

Downtown Commission Annual Retreat
Minutes – October 14, 2016
10:00 AM
6th Floor HR Conference Room (623) – City Hall

Present: Chairman Adrian Vassallo, Presiding; Vice-Chairman Michael McDonough; Mr. Dane Barrager, Mr. Brent Campbell, Ms. Franzi Charen, Mr. Byron Greiner, Councilman Brian Haynes, Mr. Jimi Rentz, Ms. Ruth Summers and Ms. Pamela Winkler

Absent: Mr. Jack Bebbber

Retreat introduction: Identifying Downtown Capital/Infrastructure Priorities

At approximately 10:05 AM, Dana Frankel, Downtown Development Specialist welcomed Commissioners and provided an overview of the Agenda.

Chairman Vassallo explained the focus for this year's Retreat being infrastructure needs and priorities, and that out of the meeting a list of projects to propose for funding from the CIP or other sources.

Downtown Investments Overview

Ms. Frankel explained the reference materials provided including:

- Map showing recent and planned infrastructure projects (funded/proposed through operational budget, bond, CIP, TDA)
- Matrix with recent and planned infrastructure projects (corresponding with map)
- Walkability Study matrix indicating status items identified by ADA in their 2015 Walkability Study

South Slope Visioning

Shannon Tuch, Principal Planner, presented an overview of the South Slope Visioning effort being initiated in order to inform possible future zoning changes, design guidelines and infrastructure projects. Ms. Tuch explained that the community would be engaged through an input process, and that goals include improving accessibility throughout downtown, supporting job growth, promoting sense of place, encouraging private investment and carrying out elements of the Asheville in Motion Plan. In response to a question from Mr. Greiner, Ms. Tuch said that part of the planning process could include UDO changes. Ms. Tuch explained that the City is waiting to hear about a grant from State DOT for complete street design along major South Slope corridors, and applying for TDA funding through the Major Works TPDF grant for construction/implementation of those plans, plus other infrastructure including a gateway and a parking garage.

Downtown Master Plan Update

Alan Glines, Assistant Director of Planning and Urban Design, presented an update on the scope of the Downtown Master Plan Update, noting that it is included in Council's priorities. It will address management of public spaces, character, design guidelines, place-making, linkages, busking policy, outside dining placement, vending permitting, construction staging, public spaces, parklets, programming of public spaces, design guidelines and parking. Franzi Charen asked about opportunities

to support local businesses and the importance of property ownership. Vice-Chairman McDonough commented that the urban character of downtown should extend to the river along the new section of Patton Avenue / I-26 Connector. Todd Okolichany, Director of Planning and Urban Design, explained that there is a working group to explore gateway and private development opportunities.

Mr. Glines said that the Downtown Master Plan Update process would begin in the summer to fall of next year, and that the parameters are still in draft.

Transportation Projects

Jeff Moore, the City's Traffic Engineer presented an overview of recent, current and planned transportation projects including the following:

- Parking Study - draft expected by end of October
- Civic Center parking garage life extension study and recommendations underway
- Credit card meters - planned replacement of all meters in next 3 years
- Passport parking use is growing every month
- Signal control update - funded by DOT – will make it easier for the City to monitor and adjust timing of signals to help with better traffic and pedestrian flow (contract beginning April)
- Audible pedestrian push buttons recently installed
- Coxe & Patton (through the HWY safety improvement program) a “yield to pedestrians” LED sign will be installed

Mr. Moore told Commissioners that they should report traffic and transportation issues to himself or Ms. Frankel and opened the floor up for questions.

Mr. Barrager asked about raising parking rates and suggested considering parking discounts for residents and also expressed concerns about Asheville’s high pedestrian death rate. He also asked about the balance of the parking enterprise fund [as of June 30, 2016: \$1.4M]. Mr. Greiner noted that the first hour free is good. Chairman Vassallo asked about meter box pay stations; Mr. Moore said Harry Brown (Parking Services Manager) has looked into it and that he would find out. [There are concerns about the distances customers must walk and the cost effectiveness in areas where only a few spaces can be served.] Ms. Summers asked about extending parking meters into the South Slope, West Asheville and Biltmore Village in order to increase revenue and also about marking crosswalks and adding pedestrian crossing signals at Haywood and Page Ave. in front of the US Cellular Center. Mr. Greiner asked about the possibility of changing signals on DOT streets; Jeff said that the City can't make those changes but can ask DOT. Vice-Chairman McDonough suggested defining an urban corridor across Patton Avenue with local street crossings and that traffic could be analyzed with Hilliard and Clingman possibly re-routed. Ms. Frankel suggested regular updates to the Commission from the Bike and Pedestrian Task Force; Mr. Moore agreed.

Public Works Projects

Greg Shuler, Director of Public Works, then presented a selection of recent, current and future projects explaining how beneficial this process of prioritization would be for all. Mr. Shuler discussed the running bond pattern for sidewalk resurfacing, proposed bulb outs for Biltmore Avenue, recent resurfacing on

North French Broad, Stormwater improvements at Patton Place (public-private partnership) and how important feedback/communication is for minimizing disruption. He also explained on-going beautification efforts including cleanliness, increased frequency of trash collection, graffiti removal and street trees.

In opening the discussion up for questions, Mr. Barrager noted that dog waste bag receptacles need to be filled. There was some conversation about efforts to improve cigarette butt litter and better secure the receptacles attached to the trash cans and support to continue frequent trash collection. Ms. Summers expressed concerns about resurfacing work taking place during busy times of the year (October).

A discussion took place about Flexi-pave, a potential grate replacement for tree pits. A suggestion was made for the Downtown Design Review Committee to look at options and/or for that issue to be included in the Downtown Master Plan Update.

A brief discussion took place about blue stone on Haywood Street. There was some conversation about options to save some of the blue stone for public art or partial surfacing. Feedback should be sought from property and business owners on Haywood Street to find out if they want to keep or replace the blue stone.

Mr. Greiner asked if private businesses or property owners would be able to pay for resurfacing projects; Mr. Shuler said that that the City could likely do so.

In continued conversation about transportation priorities, Chairman Vassallo suggested that street markings downtown be repainted. Ms. Charen pointed out areas in need of re-marking including Southbound on North Lexington at Woodfin and Hiwassee Street.

Walkability Study Review

Mr. Greiner presented an overview of ADA's Walkability Study, initiated first as a Keller Williams community project in 2012 and picked up by ADA as a working tool to serve as a guideline for staff to prioritize and address infrastructure needs related to pedestrian safety and accessibility. Projects from the 2015 Study are listed with notes on status for each, which can serve as a resource as the Commission considers infrastructure needs and priorities.

Context and Budgeting

Cathy Ball, Assistant City Manager, presented an overview of the CIP budgeting process. She noted other sources of revenue and funding including a new vehicle tax that must be used on streets and sidewalks (it was \$2M and is now \$2.8 M). Some discussion took place about the potential to relocate Public Works on South Charlotte Street to develop affordable housing; Ms. Ball explained that land costs are the barrier to affordable housing development. There was some discussion about the need for additional affordable housing downtown, and goals to better connect the east end community to downtown.

Infrastructure Planning and Prioritization

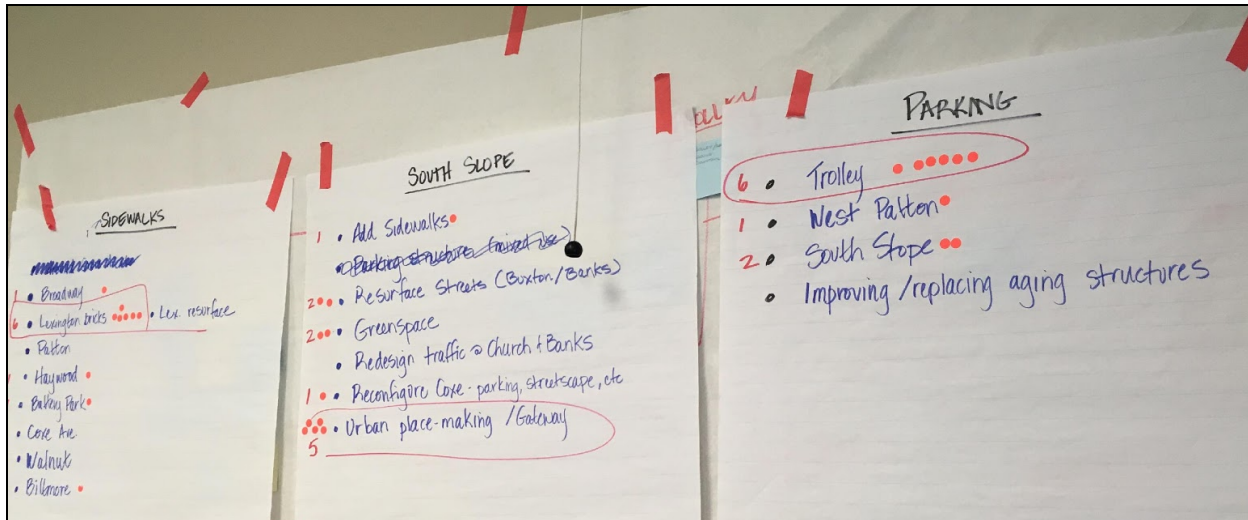
Sara Bensman, consultant facilitator, asked Commissioners to take some time to discuss ideas and needs following the information that was provided earlier in the day.

Mr. Campbell noted that sidewalks can be improved by private developers in the development process. Chairman Vassallo said that infrastructure investment by the City is important in order to encourage private development, explaining that downtown investment grows the “pie” (tax revenue City-wide). Ms. Summers suggested land banking for parking garages and the need for additional parking downtown. Ms. Winkler explained the need for transportation options, and the importance of educating citizens on those alternatives and how it can alleviate parking, noting that space is too valuable to be only housing cars. Other Commissioners also expressed an interest into considering alternative transportation options. Mr. Okolichany explained the concept of Transit Demand Management. Ms. Ball said that the City is in conversations with a property owner of a site in South Slope between Millard and Southside Avenue and has developed preliminary designs for a parking garage. There was some discussion about underused hotel parking garages, and opportunities for the City to partner with developers to create additional spaces. Sam Powers, Director of Economic Development, noted that staff has early conversations with developers about parking and affordable housing. The discussion then turned to sidewalks, with a general consensus on the importance of walkability.

Ms. Bensman asked each Commissioner to write three infrastructure priorities on post-its. Those items were grouped into the following areas of interest:

- Sidewalks (11)
- Parking & Alternatives (6)
- South Slope (4)
- Housing (3)
- Local Business (2)
- Utilities (2)
- Mixed-use at Haywood/Page Property (1)
- Cleanliness and Beautification (1)
- East End Connectivity (1)

The top three priorities (sidewalks, parking/transportation, south slope) were identified priority project lists were generated. Commissioners used stickers to prioritize items on each list (pictured below).



Prioritization resulted in the following:

Sidewalks

- Repair/replace Lexington Ave. bricks (6)
- Broadway Ave. (1)
- Haywood St. (1)
- Battery Park Ave. (1)
- Biltmore Ave. (1)
- Patton Ave.
- Coxe Ave.
- Walnut St.

South Slope

- Urban place-making/gateway (5)
- Street resurfacing @ Buxton Ave. & Banks Ave. (2)
- Creation of greenspace (2)
- Reconfiguration of Coxe Ave.: parking, streetscape, etc. (complete streets). (1)
- Add sidewalks where they do not exist (1)
- Redesign traffic @ Church St. & Banks Ave.

Parking & Alternatives

- Trolley or other transportation alternative (6)
- South Slope (2)
- Patton between CBD and river (1)
- Improving/replacing aging structures

Commissioners were then asked to consider bigger picture ideas and investments. The following list was generated:

- New Christmas decorations
- Green roofs
- Solar panels on the civic center [project in the works]

- No smoking ordinance throughout the CBD
- Free wi-fi
- Pedestrian-only streets
- Increased housing downtown, including affordable housing
- More local businesses and fewer chains
- More public spaces, both outdoor parks and indoor amenities
- Non-profit space for meetings/community center
- Education
- Expanded CBD to river along new Patton corridor
- Planters and beautification
- Car-share/bike-share (travel demand management)
- More things for kids to do
- Business Improvement District

Public Comment

Sage Turner, project manager for the French Broad Food Co-Op's redevelopment, commented on the ideas and issues discussed, noting that their plans propose many identified priorities (supporting small business, parking, affordable housing, amenities). Ms. Turner discussed the importance of communication among stakeholders and neighbors, and interest in partnering with the City on development of their parking structure and on affordable housing.

There was no additional public comment.

Next Steps & Adjournment

Staff explained that next steps with regards to shorter term infrastructure priorities are to cost out and reformat the prioritized items in order to propose some as part of the CIP and to consider alternative funding sources for others. Ms. Ball explained that staff would create a 5 year proposal that identifies costs for these priorities and funding sources for each (by December).

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:15 PM.