

Takoma Junction discussion group

Meeting 4 – March 17, 2010 – Meeting summary

Location: Takoma Park Community Center

Attending: Billy Coulter, Lorig Charkoudian, Kay Daniels-Cohen, Jim DiLuigi, Steve Dubb, Seth Grimes, Andy Kelemen, John Kidney, Howard Kohn, Lorraine Pearsall, Susan Raab, Dan Robinson, Bruce Williams, Josh Wright

1. Attendees introduced themselves.

2. Discussion: Constitution of the Takoma Junction discussion group.

Howard Kohn asked, Do we want to go to the City Council on March 22 to ask for appointment as a city committee?

Bruce Williams responded, An official committee would get staff and other resources.

Andy Kelemen observed that there are two ways to go: Suggest that the council establish a directed committee for a year, then establish whether there should be a committee that's in city code, or seek statutory status now. But we don't have it down as to what it is we're trying to do at the junction. We need to figure out what we're trying to do.

Howard: We have talked about 1) the city lot, 2) traffic and pedestrian dysfunction, and 3) businesses.

Seth Grimes: Add issue 4) parking. Many issues can be discussed by the council without a committee, and without a committee, we've had beneficial fluidity of participation. We do need to consider that it will take at least 3 months for the council to establish a committee.

Jim DiLuigi: If we don't get a group started, bigger picture decisions will be made without full input. All efforts, such as Carroll Avenue street-scaping, were done with staff etc. involvement. Without a committee, we're going to miss a lot of things.

Steve Dubb: The situation is crying out for a planning charrette type process. The what's of the traffic-planning-business development would follow from that. We need a community planning process.

Lorraine Pearsall: Don't know if we need to be official right now. What's important is coming together to define problems. We've even come up with some solutions.

Josh Wright: We should think in terms of short, medium, and long term solutions we should look at. Not sure it should be an official committee right now or now, but if a committee, it should have specific goals or objectives within a fixed time period, rather than a standing committee.

Dan Robinson: Having an overall goal is a good one: progress, and not necessarily anything more specific. The committee could focus on – assume something is going to happen, good things – then that's not going to happen without a continuing, dynamic partnership. As a second focus, the committee might look at financial and development aspects. Third, we should think about the general quality of life at the junction.

Seth: It's not determined that there will be development. One of our tasks is to determine if there might be.

Bruce: Thinking a task force, for a year or so, might be the way to go. Has a publicity advantage. A more public process is definitely the way to go. Also note that there have been committees without official status, that reach out to county and state officials, who (paraphrasing) confuse the situation. This could be done in 45 days if needed.

Susan Raab: Bruce prompted questions of "out of the woodwork people" if we are not officially appointed. With sufficient public announcements, could that effect be offset? The other need is credibility in approaching other government entities; if with only unofficial status, there could be a problem.

Howard: If we want to deal forthrightly with traffic at the junction, how do we do that?

Andy: We have state contacts, the D20 delegation, Peter Franchot. Get those people to help.

Bruce: We have staff who can work with the State Highway Administration.

Seth: Agree. But we should reserve political contacts for when there's an impasse, otherwise interact at the staff level.

Lorraine: Not comfortable that state people would sit in our meetings at this point. We need to target what we want them for.

Howard: Perhaps get someone from the state on a some-time basis.

Jim: We have been talking about planning issues. The city has staff who deal with planning issues who should be involved. It can't work unless we work together.

Josh Wright: There is value in having D20 staff here, engaged early on. Sometimes committees do get stuck.

Lorig Charkoudian: Haven't heard yet why there shouldn't be a task force.

Kay Daniels-Cohen: I'm with Jim: If you don't have city staff, going to the SHA, they're going to just laugh. We need some kind of formal organization.

Seth: Suggest a straw poll, Should we ask the council next Monday to appoint a task force now?

Bruce (in response to Jim): A task force would have a liaison assigned where a committee would have a tighter staff relationship. There's a lot more flexibility with a task force and with a time limit, you get focus.

Lorraine: Grateful for meeting notes.

Howard: Consensus is in favor of asking the council for a task force. What about membership? Current working group members would/should be appointed.

Seth: There should not be a by-ward allocation.

Howard: So what should we say to the council on Monday?

Dan: Council will want to see a statement guiding council action.

Jim + Lorraine: Business/landlord/commercial revitalization needs to be part of the task force agenda.

Seth: General quality of life, earlier discussed, is another point, include Roger Schlegel's suggestions of hang-out and performance space, festivals, etc.

Andy: Add, Who needs to be brought into discussion, from the community and from outside?

Susan: A subhead to each point of the mandate can be, Who needs to be involved in each.

Andy: The task force should also collect & store data & information related to the issues here.

Jim: Would there be a request as to what activities the task force can undertake, for instance, reaching out to staff and other entities? What may a task force do in pursuit of its mandate?

Bruce: There's something to be said for leaving that flexible. Leave it that there's a recognized need for reaching out to other agencies.

Josh: The council can note that the task force may need to request support.

Andy: Guidance. Should the task force be under the guidance of some assigned council member?

Bruce: Council consultation can be done informally.

Josh: A danger of assigning a council member is a misperception that the council members are all on the same page.

Seth: Oppose a council liaison. We have access and visibility and a sense of the council's process.

Lorig: Would hope that there'd be a public participatory process, especially since community benefits would be part of the group's aims. Would suggest that a charrette, specifically, not be put in, but rather a mandate for some form of public participation.

Susan: We have the talent in the city to have a charrette based on community resources.

Howard: A good idea for individuals to each talk to others to talk about ideas, to bring them back from small groups to the big group.

Bruce: Would need to seek to facilitate community input.

Bruce: The item on Monday will be a work session item, with any group participants invited to come to the table to address the council.

Draft working-group request statement for presentation to the council, read to the group and subsequently revised:

An ad-hoc working group has been meeting to discuss revitalization of the Takoma Junction area. The group has included community members and council members. At its fourth meeting, on March 17, 2010, the group voted to deliver recommendations, at the March 22, 2010 council worksession discussion of Takoma Junction, concerning council appointment of a Takoma Junction Task Force. The recommendation is as follows:

The Takoma Junction working group suggests that the Takoma Park City Council appoint a Takoma Junction Task Force to investigate and make recommendations relating to

Takoma Junction concerns with a view toward promoting near, medium, and long term junction improvements. The task force would address concerns that include:

- 1) Disposition of the city lots, commercial and residential,
- 2) Repairing traffic and pedestrian dysfunction,
- 3) Business and economic revitalization,
- 4) Parking.
- 5) Quality of life or livability.

Task force mechanisms would include significant outreach to encourage community involvement in discussions. The council should instruct the city manager to provide staff resources to the task force, on an as-needed basis, to facilitate planning, coordination, and interaction as-needed with state and county and other agencies.