

City of Takoma Park
Takoma Junction Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 8, 2011

The City of Takoma Park Takoma Junction Task Force met on Tuesday, February 8, 2011, 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, Lorraine Pearsall, Susan Robb, Roger Schlegel, Hailu Aichehi, Billy Coulter, Megan Gallagher, and Lorig Charkoudian.

Members Absent: Jeffrey Trunzo, Ellen Zavian, Jennifer Sisane, Katrina Oprisko.

Staff Present: None

Others Present: J.J. Smith (reporter for *Takoma Patch*).

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

A quorum present, the meeting was called to order at approximately 7:35 p.m. J.J. Smith was acknowledged and welcomed again.

2. Review, corrections, and vote on January 11 minutes.

The minutes for the January 11th meeting were unanimously approved with the correction that Roz Grigsby is no longer a task force member. It was noted that the Task Force now numbers 19, with a quorum of 10.

3. Review of January 31 Takoma Park City Council briefing.

Discussion: Several members who were present at the January 31 briefing praised Seth Grimes for his succinct presentation. Two attachments were shared with Council members as part of the presentation: the TF work plans and the minutes from the January 20 Committee of the Whole meeting with Scott Whipple (see item 4 below). Two brief question-and-answer exchanges with Council members during the presentation were noted. One addressed the importance of historic district implications in evaluating options for resolving traffic problems. The other addressed the trade-offs between economic development and environmental protection in considering the development of the wooded lot fronting Columbia Avenue. Seth Grimes reminded the TF that this briefing was simply an introduction to the Task Force, and that an interim report to the Council is set for March.

A discussion ensued about the value of pushing for experimentation with signal timings as soon as possible. Lorig Charkoudian suggested that a test might help the TF judge whether it is necessary to consider more radical changes. Howard Kohn pointed out that as SHA (State Highway Administration) has ultimate authority over the traffic signals, it seems necessary to have a traffic engineer's recommendation before any experiment would be given the go-ahead. Lorraine Pearsall is functioning as the point person with SHA and is working with Mayor Williams to bring an SHA consultant into the process in the near term. Seth Grimes pointed out that State Delegate Tom Hucker should be kept informed. Andy Kelemen emphasized that a great deal of information can be gained more simply through traffic simulation (modeling) techniques that have been in use for a long time. Kay Daniels-Cohen expressed strong concern that several possible signalization and phasing changes have been under discussion for three years now without any action taken; she felt strongly that traffic signal related issues are "low-hanging fruit" that ought to be addressed as soon as possible.

Roger Schlegel cited the 2007 traffic study as saying that the intersection at the Co-op was, as of late 2006, operating close to, but under, capacity even at the peak of the AM and PM rush hours. Lorig Charkoudian responded that the issue is not just capacity at the intersections, but also the impact of the current intersection performance on neighborhood cut-throughs. Andy Kelemen reminded the group that there are also congestion issues at the Philadelphia-Carroll intersection, particular with respect to delays caused by vehicles waiting to make left turns onto Philadelphia.

Susan Robb reported that Subcommittee C intends to bring together a list of possible changes that would help to improve the performance of the existing intersections, and then to discuss these possibilities with an SHA engineer.

Action: Consensus was reached on a plan to meet with an SHA engineer soon. With the leadership of Subcommittee C, in consultation with an SHA engineer, a set of proposed interim improvements will be developed and presented to a Council member, who can then introduce a formal proposal to the Council around the time of the TF's interim report (during the second half of March).

Note: During the subcommittee reports discussion later in this meeting, Lorig Charkoudian asked if the TF could engage with State Highway Administration (SHA) on the question of establishing a crosswalk between the Co-op and the east corner of Grant and Carroll Avenue. There was a general sense that the TF would like to see that question raised with SHA as soon as possible.

4. Review of the January 20 meeting with Scott Whipple (Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission) on historic matters.

(Separate minutes from this Committee of the Whole meeting were prepared by Jeff Trunzo and posted to the TF website.)

Seth Grimes provided a brief review of the January 20 meeting with Scott Whipple, for the benefit of those TF members who were not in attendance. During the meeting, the identity and boundaries of the historic districts were clarified. Most of the Junction is included in either county or state historic registers. Nothing at the Junction is listed on the National Historic Register, although Lorraine Pearsall pointed out that the area is eligible for inclusion on the National Register. The Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) would scrutinize proposed changes that would impact the character of the Junction. Among the many types of changes that Scott Whipple mentioned were relocations of structures and changes to roadway width or configuration. Along these lines, Lorraine Pearsall mentioned that HPC has been reviewing the project to repave Ethan Allen, the 410 portion of Carroll, and Philadelphia from Carroll to Maple.

Discussion: There was a brief exchange related to the question of how flexible the HPC may be in its response to specific proposals. Andy Kelemen asserted that in historic preservation questions, there are no hard-and-fast principles or rules, that everything is up for judgement on the basis of guidelines, not rules. Seth Grimes cited Scott Whipple's statement that if the HPC can't decide a question based on their experience, they turn to National Park Service guidelines. Lorraine Pearsall and Jim DiLuigi both noted that, as a practical matter, guidelines are treated as rules in a variety of situations involving government oversight.

Action: Howard Kohn recommended that the TF check whether City or State money is being used to pay for the repaving of Ethan Allen, the 410 portion of Carroll, and Maple.

5. Status of the TPSS Co-op Expansion Task Force and review of the February 8 meeting with Subcommittee A.

Approximately half of the TF members had just come from the above-named meeting with the Co-op Expansion Task Force, held at 6 pm. Howard Kohn summarized some of the main items discussed in this meeting, as follows:

- The Co-op Expansion Task Force has been having extensive discussions around objectives and possibilities for expansion.
- A Co-op Expansion Task Force member has made a series of concept drawings, which were shown to TF members.
- Some of the functions under consideration for an expanded Co-op include: a larger grocery, more prepared foods, a deli, community space, and a commercial kitchen to support local business and local food production.
- A primary piece of the Co-op's emerging expansion concept is that it would move out of its current building, which is leased from the Turner family, with the lease set to expire in three years. The Turner family has not shown interest in selling this building to the Co-op.

- The Co-op would construct an entirely new building on what is currently City-owned property.
- After occupancy of this new building, the Co-op would possibly expand back into the Turner-owned building under a continuing lease arrangement, in order to incorporate additional functions (a local-foods eatery was mentioned).

Discussion: The TF discussed several aspects and possible implications of the Co-op's expansion concepts. Lorig Charkoudian, as a Co-op representative to the Task Force, fielded most of the questions and provided clarification where possible. Topics raised included:

- **Parking.** Billy Coulter and others emphasized the importance of retaining as much parking as possible to serve the Junction business district as a whole. Lorig Charkoudian responded that the Co-op recognizes the need for parking to be serving more than just the Co-op, and that underground parking is definitely being considered.
- **Site Characteristics.** As in previous meetings, the question was raised of what underlies the City lot, and how much remediation would be necessary to accommodate a large structure. Howard Kohn said that Joe Klockner remembers when there was a ravine on that site, and that the site was later used as a landfill of sorts. Roger Schlegel said that he had asked Sara Daines for information on any past studies of the lot's soil characteristics that might have been done in connection with the fire station project.
- **Ownership.** Howard Kohn suggested that the Co-op's bid to become a long-term property owner at the Junction might be viewed favorably by the Council and make it more likely that the City would be supportive of the Co-op's plans.
- **Scope.** Billy Coulter, in emphasizing the need to retain parking, asked whether the Co-op had considered expanding into other vacant retail in the Junction for some of the other ventures they are thinking of.
- **Timing.** Jim DiLuigi suggested that, as the Co-op hopes to take the whole City lot and develop it within the short time frame of three years, it ought to move as quickly as possible. There are going to be many issues involved.
- **Building Size and Design:** There are five "iterations" of the new Co-op facility in rough concept form at present. Four of these involve a single building fronting on Carroll Avenue. One concept involves a multi-story building with offices or other uses on the top floor – Andy Kelemen pointed out that such a structure would be similar to a concept worked out seven years ago for the same site. Lorraine Pearsall pointed out that the size of the building footprint means that the County will likely require the design to meet overlay zone standards such as floor area ratios. Howard Kohn, noting that the Co-op envisions a new facility that is roughly double in size, e.g. moving from a current building of 6,000 square feet to a new building of 12,500 square feet, concurred with Lorraine Pearsall that once new construction exceeds a certain threshold, it is subject to more zoning requirements. Lorig Charkoudian elaborated that one of the concepts involves 10,000 square feet of retail on the main floor, with a lower level devoted to underground parking and about 2,500 square feet for support functions. Seth Grimes pointed out that with such a design, truck routing would become an issue.

- **Cost of Land:** Roger Schlegel pointed out that if the City decides to sell its property at the Junction, it must do so via an open bidding process as required by state law. [This fact was presented to the Council by city staff in a January 2010 worksession.] Thus the Co-op might find itself having to outbid other interested developers of the site. Lorig Charkoudian indicated that a 99-year lease model might work in place of the City selling the lot.
- **Building Height:** Roger Schlegel asked whether any of the Co-op's expansion concepts might involve buildings of a height that would exceed Historic Preservation guidelines. Lorraine Pearsall said that the Historic Takoma could help the Co-op on a consulting basis with respect to historic district design considerations. Lorig Charkoudian offered that all of the Co-op's concepts involve one, one-and-a-half, or two story structures. None of these designs would pose a threat to the existing character of building heights at the Junction.
- **Financing:** Andy Kelemen asked how the Co-op intends to finance an expansion development. Lorig Charkoudian mentioned that the Co-op sells preferred shares to members, which are counted as equity when applying for private capital; the Co-op also has \$500,000 in its reserve fund.
- **Turner family involvement:** Andy Kelemen asked whether the Turner family, which owns the Co-op's current building, has been involved or interested in the Co-op's expansion discussion. Lorig Charkoudian responded that the Turner family has given no indication of their intentions over the course of this three-and-a-half year expansion discussion.

Action: The TF will stay in touch with the TPSS Co-op Expansion Task Force and will stay apprised of the Co-op's developing plans. Roger Schlegel will renew his request to Sara Daines for information on any prior studies of the soil/site characteristics of the City Lot and the residential parcel also owned by the City.

6. Discussion with the Fenton Street Market organizers.

Billy Coulter shared the highlights of his recent conversation with Hannah McCann, who founded and operates the Fenton Street Market in downtown Silver Spring. They discussed the possibility of the Fenton Street Market organizing a weekly market in the Junction area.

Discussion: The discussion explored several areas of interest and concern related to the Fenton Street Market possibility:

- **Location and Accessibility.** Lorig Charkoudian asked about the possibility of using B.Y. Morrison (BYM) Park as a location for the market. Billy Coulter shared Hannah's sense that the BYM site is too small and has accessibility issues. Susan Robb and Steve Dubb both expressed concern as to whether there would be enough foot traffic to support this kind of a market. Billy Coulter shared Fenton Street Market's experiences before and after their relocation closer to the Farmers Market (increase in traffic after relocation). Barbara Muhlbacher proposed running a shuttle to connect the Farmers Market with the Junction during the Sunday hours when both events are underway. Difficulty of gaining access to the City-owned shuttle was mentioned.

- Rationale. Linette Lander asked what prompted the exploratory talk with Hannah McCann. Billy Coulter cited the general TF sense that the Junction ought to fulfill a "town square" function, others supported this view, noting and that it is desirable to generate more foot traffic to help support the brick-and-mortar businesses. Kay Daniels-Cohen cited Earth Day and Art Hop as events that have increased foot traffic to a degree, although getting people to cross Carroll Ave. remains difficult. In a related comment, Roger Schlegel added later that the OTBA Market Analysis supports "destination"-type events and activities such as this kind of a market, to increase the draw of consumers from beyond the immediate vicinity.
- Coordination. Seth Grimes noted the need to coordinate with Old Town Business Association (OTBA). This appears easy to accomplish, as both Billy Coulter and Howard Kohn are active with OTBA. They were able to confirm that the market idea poses no conflict with other OTBA initiatives.
- Event Design. Steve Dubb suggested use of BYM Park as bandstand for live music during the market. Billy Coulter reported that "music is part of the mix" at the current Fenton Street Market.
- Negative Concerns. Few members offered negative concerns. Susan Robb, who lives next to BYM Park, said it sounded great. Jim DiLuigi asked whether a market event would take away from Co-op receipts. Billy Coulter noted that food vendors rotate in and out regularly; and Steve Dubb (associated with the Co-op) predicted that the presence of an outdoor market would be a win-win rather than taking away revenue from the Co-op.
- Cost. Lorig Charkoudian asked how much it would cost the City, e.g. what, if any, Fenton St. Market would charge the City to run a market. Billy Coulter said that the cost is unknown at this point, but that any proposal from Fenton St. Market would necessarily include who gets paid, and what amount.
- Planning Window. Kay Daniels-Cohen emphasized that the planning window is tight if a market is to be up and running in the spring, so the TF should not delay if it is interested in pursuing the possibility.

Later Discussion: During the subcommittee reports later in this meeting, Linette Lander raised two followup questions about the market concept, asking what the feelings of neighbors were about this, and whether conflicts among vendors might potentially arise (i.e. who gets stalls). In the short discussion that followed, questions of congestion and parking were raised again in connection with the market concept. The use of a shuttle service to-and-from the Farmers Market was suggested, and there was some brief discussion of the viability and cost of bike stations, as well as the idea of rickshaw transportation in the OTBA area.

Action: Billy Coulter had previously sent the notes from his meeting with Hannah McCann to Subcommittee B via Roger Schlegel. It was agreed that these notes would be shared with the whole TF. The TF gave Subcommittee A permission to proceed in talks with Hannah McCann, to pursue the possibilities of a pilot market at the Junction. The TF is prepared to communicate to the City Council their support for the idea of giving permission to let Fenton Street Market

prepare a proposal to do a spring/summer/fall 2011 trial "market" at the Junction. No timeline was set for when the TF would communicate this to the Council.

7. Outreach meetings with Junction neighbors.

Roger Schlegel reported that Subcommittee B was in the process of distributing approximately 200 invitation flyers to an outreach meeting for residents who live within a "stone's throw" of the Junction. The area covered includes portions of Carroll Avenue, Manor Circle, Ethan Allen Avenue, Sycamore Avenue, Columbia Avenue, Poplar Avenue, Philadelphia Avenue., Holt Place, Grant Avenue, Lee Avenue, and Sherman Avenue. The meeting will take place on February 22, at the Co-op community room, from 7 until 8:30 pm. Subcommittee B will be contacting neighborhood and community association leaders over the next week to begin scheduling outreach meetings in neighborhoods throughout the City.

The goal of each outreach meeting will be to inform residents of the Task Force's work and to invite their input into the process of developing recommendations for the Junction. The hope of Subcommittee B is to establish a good relationship with residents, particularly with those in close proximity to the Junction, and to maintain that relationship throughout the TF process with anyone who is interested. The organizing framework for input at the first outreach meeting will be a series of broad questions as follows: As a neighbor in "stone's throw" distance, how do you feel about the vision for the Junction that has been articulated by the Task Force? How do you currently use the Junction? How does your proximity to the Junction affect you in other ways? What would you like to see more of at the Junction? What would you like to see less of? Do you have specific ideas or concepts for improvements that could be made? What sorts of changes would cause you concern?

8. Responses to inquiry to consultants.

Kay Daniels-Cohen summarized the results of the request for consulting services that she developed in coordination with Linette Lander and sent out to prospective consultants in January, with a February 3 response deadline. The letter to consultants was included as an attachment to this meeting's agenda. It did not include Jim Lehman among the addressees, as he was added to the list later. Kay and Linette were praised for their work in developing a thorough set of questions for consultants. Kay met in person with two of the groups and toured the Junction with one of those (the other was already familiar with the Junction).

Of the ten consultants contacted, there were two non-respondents: the Abdo development company and Professor Cohen of the University of Maryland planning school. Two respondents were not interested in pursuing work at this time: Gabe Klein (recent director of the D.C. Department of Transportation) and Collaborative Strategies Group.

The six proposals received came from the following consultants:

- Natural Resources Design, Inc. in partnership with Jordan Honeyman Landscape Architecture, LLC

- Toole Design Group
- Richard Layman/TND Planning Group/Just Economics LLC
- RK & K Team
- Urban Land Institute, Washington
- Ourston Roundabout Engineering

The estimated costs associated with the various proposals ranged from \$12,000 to \$40,000. Kay Daniels-Cohen asked each consultant about the possibility of pro bono work, and was generally told that there tends to be a built-in discount for this type of work in the sense that not all hours involved are billed to the client.

Discussion: Seth Grimes suggested that the TF needs to document this process of consultant outreach so that the Council has all the information it might want, in the event it chooses to turn to one of these consultants in the longer term. Steve Dubb asked whether the TF would be making a recommendation for the City to try to get a consultant involved. A comment was made that any consultant hiring would have to involve a formal bidding process.

Action: The proposals submitted by the remaining six consultants will be reviewed by Subcommittee B, with recommendations presented to the full TF in the near future. This consultant engagement process will be documented as a future reference for the Council, but no decision was reached as to what form this documentation will take.

9. Subcommittee reports and discussion.

(B. Research and Outreach.) Subcommittee B was invited to lead off the subcommittee reports, as it had just shared two of its recent initiatives (neighborhood and consultant outreach). Roger Schlegel added that a “digest’ of the TF Resource Binder documents is now complete and ready for posting on the TF website. Howard Kohn suggested that Roger might be willing to serve as a walking reference for facts and details found in the Resource Binder.

(A. City lot and business issues.) Subcommittee A’s work since the previous meeting had already been addressed in the course of discussions earlier in the evening. During this portion of the meeting, there was a brief continuation of the discussion of the Fenton Street Market idea. This has been incorporated near the end of Section 6 above.

(C. Traffic, pedestrian, streetscape, and livability.)

Subcommittee C’s work since the previous meeting had been addressed in the course of discussions earlier in the evening. Lorig Charkoudian raised a followup question for Subcommittee C, asking whether Deputy City Manager Suzanne Ludlow had been able to clarify who would need to give permission for the establishment of a crosswalk running across Carroll Avenue from the Co-op to the east corner of Grant Avenue. Lorig Charkoudian asked if the TF

could engage with State Highway Administration (SHA) on this question, and there was a general sense that the TF would like to see that question raised with SHA as soon as possible.

Action: Megan Gallagher volunteered to contact Suzanne Ludlow with this question, as she is already taking responsibility for tracking any developments related the Rt. 410 ownership question.

(D. Subcommittee coverage, coordination, adjustments, and other (general) discussion.

Barbara Muhlbacher shared with the group copies of a document entitled “Common Modern Roundabout Myths” which can be accessed online via this link:

www.livingstonroads.org/pdf_docs/RAB_Myths.pdf Much of the information in this document was obtained from representatives of DLZ Michigan, Inc., whose staff authored a paper titled “Common Misperceptions about Modern Roundabouts” which was published in the American Planning Association journal *Transportation Planning*. Barbara requested that a discussion of roundabouts perhaps be incorporated into the next TF meeting. She also mentioned that she has rough-sketches of some possible roundabout designs that would potentially fit within the existing intersection area at the Junction. Andy Kelemen suggested that anyone interested in mini-roundabouts might examine one that has been constructed on Arliss Road adjacent to the Long Branch Library.

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 pm.

Respectfully Submitted

Roger Schlegel, Secretary

Jeff Trunzo, Secretary