unresolved questions, or questions calling for a vote, could be deferred until September. Seth Grimes noted that some TF members who have not been able to participate in many meetings nonetheless have writing experience that they can contribute to report preparation.

Decision: It was agreed that Kay Daniels Cohen would send a message to the TF listserv. This message would provide the tentative schedule for July and August TF meetings and would ask each member whether he/she wishes to continue on the TF and, if not, whether he/she would be willing to resign from the TF.

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Item 7 was deferred momentarily while the TF considered its July/August meeting schedule (Item #8).

8. Planning through August 31: After discussion, the TF tentatively agreed to hold meetings on Tuesday, July 12; Thursday, July 21; Tuesday, August 2; Thursday, August 18; and Tuesday, August 30.

The TF also agreed that during the week of September 6, Subcommittee B would hold a citywide meeting to share emerging TF ideas with prior outreach meeting participants and any other interested members of the general public.

September 19 or 26 were set as the tentative dates for presentation of the TF report to the Council.

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Item #5, resumed: Andy Kelemen returned to the Co-op expansion discussion, asking how the TF could make a recommendation of a Co-op expansion “concept” that lacked detail. Related discussion followed: Lorig Charkoudian offered that the TF should have the ability to support the general concept of a Co-op expansion if such an option seems good for the Junction. In response to a question from Billy Coulter, Lorig Charkoudian stated that no one has discussed the Co-op expansion ideas with the Co-op’s current landlord. Roger Schlegel observed that the TF should explore other development possibilities for the City lot and then compare them with the Co-op expansion idea. Seth Grimes responded that all options for the City lot ought to be catalogued in the TF report. Howard Kohn observed that the TF hasn’t looked

into expanded options for the whole south side of Carroll Avenue – which might involve a combined development of two or more properties.

Andy Kelemen asked what developers have said about the possibilities for the City lot. Howard Kohn responded that Bruce Levin’s opinion was that the City lot and the Junction are too small to be attractive for development. Seth Grimes clarified that Bruce Levin said he would be interested in developing the City lot if he had a committed tenant. Lorig Charkoudian noted that the conversation at the TPSS Expansion Task Force meeting (Item 5 above) included the idea of working with a developer, who would have the Co-op anchor a larger development as the main tenant.

Andy Kelemen recommended that the TF report include a section on developers’ assessments of City Lot development potential.

7. Subcommittee reports:

7a. Subcommittee B – Roger Schlegel provided an overview of Subcommittee B’s process and remaining work. He shared a summary of findings from the individual residential surveys received thus far at outreach events thus far. Kay Daniels Cohen noted that flip-chart responses, which captured group discussions at the outreach meetings, will have a different kind of value. Remaining outreach work includes a Maple Avenue outreach and pedestrian intercepts. Megan Gallagher, Kay Daniels Cohen, and Roger Schlegel said that they would aim to get the remainder of business surveys completed and shared within a week. Megan Gallagher shared findings about the Summit Lighthouse, which functions like a “destination business,” attracting people from well outside Takoma Park.

Roger Schlegel shared two graphs depicting individual resident “likes” and “dislikes” related to the Junction, as well as the businesses and amenities mentioned by residential survey respondents. Megan Gallagher noted that individual survey respondents did not include many people seeking affordable options, although many members of this constituency seem to live near the Junction. Seth Grimes said that the TF report might recommend further outreach including market investigation. Susan Robb asked that the outreach report list attendance numbers at each meeting. Kay Daniels Cohen noted that few residents interviewed at the Franklin Apartments on Maple Avenue were familiar with the term “Junction.” Referring to the “likes” and “dislikes” chart, Roger Schlegel mentioned the complexity of questions surrounding the Junction and the difficulty of meeting all expressed needs and desires.

It was noted that additional Subcommittee B material still needs to be produced, including summaries of pedestrian intercepts, business surveys, and flip charts.

Howard Kohn and Joe Klocker recalled that the Turner family had been asking about \$2 million for their property a couple of years ago.

7b. Subcommittee A report progress: Members of Subcommittee A briefly summarized the options that they will present for the City lot:

- Option A: Status quo.
- Option B: Commercial Development. The Bruce Levin interview will be one source for this section. Three variations will be presented; one will involve bringing in a developer, with the Co-op potentially functioning as the major tenant. Pros and cons will be presented for each variation.

- Option C: Development of all or part of the City lot as a community amenity, with parking still in the mix, but with other recreational and cultural uses emphasized.

The Subcommittee B report will also examine the question of whether B.Y. Morrison Park can/should be “greened up” with less concrete. This might be explored in conjunction with Option C above.

In discussion, Roger Schlegel asked whether the historic structure at BY Morrison could be repurposed for commercial use. Billy Coulter pointed out that this would make the park a revenue source for the City. Others asked where Subcommittee A stands in relation to the wooded portion of the City lot, e.g. whether a path will be recommended, what clean-up may be recommended, etc. This raised the question of whether the wooded lot is a Subcommittee A or Subcommittee C issue. Seth Grimes suggested that A and C coordinate to ensure complete coverage of any overlapping issues. Seth Grimes also offered to provide a template for Subcommittee A to work with in addressing options.

7c) Subcommittee C report – Katrina Oprisko expressed reservations about drafting a report for Subcommittee C because of a potential lack of buy-in from C members. Seth Grimes suggested that Katrina Oprisko outline ideas, then ask for specific contributions from subcommittee members. These could then be discussed by the full TF. Katrina Oprisko noted that a comprehensive list of traffic options generated earlier contained 34 options, and that the full TF seemed to find this overwhelming. Seth Grimes offered to help in encouraging C members to participate in the report-writing process. Linette Lander mentioned that some Council members have expressed their interest that the TF ensure that all views are considered.

Returning to the subject of consultation with SHA, Linette Lander agreed to be the lead person in contacting Ben Myrick of SHA about traffic signals, and to contact SHA’s contact person on roundabouts. Howard Kohn suggested that Subcommittee C could get in touch with the engineering consultants who worked on ideas for New Hampshire Avenue. Brief discussion followed, in which various TF members noted that the lack of conclusive information from SHA prevents the TF from making recommendations about signal timings, which in turn prevents the Council from addressing the signal timing issue; and that the TF’s limited political influence makes it difficult to press for more rapid responses from SHA. It was agreed that the TF should share its timeline for decision-making with Cedric Ward.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Roger Schlegel and Jeff Trunzo, Task Force Secretaries.