

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
CITY AND BOROUGH OF JUNEAU
Dennis Watson, Chair

Assembly Chambers
5:15 PM

AUDIO MISSING 5:15 -5:30

Commissioners present: Dennis Watson (acting chair), Nathan Bishop, Karen Lawfer, Benjamin Haight, Nicole Grewe, Jerry Medina, Marsha Bennett.

Commissioners absent: Michael Satre, Dan Miller.

A quorum was present.

Staff present: Greg Chaney, Planning Manager; Ben Lyman Senior Planner; Beth McKibben, Senior Planner; Hal Hart, Director; Jonathan Lange, Planner.

INQ2013 0004: Presentations on downtown Juneau transportation improvement projects by DOT and CBJ staff.

Applicant: City and Borough of Juneau

Location: Downtown Juneau

Mr. Chuck Tripp from DOT spoke about the disadvantage of having a traditional shoulder with bikes riding in both directions, in that there is a lot of traffic. Mr. Tripp described the three classifications of cyclist's types (A, B, and C) and their varying needs. Mr. Tripp then spoke about the advantages of a Shared Use Path for cyclists who are anticipated to use this corridor, as it is wider and feels more protected from the traffic, but mentioned that he would like more input from the public and would be having public meetings in the future to provide that opportunity for people.

Mr. Tripp referred to the stretch from Whittier to Willoughby, saying that one of the main things happening was that they were narrowing the road from two lanes to one inbound lane; currently, there are two lanes through Main Street and the left lane becomes a left-only; the plan is that the two lanes would merge to one lane at the Whittier Intersection and the reason was to provide bike lanes and the wide sidewalk. It would be expensive to widen the road as you approach the Merchant's Warf because there are buildings, so they are looking at ways to make better use of the existing real estate. DOT hired a traffic consultant and one of the questions asked was if they could actually narrow from two lanes to one, without negatively impacting traffic. Mr. Tripp stated that they believe that you could do that without negatively impacting traffic and cited examples of intersections with similar traffic volumes (12,000 ADT) where the lanes went from two to one (Brotherhood Bridge, Mendenhall Loop heading up the valley at Nancy [St.], and between Wal-Mart and the turn off to Costco). DOT watched how traffic operates in these locations and noted that left-turning traffic occupies a lane and other traffic stacks up behind it.

DOT staff believes that this design will work in this location, and that this would allow them to put 6-foot bike lanes and 8-foot sidewalks on both sides.

Mr. Tripp said "what we also have at the intersection of Willoughby, we have a protected right turn coming from the same direction, we would have a single lane entering, it currently is two lanes entering the Willoughby Intersection from any direction that would become one and then there would be a protected right turn coming off of Willoughby so that this next lane starts heading in the direction of Douglas and the Valley because we've noticed that during peak times traffic tends to stack up on Willoughby and that would help there".

Mr. Tripp continued saying that currently at Willoughby, there was no striped/marked crosswalk, though there is a legal crosswalk because there is an intersection there. People who cross Egan here have to cross four lanes of traffic. What DOT would do instead, is with the two lanes in each direction, there would be a center island refuge which means that pedestrians could cross in stages and that would allow a crosswalk to be put in without having to put in a light. That was one of DOT's goals; to put in a crosswalk at this location without putting in a light. Mr. Tripp noted the difference at Willoughby to Main, a single lane of traffic in each direction with a center turn lane; outbound the two lanes currently would become one lane. There is a protected right turn at Seward onto Egan, two lanes of traffic waiting at the light at Main, which would become one lane. Mr. Tripp mentioned they were going to be sending out open letters to the various agencies including CBJ and running public meetings looking for input. The next two slides showed what they were looking at in terms of right-of-way compared to the past project plans. They would just need a sliver of right-of-way starting at Whittier and going through the Willoughby Intersection. For the most part, they have enough right-of-way but would be widening to the side that currently had parking, trying to avoid impact.

Mr. Rorie Watt, Director of Engineering gave some context on City Planning and the Seawalk because what happens on the DOT project is very much related. Referring to pictures, Mr. Watt stated that in 2004, the City adopted the long-range waterfront plan, a 30-year plan. One of the large features was a Waterfront Seawalk from the rock dumps to the bridge and another was enhancement of the City Docks downtown. In the Engineering Department, they have been working on Area A or Bridge Park, which was more or less immediately adjacent to part of the DOT project. In thinking about the Waterfront Plan, as a multi-decade plan, it becomes a problem of how and when to phase in improvements. Over by the bridge (Bridge Park, Waterfront Plan Area A), they were looking for a park by the bridge, Seawalk, an open space recreation area, and mixed use development. One of their tasks was to think about Seawalk in that area, and how that was going to work. Mr. Watt said he wanted to focus on Seawalk and consider the DOT project in that context. He showed a photo of the waterfront plan - Seawalk from the Taku Smokeries Section that they had built a couple of years ago, basically a 16-foot wide pedestrian walkway built like a pier. Broadly, he mentioned that one option would be for the walkway to hug the shoreline, another could be to go out further in the water and there was a logical breakpoint at Gold Creek in terms of phasing. In terms of funding the construction of the Seawalk, it was a simple idea, but there were a lot of property owners to consider and a lot of complexity in negotiating land deals, scheduling money and affording it. It would take them a couple of years to achieve it. The last option he said would be something coming back in at Gold Creek as a crossing which could be a phase.

There was a lot of interest in the Bridge Park area; the city had programmed money for a new snow dump site on the rock dump which was scheduled to go under construction this spring. The City had built a new public workshop at Seven Mile and torn down the old building which was now a vacant site. The Assembly adopted, by resolution, that site as the location of the Statehood Whale. The group working on the Whale project has made a lot of progress. The Docks and Harbors Board has identified that site as the location for the Maritime Exchange Building. As that property develops, based on what Mr. Watt saw, the Whale was coming sooner than anything, and as soon as they have the sculpture, there would be a lot of visitation. As DOT spoke to them about scoping their project and explained their funding, their limitations, how they were fusing a project near Main Street with the Seawall with a repaving project, one of the things that staff recognized was that the DOT project was not the vehicle to get to the 30-year vision, although it would help make some serious strides in that direction because there was some really good thinking and ideas on DOT's part. The nominal input that staff (Planning and Engineering) had been giving DOT was that they had seen the road template from Main Street to Willoughby looking more like the road from Main Street south, and as they move forward with some of the development projects that were happening, notably the cruise ship dock, Mr. Watt thought that was an appropriate road design or approach. On the City's part, the City initiated the Willoughby District Planning which was consistent with the ideas in that plan. The SLAM Project was under construction and there would be a fair amount of summer visitors going to the SLAM by vehicle or by foot. The combination of the City Dock Project, bringing bigger boats further north, and attractions like the SLAM project and the Whale, brings into picture why they were talking about some of the transportation changes the way they were. Mr. Watt showed a conceptual drawing of the Whale saying that it was a life-size whale with a pool and fountain-works which would be a major attraction. Mr. Watt showed an image of all the conceptual ideas the Whale, a park, the Docks and Harbors Building, and Waterfront Walkway. Mr. Watt noted that the City had recently purchased a strip of the land referred to as the "sand spit" which would put ownership of land for a Seawalk Project in city control to Gold Creek.

Mr. Watt mentioned another project, the South Franklin Dock (Princess Dock), a smaller phase of Seawalk that would take off where they had left off on the Taku Smokeries Project and continue past the dock approach to South Franklin. This project would do some improvements for passenger and bus staging at that dock, which would improve efficiency.

Mr. Watt then showed a picture of the Cruise Ship Dock Project, 16B, which should be going out to bid this year and starting construction next winter. This summer, they're making modifications and taking out the old ferry terminal ramp. Mr. Watt noted that this would bring more passengers further north which would have an effect on pedestrian patterns, it will create a de facto Seawalk out of the wharf, so as the ships move off, the existing wharf would become a piece of the Seawalk.

With regards to roads from Main to Whittier it should look more like sections further south of Main Street, Egan would go from a free flow facility, no traffic lights at Salmon Creek, into a step-down deal from Main Street to Willoughby as more of a transition to downtown. From Whittier to the bridge, would be a higher speed road that bridges the gap between the downtown heavy touristed pedestrian area and a more vehicle-oriented corridor. Mr. Watt mentioned that what DOT has proposed fits well with the staff level that had been looking at all these things.

Ms. Bennett commented to consider having a single use bike path as an alternative (e.g. coastal trail in Anchorage and bike paths in Portland that are single paths and don't involve pedestrians). She expressed her concern about the traffic hazard aspect with respect to elderly tourists sharing paths with bikes. Mr. Watt said that it would be a shared use lane between the Bridge and Whittier, after that, it would be a separate bike lane. Ms. Bennett wondered about the Whale attracting bus trips, bicycles and pedestrians. Mr. Watt said he thought a lot of people are going to end up there.

Mr. Medina asked if there would be any new impediments when it came to snow removal on the new DOT road. Mr. Watt replied that it will be maintainable during the winter. Mr. Watt added that their view on city projects was that downtown they were aggressive in the use of islands and wider sidewalks and things that were hard to plow around than they were in the rest of the Borough.

Ms. Grewe expressed her concern in making the public understand, keeping in mind the DOT's concept, the long-range waterfront plan, the challenge of narrowing down traffic lanes in light of the new attractions such as the Whale, SLAM, tourism district and the Willoughby District Plan; though she felt it made sense.

Mr. Haight first spoke regarding the area between Whittier and Willoughby coming into town where there was a 30 mph merging traffic. Mr. Haight asked if they would be looking at reducing speed limits in that area. Mr. Tripp responded saying that the idea was from Main and beyond was a 20 mph zone and their goal was to move that out to start at Whittier and be fully implemented at Willoughby. The pedestrian refuge would act as a gateway feature which would call for slower speeds ahead.

Mr. Haight, who drives the route daily, mentioned that the entrance to the parking area for Merchant's Wharf frequently had traffic stopping because the cars that were wanting to turn into the parking lot couldn't, because the entrance was so narrow due to cars trying to leave. Currently, there were two lanes, but now that they were talking about a single lane with a center lane for multidirectional traffic, he wondered what would be done about that. Mr. Tripp answered that one of the biggest problems there was sight distance because it was narrow. Mr. Watt said they would work on a wider sidewalk, a bike lane, and a better sight distance at that driveway. Mr. Haight then spoke about the sidewalk between Whittier and Willoughby that people would get soaked just walking on it; he asked how that could be mitigated. Mr. Tripp responded that part of it was to resurface it, take out the ruts, and make sure that the street drained well and water doesn't accumulate; he also noted the importance of buffering.

Ms. Lawfer was concerned about the safety of pedestrians and increased traffic going towards Bridge Park especially when the weather was not optimal. People would want to access that through some sort of vehicular traffic and this could cause some issues with regards to the cruise ship busses, AML trucks and cars with regards to that especially if it is raining. She suggested working with tourism "best management practices" to get them around. She noted the mixed use bike paths on both sides of Back Loop Road and asked if there had been observations with regards to the bike path and the sidewalk in the Lemon Creek area with regards to how that was utilized. Mr. Tripp asked if they were talking about the shoulders, Mr. Tripp stated that DOT has

another project in that area that runs from the light at Wal-Mart, towards the turn-off at Twin Lakes and the goal of that project is to improve things for both pedestrians and cyclists. Ms. Lawfer mentioned that commuters tend to use the bike path but everyone else tends to use the sidewalk, so then the sidewalk becomes mixed use. Mr. Tripp noted that pedestrians tend to make sudden movements which increase the chances for an accident.

Mr. Bishop was happy to hear about the gateway and narrowing of the road which would decrease speed entering into town. He asked if they had considered other gateway elements. Mr. Tripp replied that they had looked at roundabouts and thought one would work great at Whittier but for a number of reasons it would not work in this situation.

Mr. Bishop asked about the width of the pathways as they proceed into town from Tenth. Mr. Tripp replied that right now, as you cross the bridge, it was about 8 feet, and continued on the seaward side to about Willoughby and it then narrowed down to 5 feet approaching the front of the Merchant's Wharf Building. The proposed width between the bridge and Whittier is 11 feet plus the 3-foot buffer (they currently have a 3-foot buffer). On the outbound side, there would be 8 feet between Main and Whittier. Their current plan is to leave it as is between Whittier and 10th (4-5 feet). DOT has looked at ways to get some extra width but would like some public input. There is 2 feet of right-of-way outside the back of the sidewalk between 10th and Whittier which was the problem for bikers and pedestrians. Mr. Tripp thought that maybe they could narrow the lanes between the edge of the gutter pans and narrow up the median.

Mr. Bishop opined that he was a biker and when he thought about increased pedestrian traffic going to the bridge and bikes going both directions, he wanted to walk his bike. He wouldn't trust bikers going opposite directions in a pedestrian-dense area with only 11 feet. Mr. Tripp agreed and felt that was why robust public input was important.

Mr. Watt mentioned that the waterfront plan called for gateway features and that could be something the City pursued on its own. With the narrowing of the road template and the dropping of lanes, one of the benefits was gaining a pedestrian refuge and limiting vehicle-pedestrian interactions, which was safer for both pedestrians and vehicles. He pointed to the roundabout project by the library which had a terrible pedestrian-vehicle problem and the reason why the roundabout works very well now is the southerly island split the interaction. He expressed appreciation for where DOT was going with this project.

Mr. Bishop mentioned that he thought the most congested and problematic area was right in front of Merchant's Wharf where there was a proposed plan for widening but wondered what the plan was for the back side of it from the City's standpoint.

Mr. Watt said they have been talking with the owners of the wharf property about a Seawalk Project for a couple of years and they had been to the Assembly several times to get a negotiating strategy and authority. He would expect it to take a bit longer to work out, though it was a project in the foreseeable future. When the Assembly committed to funding the Dock Project, Seawalk Project and Marine Park projects. If a deal with the property owners can be made, there is already a commitment by the Assembly to fund that project.

Vice-Chair Watson thanked staff for the excellent presentation and felt that it would certainly go a long ways to serve the community both from the non-motorized perspective to safety. He shared his experience growing up in a large tourist-driven city where millions of people visited and they had a 6-7 mile walking path around the harbor that was a separated bike and walking path. Just recently, they put a bike path right up the main streets of the community, which seemed to be functioning very well.

Mr. Hart, Community Development Director, stated that he wanted everyone to look at the Waterfront Plan and the Juneau Non-Motorized Transportation Plan, and then think about what they wanted it to look like in 30 years.

Vice-Chair Watson called for a brief break.

BREAK: 6:25 – 6:33 PM

AME2012 0006: A Text Amendment of Title 49 and of the Comprehensive Plan for the 2013 Update.

Applicant: City and Borough of Juneau

Location: Borough-wide

Vice-Chair Watson called the meeting back to order and asked Mr. Lyman to provide a brief update on the 2013 Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Lyman recapped that staff had been working on an ongoing review of the now drafted 2013 Comprehensive Plan of the City and Borough of Juneau. He noted that in this second round of review and public testimony would be accepted by the Planning Commission. They have had a couple of work sessions, spent a little time looking at things since October 30th, and made some suggested changes.

At the Committee of the Whole meeting last week, a couple of requests and corrections were suggested by Commission that staff tried to address with the new packet. There is a one-page summary that states where the individual chapters are and that is also available as a separate document on the Comprehensive Plan Review website.

In an effort to make the document more manageable, they added a policy summary (third page). Mr. Lyman noted that they had 123 policies in this document and ended up with about 15 pages of policies, the enforceable parts of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Lyman reviewed the changes and updates that had occurred since the last meeting: the addition of public comments received before 8:30 a.m. on Friday, February 22, 2013, the inclusion of page numbers, and a few more comments on wireless communication facilities.

Referring to their blue folders, he noted a letter from the Juneau Chamber of Commerce and a two-page letter from Ruth Danner both of which had been included and were addressed. There was a letter from the Douglas Indian Association Tribal Government that was only in the blue folder and a letter from Clarke Damon regarding a particular property in Douglas and the designation of that property in the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Maps; Mr. Damon's original comments were also listed in the consolidated document. Mr. Damon had since then come into

Mr. Lyman's office and was told that the Planning Commission would not be looking at any changes to the maps at this time and that if he wanted to pursue a map amendment, he would need to apply for it. Mr. Lyman called for comments or questions.

Vice-Chair Watson stated that since the letters from the Chamber and the citizen were rather extensive, he doubted if everyone had had a chance to read through it. He believed the City Clerk may have sent out a copy of the Chambers' letter as well. Staff answered that it was.

Ms. Bennett stated that she read all of comments on the Internet and really appreciated Mr. Lyman's response to them which she thought that his comments were well taken.

Ms. Lawfer suggested setting up another index of long-range plans to make accessing information about projects like Willoughby and the Waterfront easier.

Mr. Lyman mentioned another related comment suggesting that there be a listing in the Comprehensive Plan stating where in Title 49, the components of the Comprehensive Plan are listed. They had discussed it as staff and felt that they would have to talk to the Law Department about cross-referencing because the Comprehensive Plan informs the ordinances that are adopted, but then the ordinances are more specific and are actually what they use for regulation and it can create an odd situation when cross-referencing between the two documents point back at each other. He noted as an example that Article 2, at the beginning of Title 49, the Land Use Code, 49.05.200 Comprehensive Plan, Section (b)(1) Plan Adopted then lists the Juneau Coastal Management Plan, the Downtown Historic District Development Plan, the Long-Range Waterfront Plan, the Last Chance Basin Land Management Plan etc., these are the components of the Comprehensive Plan and we do have that listing. People don't necessarily know where to look for it and it may be appropriate to add it somewhere easier to find.

Ms. Lawfer thought that they had developed this Comprehensive Plan thinking, or at least referencing, some of the other plans; nowhere does it say that this is the list, it just helps as a reference.

Mr. Lyman said that there were individual sections of the plan that do reference individual plans but not all the various plans would be in one location.

Vice-Chair Watson cautioned that they were approaching 6:50 and they would resume the discussion after public comment and then take up the various applications and go back and discuss more on the Comprehensive Plan. Vice-Chair Watson added that at 9 o'clock they would be going into executive session.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: *by Mr. Watson to adjourn the meeting.*

The meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.