



**PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING WORK SESSION
CONFERENCE CALL TO STREETSENSE
MINUTES**

February 17, 2017

11:00 a.m.

**City of Fredericksburg
715 Princess Anne Street
Conference Room #218**

MEMBERS

Jim Pates – Chair
Roy Gratz - Vice-Chair
Chris Hornung
Tom O'Toole
Chris Hornung

CITY STAFF

Chuck Johnston, Director
Mike Craig, Zoning Administrator
Susanna Finn, Comm. Dev. Planner
Tim Baroody, City Manager

STREETSENSE (On the Phone)

Colin Greene
Beth Hesler

Mr. Pates called the February 17, 2017 special meeting work session to order at 11 :00 a.m. He read Section 5-6 of the Planning Commission by-laws, which states :

- 5-6 *Special meetings may be called at the request of the Chairman or by two members of the Commission with a written request to the Secretary. The Secretary shall e-mail to all members, at least five days in advance of a special meeting, a written notice fixing the time and place of the meeting and the purpose thereof. Written notice of a special meeting is not required if the time of the special meeting has been fixed at a regular meeting, or if all members are present at the special meeting or file a written waiver of notice.*

He noted that all Planning Commissioners had been contacted regarding the special meeting work session and that all members were either present or had waived the 5-day advance notice (attached).

Mr. Pates said this was an opportunity for the Planning Commission to provide its input to StreetSense for Planning Areas 3 (Idlewild) and 6 (Fall Hill). He said he would go around the table and ask each Commission member if they have specific questions for StreetSense.

Mr. Colin Greene introduced himself and Beth Hesler (StreetSense). They were participating via conference call/Skype.

Mr. Hornung said he had no questions at this time. He said it was his understanding that following the work joint session with City Council and the Planning Commission, StreetSense would be providing the first draft of the document in March. He asked if this was still the case.

Mr. Johnston said staff would be going to Bethesda on February 23rd to meet with StreetSense and that the City expects the draft of the plan on March 15th. He said the document would be presented to the Planning Commission and the City Council at a joint work session, scheduled for March 21, 2017 at 5:30 p.m. However, he said that presentation would not be the end of the process. Once the document is received, City staff will take the recommendations and put the information into Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) and Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) language.

Mr. Pates welcomed Mr. Tim Baroody, City Manager, as an attendee at the work session. He said that at the point when the document is received by the City, it was his understanding that this document would be the end-product from StreetSense. He said he presumed then that the Planning Commission would take the draft and either amend it, scrap it, or move it forward to City Council.

Mr. Johnston said City staff will determine how to affect it from a policy standpoint. He said a presentation is tentatively scheduled in May to move the document forward. The next step for these two Area Plans would be to make Comp Plan Amendments. He said the document from StreetSense would not be adopted in and of itself but that staff would extract portions of the document to be incorporated into the Comp Plan.

Mr. Pates said he thought that the Planning Commission was going to get a product from StreetSense that the City would then be able to adopt and thus have Comp Plan amendments right away.

Mr. Johnston said it is still being decided what the exact process will be.

Mr. Colin Greene, StreetSense, said the goal was to work with the City Staff, the Planning Commission and City Council to provide a strong framework and to take parts of the document and work them into the Comprehensive Plan. He said it is most important to continue to move forward. He said the expectation was not to publish the document as a Comp Plan amendment.

Mr. Pates said he was concerned that the City wouldn't have amendments to the Comp Plan for these areas for more than six more months.

Mr. Johnston said that until the City reviews and absorbs the final product from StreetSense, we just don't know. He reminded everyone that the City will have public hearings, as required by City and State Code, which will provide opportunities for everyone to give comments on the document.

Mr. Pates clarified that the Commission will receive a final product from StreetSense in March but that the City will not be getting Comp Plan amendments from StreetSense. After that point, the Commission will be getting the Comp Plan amendments/changes from City staff.

Dr. Gratz said he had a question regarding density. He said density involves more things that the City needs to consider, such as City services, schools, infrastructure, etc. He said we need to ensure that we are not increasing density while also overburdening and creating a less desirable area. He cautioned that the City must be careful with increasing density.

Mr. Greene agreed with Dr. Gratz that this is a very important issue. He said StreetSense has been very careful in addressing density and are not advocating increasing density and has been working closely with staff to determine what areas have limited growth potential. He said feedback is vital in weighing the benefits and costs associated with increased density.

Mr. O'Toole asked what Streetsense has come up with to help [the Princess Anne Street corridor in] Planning Area 6.

Mr. Greene said they had determined that some of the older buildings [on Princess Anne Street] are not contributing (eastern side) to that area. He said they would like to see the City make use of older buildings along Princess Anne Street and possibly to create a special zoning district. He said it was important to determine what the City wants for the character of this roadway, while still being sensitive to and protecting the [residential] area behind Princess Anne Street.

Mr. Pates asked how this would be implemented.

Mr. Greene said the City would need to determine how big the district should be and to also make it an easier process for businesses that want to locate in certain areas.

Mr. O'Toole asked what the overall plan was for Planning Area 3. Specifically the 78+- acres [i.e., Hylton Tract] in that area.

Mr. Greene said the City could benefit greatly from [the Route 3 and I-95] traffic in this area. He said the City may want to consider an office campus use to attract government agencies, private companies, etc. He said density in the area is not looking to be like downtown but geared more toward the I-95 corridor.

Mr. Johnston said that the City Manager has been very involved with talks to develop this property. He said the current owner of the 78+- acres knows he needs to decide what he would like to do with the property.

Mr. Pates said he would encourage the City to facilitate and encourage a Regional Employment Center for this property. He said it would be a tremendous economic opportunity for the City and that he would not want to see residential development for this tract. He encouraged the City to continue to work with the property owner and to extend Gateway Boulevard across Route 3 to a proposed intersection with Hays Street.

Mr. Greene said the City will need to ensure transitions are done well and correctly.

Mr. Pates asked to what degree StreetSense has used social media in developing these Area Plans. He said he has not seen any comments from the public that had been generated by the use of social media and no written comments from citizens other than two e-mails. He noted that the City's contract with StreetSense called for the consultants to use social media to solicit citizen input but that apparently this has not been done.

Mr. Greene said the City has hosted several community meetings and they have welcomed residents to provide comments via e-mail.

Mr. Pates said that for both Planning Areas, he thought it would be a good idea to have the ARB, City staff, and Commission members get together to identify significant architectural structures in these areas, to see which buildings should be protected in some fashion, and to potentially use them as focal points for redeveloping/developing these areas. For example, he suggested that in Area 6, Carl's Ice Cream and the Relax Inn on Princess Anne Street were distinctive buildings from a certain era and that they warranted protection. He said although the Relax Inn has had its problems, he believes this building to be a distinctive part of the character of the downtown and he would like to strongly encourage preservation of these types of areas/buildings.

Mr. Greene suggested that an open door policy with staff and property owners would be one way of being able to discuss possibilities and ways to accomplish goals.

Mr. Pates suggested that conducting an inventory of the distinctive or contributing structures that are in both Planning Areas would be a good start to focus public attention on these kinds of unique structures.

Mr. Pates asked whether, with respect to both Planning Areas (3&6), StreetSense had talked to business owners and, if so, what were their comments ?

Mr. Greene said they had mostly talked to business owners on the retail side. The bottom line in doing this was an attempt to understand why people chose to do business in Fredericksburg.

Mr. Pates said he would like to see a list of the business owners that StreetSense had contacted.

Mr. Pates said another great concern for him was improving the appearance of Route 3. He suggested installing more sidewalks, street trees and crosswalks for pedestrians and cyclists wanting to access the area. Connectivity, he said, was extremely important. He asked Mr. Greene if they had any specific ideas on improving the appearance of that area.

Mr. Greene said the most important suggestion would be to de-clutter that area. He noted that there was an excess of signage, overhead wires, etc.

Mr. Pates said he thought that the City could invoke eminent domain in instances where a shopping center or business complex had a parking lot/area or any area that needed to be upgraded, improved, repaired and the property owner was not receptive to the use of incentives.

Mr. Hornung said he agreed that the City should address beautification but that he does not agree with taking property for this purpose. He said the City has to be reasonable and realistic and noted that the cost associated with the City taking someone's property would be excessive and that he believed the «Public Use» clause under the eminent domain process would be a difficult requirement for the City to meet for this purpose. He said he did not believe the City would want to go this route.

Ms. Beth Hesler (StreetSense) said part of their recommendations for a strategic plan for Route 3 and Route 1 would be to suggest limiting curb cuts and modifying medians to reduce erratic movements.

Mr. Pates said he would like to see immediate steps taken with regard to beautification. He stressed the importance of Route 3 as an entranceway into the City and that for many people coming to Fredericksburg from I-95, this area would be their first, and perhaps only, impression of the City. He pointed out that at one point, the Silver Companies had discussed creating a special tax district to fund a

major beautification project on the Route 3 bridge over the interstate, but that no action was ever taken on their proposal. He said he was not sure that project was the best way to go, but that at least it attempted to make this area an attractive feature that would draw people to this commercial corridor and to the downtown.

He said he would also like to see a Gateway Feature at all four major entranceways into the City, all of which would be the same and that would ensure that anyone entering at any of these points would know they were literally entering the City limits. He used Falls Church as an example of a city in Virginia that was surrounded by a county (Fairfax County in that case) and that if it were not for the state highway sign, you would never know that you were entering the City of Falls Church.

Dr. Gratz and Mr. Hornung suggested the City take advantage of and begin talks with the arts community to discuss ways of accomplishing this goal.

Mr. Pates said he had only been able to get through one-third of his questions during this work session but that he had to leave the work session for another engagement. He asked if the other Commissioners would like to continue with the work session. The remaining Commissioners agreed to adjourn.

Mr. Johnston asked Mr. Pates to submit his remaining questions via e-mail to City staff so they could turn them in to the StreetSense team prior to the work session scheduled on March 21st.

Work session adjourned at 12:30 p.m.



James M. Pates, Chair

NOTE: Mr. Pates provided a copy of his remaining questions to Mr. Johnston on February 23, 2017. Mr. Johnston and other staff met with StreetSense in Bethesda, MD on Feb. 23rd and Mr. Johnston brought a copy of the questions to discuss with the StreetSense team that afternoon. A copy of those questions is attached to these Minutes as a courtesy. (Attachment A).

ATTACHMENT A

**Questions and Comments for StreetSense
Planning Commission – Jim Pates, Chair
Fredericksburg Small Area Plans – Areas 3 (Idlewild) and 6 (Fall Hill)**

February 22, 2017

Area Plan 3 – Idlewild

1. What can be done to protect residential uses near I-95 from air, noise and light pollution? For example, there is tremendous ambient noise in the Idlewild development from I-95 and now there is talk about building an elementary school very close to the interstate. Is that advisable? What can be done to protect both existing uses and proposed uses near I-95 from such pollution? Should the City consider establishing a specific building setback or require other mitigation for all new construction near the I-95 right-of-way?
2. What specific ideas do you have for redevelopment of the three shopping centers along Route 3 between Westwood subdivision and I-95? As discussed on February 15, such redevelopment would hopefully include improved signage, landscaping, lighting, etc. Do you think redevelopment and beautification of this area (and other planning areas) would be helped if the City prohibited flashing digital signs?
3. What are your recommendations for improved pedestrian and bicycle access along Route 3? What can be done both in the short term and long term?
4. Is it desirable or feasible to extend the Walking Trail from Smith Run to I-95? What improvements can be made generally to the Smith Run Trail?
5. What can be done, both short term and long term, to improve public access to the City-owned Smith Run Civil War battlefield?
6. What are the potential “pocket park” sites in Area 3?
7. As mentioned on February 15, how could the City promote development of the Hylton Tract by improving the intersection of Route 3 and Gateway Boulevard and extending Gateway Boulevard to the extension of Hays Street? Wouldn't such a step also help to address the traffic congestion recently exacerbated by the new Governors Row townhouse development?
8. What improvements would be desirable and feasible for the VCR Walking Trail? Is it feasible to extend it under I-95? If not, should it be extended into Idlewild and north to Route 3?

Area Plan 6 – Fall Hill

1. Do you think removal of existing billboards along Princess Anne Street would help with redevelopment of that entranceway into the City? If so, how could this best be accomplished?
2. What are your recommendations for improved pedestrian and bicycle access along Jefferson Davis Highway? What can be done to promote this, both short term and long term?
3. What improvements should be made to the Canal Path/Heritage Trail? For example, would it be desirable to incorporate a fitness trail into the existing pathway, perhaps at Old Mill Park? What other improvements can be made to this very popular trail?
4. What about riverfront development generally? The City has expressed a desire to protect the riverfront as open space that will preserve the river from intrusive development. Do you suggest comprehensively downzoning all land along the Rappahannock? If not, what additional measures can be taken to make sure riverfront development is sensitive to the environment?
5. What are the potential “pocket park” sites in Planning Area 6?
6. I was puzzled to see in the Request for Proposals that “[t]he Area Plans shall include policies and regulations to turn strip commercial into mixed-use walkable urban places at a scale compatible with adjacent neighborhoods.” For both Planning Areas 3 and 6, have you done this? Why or why not? Do you support such an idea? Have the residents in these two Planning Areas voiced support for such a concept?
7. What specific ideas do you have to address existing problems of homelessness and crime in Area 6?
8. There is support within the Fall Hill neighborhood to preserve the character and scale of infill residential development within the community. For example, there has been a recent “tear-down” on Bunker Hill Street and the neighborhood fears that an over-sized house will be erected on the site. What can be done to prevent this? Have you ever had any experience with residential conservation districts? Would such an approach be helpful to protect such neighborhoods in the City?
9. What improvements are you suggesting for the VEPCO Canal?
10. Should there be a specified plan for development along Princess Anne Street? What about traffic and traffic patterns?
11. What road improvements can be made to address serious congestion problems at the Fall Hill Avenue/ Route 1 intersection? Specifically, would it be helpful to

extend the northbound right-turn lane on Route 1 south of Fall Hill Avenue?
What about a second entrance to James Monroe High School from northbound Route 1? What role should James Monroe High School play in reducing traffic and its effects on the neighborhood?

12. VDOT is planning to re-build the Route 1 bridge over the VEPCO Canal. Wouldn't it make sense to widen the new bridge at the same time to address future needs?
13. What suggestions do you have to accent or improve historic sites in both Planning Areas 3 and 6?
14. Although Lauck's Island is not within the City, do you think the City should consider protecting or using this property as a recreational and environmental asset for the City and Stafford County?
15. What about parking on Fall Hill Avenue near the City-owned river recreational area?