

*COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
February 1, 2010*

Subcommittee Members: Council Member Sheryl Cole (Chair)
Council Member Laura Morrison
Council Member Chris Riley

1. Citizen Communication (3 minutes to speak)

No citizens signed up to speak.

2. Approval of minutes from the October 5, 2009 and November 2, 2009 regular subcommittee meeting.

Minutes were approved by a vote of 3-0.

3. Discussion and possible action on Comprehensive Plan update, including an update on outreach.

Garner Stoll, Planning and Development Review Department, updated the committee on outreach efforts and task force activities and provided an overview of participation to date. He said staff is currently compiling the results of public input and hopes to start assembling the elements of the vision statement in March. The plan is to return to the task force in April to discuss that preliminary vision statement, and workshops will later be held to allow the public to respond to that vision statement.

Matthew Duggan, Planning and Development Review Department, stated that the task force has created two committees: Communications and Engagement. The Engagement Committee has not yet met, but will soon begin discussing participation and outreach goals. A small group of volunteers have been working to design a logo. To date, 1200 surveys have been completed and 165 Meetings in a box have been scheduled. In addition, over 900 fans have signed up as fans on a Facebook page, and both the Chronicle and News 8 have done stories on the plan.

Gleg Claxton, Planning and Development Review Department, presented demographic information on the plan participants. He noted that the demographic information is not 100% accurate because some participants have neglected to provide demographic information. He noted that there has been a low participation rate from the Asian American community.

Perla Cavazos, Comprehensive Planning Task Force member and Chair of Engagement Committee, stated that task force members have been working on an organization plan and determining how they can be most effective as task force members. She said the biggest problem is the need for resource materials that can be distributed to the public to inform and educate the public about the plan, and added that some of the materials have been paid for by the task force members themselves. She noted that one of the challenges due to the size of the task force is communication, especially given the number of task force members and limited meeting dates. She also added that the task force is in need of a committee that can delegate tasks and create agendas. They are devoted to the process and want to be assured that their feedback will be integrated into the plan.

Mark Yznaga, Comprehensive Planning Task Force member, said there is a need for an alignment of the plan where all parties, e.g., the Council, consultant, Planning Commission and staff can get together to communicate. He felt the Council needed representatives in one place so they can all talk to each other. He also spoke about the lack of resource materials to distribute to the public, and the need for a website similar to the one created by the City of Portland. He added that they are also in need of public relations assistance because most citizens aren't aware that this effort is taking place. He said a smaller group is needed to bring all the work of the committees together. He added that strategic partnerships need to be formed to bring all segments of the community together.

Council Member Cole asked the Law Department to make a determination on whether the City of Austin could accept donations to assist with the creation and distribution of resource materials, as opposed to having those donations made directly to the task force or to individual task force members.

Council Member Morrison suggested that they also consider looking at non-profits to perform some outreach efforts.

No action taken.

4. Discussion and possible action on Open Meetings Act and its relation to Citizen Task Forces.

Brent Lloyd, Law Department, described the Open Meetings Act and stated that under State law, only the City Council and bodies that exercise final approving authority are subject to the Open Meetings Act. This includes all task forces and subcommittees. The City Council has a strong and broad policy of requiring open meeting compliance. The City's ordinance that governs open meetings says that a body created by the Council is subject to the open meetings requirement, and thus any change to those open meeting requirements would have to be amended by ordinance.

He added that the City currently does not have a policy regarding social media websites, however, it is clear that an open meetings violation does not exist if those websites are only used to garner citizen comments. However, if a page were created in the name of a task force under a city policy, it could become problematic if board members were to respond to those comments.

Council Member Morrison questioned how this would differ from four board members making a public comment. Mr. Lloyd responded that in the example of Facebook, which is used to have an interactive discussion, if board members were to make comments, it becomes a deliberation and discussion, which would be a violation of the open meetings act.

Council Member Riley questioned to what extent can a body covered by the open meetings act publicly comment on citizen comments without violating the Act. He noted that he was recently introduced to "Tweetup" which allows people to meet online at a designated date and time and have online interaction. He noted that a future tweetup could be posted as a public meeting with invites to the public to participate. He questioned whether the Council could waive open meeting requirements, and Mr. Lloyd confirmed that Council could waive those requirements.

No action taken.

5. Discussion and possible action on roles and responsibilities of the Planning Commission related to the Comprehensive Plan.

Dave Anderson, Planning Commission, said their role in the comprehensive plan is to support staff, Council and the consultants, and make a recommendation to Council. In order to do this, they need to be informed of the decisions that are made at the task force level. One of their goals is to assist in the outreach component, and have challenged staff to form partnerships with other public entities for contribution of in-kind resources. There is also a need to identify process gaps and work with the task force and community to close those gaps. He also spoke about adding additional elements such as the arts and culture.

Dave Sullivan, Planning Commission, talked about the additional elements that the Planning Commission had recommended for inclusion: transportation, children and schools, historic and cultural preservation and a music, theatre and art element. There is a sentiment to paying more attention to children and schools and preserving the cultural and music environment.

Council Member Cole questioned whether the Charter gives the Planning Commission the authority to approve additional elements.

Garner Stoll, Planning and Development Review, responded that the scope framework anticipated additional elements and the Charter is clear that additional elements can be added until the end of Phase II.

Council Member Morrison questioned whether a telecommunications element had been recommended for inclusion, and Mr. Anderson responded that it was unclear whether the Technology and Communications Commission was aware of how they could make that recommendation; whether the recommendation would be made to staff, Planning Commission or the Council., and perhaps the boards and commissions should be notified of the process for adding additional elements.

Council Member Cole stated that there is some room for adding elements, but Council should make the final decision because some elements could have a fiscal impact. She did support the Planning Commission's recommendation, and noted that any additional recommendations should come before the CPTC before they proceed to Council.

Council Member Morrison noted that the Participation Plan was approved by Council before the task force was created, and if it needs to be changed, then they need to change it. An important discussion is to know when they've done a good job of communicating and getting public input. With regard to the other suggestions, one of the ones that stuck her the most is the one of having all the different players sit down and talk together. It would be helpful to form a working group that consists of a representative of each body to ask questions and provide feedback.

Council Member Riley agreed, and said the conversation needs to continue. He said additional direction is needed; the advisory committee needs some internal communication, and possibly an electronic bulletin board could help with that communication. He also noted that websites need to be updated, and more information is needed on how the committees will be subject to the open meetings act. He added that additional direction is needed on the elements recommended by the Planning Commission. He said he appreciated all the work the community is doing on this effort.

No action taken.

6. Discussion and possible action related to education and outreach efforts on bicycle safety.

Howard Lazarus, Director, Public Works Department, provided information on the approved ordinance that requires motor vehicles to keep a 3' distance from pedestrians, runners, cyclists, mopeds, motorcycles, wheelchairs and public service workers in the right-of-way. He discussed the public outreach effort to make the citizens aware of the ordinance.

No action taken.

7. Discussion and possible action on Nueces Bike Boulevard.

Howard Lazarus, Director, Public Works Department, updated the committee on the status of the proposed Nueces Bike Boulevard and discussed the reasons why Nueces was chosen. He said presentations have been made to the relevant boards and commissions. The outreach effort has consisted of community meetings and they have also formed a stakeholder group that consists of property owners and cyclists. On February 24th they plan to present the results of a traffic study to the public. Some stakeholder feedback has included investigation of Rio Grande as an alternative, and staff will perform some traffic modeling which includes the impact on property values in the area. Options include keeping Nueces in its current state; installation of bicycle lanes, which would require loss of on-street parking; and installation of traffic circles.

The owner of 1800 Nueces said that the proposed project will have an adverse impact on existing businesses on Nueces. He added that no business can possibly benefit from a 70% reduction in traffic, or from having the owners have less access to their property.

Trey Bueche stated he recently moved his business to Nueces Street for increased exposure to his business. He said the proposed plan would substantially reduce the number of potential clients and would be an inconvenient location for his clients. He talked about the safety issue for cyclists, and said there is not a problem with the co-existence of bicycles and automobiles on Nueces.

Susan Harris said that in the 19 block stretch of Nueces and Rio Grande, 100% of the properties are zoned for commercial uses, and any plan that results in the reduction of vehicular capacity would have a negative impact on the city's desire for increased density in that downtown area. She said the Council should be concerned about reducing vehicular capacity in the area.

Rob D'Amico spoke in support of the plan. He said businesses can benefit from cyclists on the street because they travel slower and more inclined to familiarize themselves with businesses on the street. He added that once Nueces connects to Seaholm, a bicycle route will be needed to move cyclists from the downtown area up north, and he opposes the use of Rio Grande because it does not provide a direct route to the Lance Armstrong Bikeway. He said this is the best solution for Class C cyclists that are not accustomed to riding in traffic.

Annick Beaudet, Public Works Department, spoke about the traffic study which would include an analysis of the ratio between development and its related traffic impact.

Council Member Cole said she had not fully vetted the issue of downtown development and the question of spill-over traffic from that development. She asked for a briefing on emerging projects in the downtown area.

Council Member Riley noted that the proposed bicycle boulevard is new to Texas, but there is a need for better communication with stakeholders in order to arrive at a solution that works for everyone.

No action taken.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.