

MINUTES

ANN ARBOR CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

BUSINESS MEETING

7:00 p.m. – November 2, 2006

Time: Chair Pratt called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Place: Council Chamber, Second Floor, 100 North Fifth Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Borum, Carlberg, Emaus, Potts, Pratt, Westphal

Members Absent: Lipson

Arriving Members: Bona, Kunselman

Staff Present: Foondle, Kahan

INTRODUCTIONS

None.

Enter Kunselman.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

a. Minutes of October 5, 2006.

Moved by Carlberg, seconded by Borum, to approve the minutes as presented.

A vote on the motion showed:

YEAS: Borum, Carlberg, Emaus, Kunselman, Potts, Pratt, Westphal

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Bona, Lipson

Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Moved by Carlberg, seconded by Borum, to approve the agenda.

A vote on the motion showed:

YEAS: Borum, Carlberg, Emaus, Kunselman, Potts, Pratt, Westphal
NAYS: None
ABSENT: Bona, Lipson

Motion carried.

Enter Bona.

REPORTS FROM CITY ADMINISTRATION, CITY COUNCIL,
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, PLANNING COMMISSION
OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES, WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS AND PETITIONS

Pratt reported that the Planning Commission officers discussed the work program and hoped to have a draft to discuss at the next working session.

Potts reported that the Master Plan Revisions Committee is moving ahead on the reconsideration of the zoning and plans for the South State Street area. She announced that the next meeting of the Ordinance Revisions Committee was November 3 at 3:00 p.m. and that the A2D2 Downtown Planning for Historic Preservation committee would be meeting on November 8 at 1:00 p.m. in the Sixth Floor Conference Room, City Hall.

Carlberg referred to the City's list of neighborhood groups and noted that many did not have email addresses. She suggested that it would be helpful to contact these groups to obtain email addresses and request their most recent meeting minutes, which would provide Commission with a sense of when they last met, how many people attended, etc.

Bona announced that the A2D2 Overlay Committee would be meeting on Wednesday, November 15 at 4:00 p.m. in the Fourth Floor Conference Room, City Hall.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

None.

PUBLIC HEARINGS SCHEDULED FOR NEXT MEETING

None.

REGULAR BUSINESS

a. Public Hearing and Action on City of Ann Arbor Non-motorized Transportation Plan. This Citywide, comprehensive plan identifies ways to improve non-motorized access throughout Ann Arbor and to points outside the City. The plan includes design guidelines, existing conditions, proposed facilities and a description of how to implement the improvements. This plan will replace the 1992 Bicycle Master Plan (tabled at 10/5/06 meeting) – Staff Recommendation: Approval

Kahan summarized what had occurred since the last time Commission reviewed the plan.

Norm Cox, of The Greenway Collaborative, consultant for the plan, also summarized changes that had been made since the last Planning Commission review. He said it was not the City's intent to tell a bicyclist to bike in the street or on the sidewalk; rather, it was an individual choice based on skills, weather conditions, etc. He stated that sidewalks along arterial and collector streets were different from sidewalks in neighborhoods with regard to maintenance issues and that they should be looked at more frequently than the five-year level in the plan. He said they removed the off-road pathway system from near road plan, stating that this was more of a long-term item that would be built as funding allowed. However, he said there were a few off-road corridors that were worth highlighting to pursue because of the way they could serve pedestrians and bicyclists. Clarification of how the bike route signs were used in comparison to bike lane signs was something to be considered for incorporation into the plan.

Eli Cooper, City Transportation Manager, stated that the sidewalk bike route signage issue has drawn a great deal of attention. Currently, he said, there were 48 sidewalk bike route signs in Ann Arbor. He stated that 30 of these signs were on roadways that were not wide enough to have included recognition in the near-term plan to narrow lanes for adequate bike lane space. In addition, he said, the average daily traffic on those roads was greater than 15,000 vehicles per day and the speed limits ranged from 30-45 miles per hour, so they were heavily traveled roads at relatively high speeds. He stated that a posted speed limit provided guidance and that the community would be well served if more people paid attention to the speed limit. He said there were an additional 11 signs that could be found along Seventh Street, which was one of the corridors identified on the near-term opportunity corridor map, and said staff was developing a signage and striping plan. He believed the existing signs could come down and the new work installed next spring when the temperature was above 45 degrees. He said traffic engineering staff understood the claims made by many on the issue of safety of riding on the sidewalk versus the street. Some of the staff has gone back to the original research, he said, and pointed out that there were questions asked by researchers about the potential harm that could come to a bicyclist on the sidewalk versus the street. He said there were many different types of bicyclists in the community, who would all make different choices. The issue was the sign and it was the City traffic engineer's opinion that the sidewalk bike signs remain in place for some corridors until there was a safe place for bicyclists to enjoy those corridors.

Mike Naughton, 2067 Sorrento, stated that the last time he spoke before the Planning Commission about this plan, he felt that the plan was more of a bike lane plan and did not represent what it set out to do, which was plan for all non-motorized transportation. Since then, he said, most of his concerns were addressed after discussions with staff and the consultant. He suggested that Commission keep in mind the bicycle usage on sidewalks and bike lanes. He thought more people used the bike paths than the bike lanes. He suggested that the City look at the websites for Madison, Wisconsin, and Boulder, Colorado, stating that their bicycle travel provisions were excellent. He mentioned a south side bike path, stating that this would be an opportunity to provide a quality corridor for those who work in the State Street area. With regard to a priority sidewalk, he thought there should be at least one next to all major arterials, qualifying for tighter inspection and maintenance. He said for most people, sidewalks were paths. He said the definition of a path should be addressed. One thing that could be done, he said, was to start engineering those sidewalks, stating that bicyclists immediately slowed down when riding on concrete. He stated that the environment created for the bicyclist was a way to control speed, adding that there were appropriate places for both concrete and paving. He commended staff for doing a fine job on this plan.

The resident of 1336 Hutchins reiterated the importance of sidewalks. He stated that Ann Arbor had a very large running community, with three running specialty stores in the area, and asked that Commission keep that in mind. He said he would like to see more asphalt paths because concrete was very hard on runners.

Noting no further speakers, Pratt declared the public hearing closed.

Moved by Carlberg, seconded by Emaus, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby adopts the Non-motorized Transportation Plan as an element of the City of Ann Arbor's Master Plan.

Moved by Carlberg, seconded by Emaus, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the City Council adopt the Non-motorized Transportation Plan as an element of the City of Ann Arbor's Master Plan.

Potts asked Mr. Cox to further discuss the issue of signage.

Cox stated that bike route signs going through neighborhoods were seen around the City. The purpose of those signs was to guide bicyclists onto shared facilities that were not bike lanes, he said. The way they were currently used, he said, was simply as a bike route. He said the idea here was that these signs publicize the best routes through neighborhoods to get to key destinations.

Potts asked if there were any cooperation with schools to make sure there were ways to get to those schools on foot and by bicycle. She wanted to be sure there was knowledge and cooperation between all of the groups interested in providing pedestrian access and bicycle transportation.

Cox stated that each school had an access plan for anyone within walking distance. If it were the community's priority to add public elementary schools to the bike route map, he said, the map could be revised.

Carlberg did not see how everyone's needs could be met with a simple solution. She said she would not ride in the street on Packard because she did not feel safe, but the fact that there was a choice to ride on the sidewalk did not take anything away from someone wanting to ride on the street. She was impressed

that there were 30 sidewalk bike route signs on roadways that were not wide enough for someone to ride on the street. She thought the signs were helpful for people who were not experienced riders, adding that she would like those people to consider riding their bikes on safe route. She was not convinced that removing those signs would benefit anyone. She said there were many complaints about the behavior of drivers and she did not know how signs would change that.

Cooper said the policy in the plan was to remove the signs as soon as possible, stating that this has been the City's long-standing policy. He said there has been a great deal of debate on this issue. Staff was not in favor of the signs or in favor of sidewalk bicycle routes, he said, but noted that it was staff's opinion that the signs should remain until improvements could be made to make a safe situation for bicyclists.

Pratt asked if there had been any coordination with the City Attorney's Office, suggesting that it may be helpful if an opinion were available prior to this going to City Council. He said there was an issue of liability and of bringing something up to current standards versus whether it was acceptable to have something remain with the standards in place at the time it was built. It seemed intuitive to him that it would be safer to ride a bicycle on a sidewalk along a street with 15,000 vehicle trips per day.

Emaus said he was confused about the City's position on the signs. He did not see a compelling reason to keep them or take them down. He thought the signs were a message to drivers that bicycles did not belong on the road, which caused people to drive faster. He said perhaps the solution was to send a message to drivers and bicyclists that they needed to share the road, perhaps creating signs that said cars must share the road with bicyclists, which could be installed along with the bike path signs.

Cooper said staff would need to research whether this type of sign would be acceptable, adding that it would be an interesting way to accommodate many interests. He said staff was currently in the process of installing bike lanes, which used black and white regulatory signs. Green signs were used for guidance and informational purposes, he said, and staff would need to check the viability of using yellow background "share the road" signs.

Kunselman stated that he tried to keep off of Packard Road while riding his bike, as it was dangerous. He said the signs were more on the sidewalk than the road right-of-way and asked if they were intended to inform pedestrians that they were to share the sidewalk with bicyclists.

Cooper did not know the intention of the signs when they were erected in the 1960s and 1970s. He said the signs were visible to pedestrians, bicyclists and motor vehicle operators and that bicyclists believed they created an environment for motor vehicle drivers to think that bicycles did not belong in the street. This was not true, he said, noting that it was legal for bicyclists to ride in the street.

Kunselman stated that while those signs might be visible to a driver, they were not necessarily for the driver's information, as they were located closer to the sidewalk. He understood that there were two sides to this issue, but agreed that there was no sense in removing the signs until there was a safe alternative.

Pratt asked if there were some type of approach with regard to maintenance where staff kept track of how frequently maintenance calls were made and how frequently problems were found. It made sense to make inspections each year, he said, but in many cases staff would find nothing, so perhaps there was a better way to manage time.

Cooper stated that a committee consisting of staff members looked not only at riding surface management, but also at other maintenance types of application, such as the type of material and how frequently bike lanes should be swept.

Kunselman asked if the plan contained any provisions for skateboarders.

Cox replied no, skateboarders were not addressed in this plan.

Kunselman stated that students at Arizona State University used skateboards as a means of transportation throughout the year. He wondered if there were a way to help citizens in Ann Arbor feel that skateboards were not against the law, stating that they were a form of recreation and mobility. He said he would like to see this addressed at some time in the future.

Potts suggested that perhaps a footnote might be added to the plan indicating that scooters and inline skating might be considered if they were to ever catch on as modes of transportation.

Bona stated that the questions she raised when Commission last reviewed this were answered to her satisfaction and she thanked staff for that. She thought the education component of this would be very important, stating that educating the public would help with many of the misunderstandings out there. She was comfortable with the response from staff regarding signs and believed the situations would be evaluated with care as they came up. She suggested that the routes be evaluated by a comprehensive group to make sure all concerns were addressed.

Pratt supported Commissioner Emaus' suggestion and appreciated staff's willingness to look into the idea of an additional sign. With regard to education, he suggested that measurable goals would be appropriate, such as a program in every elementary school by a certain date or pamphlets being provided in all driver education training centers by a certain date. He also echoed Commissioner Emaus' desire to identify how many sidewalk gaps the City would want to have filled within a certain time, stating that working to reach a benchmark would help things keep moving.

Carlberg asked if this were contained in the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).

Cooper replied yes. He said the CIP was a five-year funding program listing projects moving toward implementation. He said there were fiscal constraints in the CIP and it has been staff's experience that funds have not been available for this. He stated that a regional policy recently was changed which made federal funds available to invest in sidewalk and bike lanes.

Carlberg asked if staff believed the plan provided sufficient direction to move forward with filling in sidewalk gaps.

Cooper said the plan was not entirely precise, but that staff has created groupings of high quality and they would be pursuing those quickly and moving forward with a full prioritization program that would be developed through the CIP as funds become available.

Pratt said he would be interested in finding out how many sidewalk gaps there were ten years ago. He said an analysis could then be done on whether goals had been set too high or not high enough, and what was and was not done well.

Potts commended staff for an exceptional job of responding to the many comments raised at the Planning Commission meeting when the plan was reviewed. She stated that with regard to page 124, she was particularly interested in the safety of bicyclists. She believed bicyclists were not taking responsibility for their own safety to a certain degree, noting that they did very little to make themselves visible when riding among cars and pedestrians. She suggested an extra bullet item be added to the educational recommendations within one year, as follows: "Prepare an informational leaflet to distribute with bicycle licenses which stated that bicyclists were responsible for making themselves visible from all angles at

night.” She said the booklet, which would not need much funding, could contain suggestions about what to wear.

Cox stated that bicycle visibility was included in the safety suggestions for motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians, which was contained in the plan.

Potts asked what would be done with the information, suggesting that it be given to people obtaining bicycle licenses, to schools for distribution to students. She said this information needed to be provided early, not as a response when someone broke the law.

Cox agreed and stated that the League of Michigan Bicyclists had a pamphlet on what every bicyclist should know. He also said the bicycle map contained a list of items that bicyclists should do and know.

Pratt suggested that something simple and inexpensive be prepared to provide to schools and to distribute with bike licenses.

A vote on the two main motions showed:

YEAS: Bona, Borum, Carlberg, Emaus, Kunselman, Potts, Pratt, Westphal
NAYS: None
ABSENT: Lipson

Motion carried.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

None.

COMMISSION PROPOSED BUSINESS

Kunselman said he asked staff to provide Commission with the flyer on Solar City Strategic Partnerships, which was distributed this evening. He encouraged anyone to provide ideas to Dave Konkle, the City's energy coordinator, stating that perhaps a solar friendly task force of the Planning Commission might be created if the City were rewarded any grants.

Carlberg stated that this was her last Planning Commission meeting as a City Council representative. She thanked everyone for the many hours devoted to Commission work, stating that Commission members were unrecognized heroes in terms of public participation. She thought this particular Planning Commission brought a high level of expertise and involvement in its serious consideration of all issues. She was proud to be a part of this Planning Commission and wished everyone well.

Kunselman thanked Commissioner Carlberg for her service. It was his hope she would come back to serve on the Planning Commission as a general citizen.

Moved by Kunselman, seconded by Emaus, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby approves the following resolution:

WHEREAS, Jean Carlberg served tirelessly and with great enthusiasm as the City Council representative on the Planning Commission;

WHEREAS, Jean Carlberg's term as City Council representative is set to expire in the near future;

RESOLVED, That the City Planning Commission welcomes the opportunity for Jean Carlberg to serve on the Planning Commission as a citizen at large.

A vote on the motion showed:

YEAS: Bona, Borum, Carlberg, Emaus, Kunselman, Potts, Pratt, Westphal
NAYS: None
ABSENT: Lipson

Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Pratt declared the meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Mark Lloyd, Manager
Planning and Development Services

Bonnie Bona, Secretary

Prepared by Laurie Foondle
Management Assistant
Planning and Development Services