

DRAFT
MINUTES
STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR
VAUGHAN-WORTH-BRIDGE REVITALIZATION
7:30 A.M. – Thursday, July 13, 2017
Conference Room A
Portsmouth City Hall

Members in attendance: Rebecca Perkins, Chair; Nancy Pearson, City Councilor; Vincent Lombardi, Historic District Commission; Dexter Legg, Planning Board; Everett Eaton, Economic Development Commission; Barbara Destefano, Resident; Jay McSharry, Downtown Business owner

Staff Present: David Moore, Assistant City Manager; Juliet Walker, Planning Director

1. Call to Order

Chair Perkins called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

2. Consideration of Meeting Minutes – June 28, 2017

Mr. Legg moved to approve the June 28, 2017 minutes. Seconded by Ms. Destefano and voted.

3. Discussion of Public Inputs to Date

Councilor Pearson stated that she picked out several themes from the input received including parking, open space, walkability and sustainability. She stated that it wasn't necessarily about keeping the parking but about the future of parking.

Mr. Lombardi stated that some of the comments led him to think about broader, long range thinking.

Mr. Legg stated he is encouraged about the amount of feedback received so far especially in the summer and feels that there should be a broader scope in creating a long term strategy but also do something short term to keep the public interested in these 2 sites. He continued that we are a decade away from really doing anything and we don't know what will have in 10 years.

Chair Perkins stated that the pushback has been that it is a monolithic project that needs to be done all at once, but it can be more incremental.

Ms. Destefano stated that she agrees that it can be more incremental and suggested starting with the beautifying the Vaughan Mall as that can be done sooner than later.

Mr. Lombardi explained changes to the Provident Bank building which back of the building borders the Vaughan Mall and the HDC encouraged them to think about the space around the entire building.

Mr. Eaton stated that from the site walk and public input at the Discovery Center, it was discussed that the turning area inside Bridge Street is wider than needed so we may be able to do a pocket park there without reducing the number of parking spaces.

Mr. McSharry asked for clarification if it is the committee's mission to give recommendations for more current changes. Assistant City Manager Moore stated yes the committee will be providing semi-annual reports and can make those suggestions.

Mr. Legg stated that this should be put into the mission statement because initially it was long-term strategic planning but now it has opened up to be able to do some short-term cost-effective things to better use the space sooner.

Assistant City Manager Moore agrees stating the city should look for opportunities of short-term investments and how to meet the challenges of the site and marrying those with the expectations of the long-term.

Chair Perkins stated the committee has to decide how to mandate the short-term changes and make suggestions to the City to look for opportunities instead of giving specifics, or keep it high-level long term.

Consensus was that this change should be made to the committee mission as it fits with the response from the public input.

Councilor Pearson stated she would like to follow the PS21 model and get more community input along the way and get the best of the community instead of just people who are opposed.

Mr. Eaton asked if the business owners that surround the Worth lot should be polled as to their vision for the area. He stated a business owner recently stated that in retrospect, the Worth Lot would have been a good place to put the parking garage, but the opposition was so strong against it at that time.

Mr. McSharry suggested expanding it to the entire area.

Mr. Lombardi suggested having a listening session specifically for the business owners.

Discussion ensued regarding the best way to accomplish polling the businesses.

Mr. Lombardi stated that if we want to empower short-term improvements such as the Vaughan Mall, then the city needs to bring forward the infrastructure changes that will be necessary.

Mr. Moore stated he agrees but the benefits would need to be made very clear in going forward because it will be invasive work.

Councilor Pearson stated that currently there is the least amount of businesses in Vaughan Mall so it would be the time to consider such a disruption.

Mr. Lombardi stated we wouldn't want to kill existing business.

Mr. McSharry stated that when the State Street renovations were done, the city was very conscious of the businesses in the area.

Next, Assistant City Manager Moore discussed the feedback from the June 28th listening session stating that people don't understand the how of the city being able to do this and that because it is city property, we have a lot of flexibility.

Mr. Legg stated that this is a rare opportunity and we have a wide latitude to accomplish something on this incredibly valuable space.

Councilor Pearson stated that there are comments that we don't need more development and she feels that the name of committee should reflect the desire for "green space" and suggested looking at the Kennedy Greenway in Boston as an example.

Mr. Lombardi stated that another project under the city's control is the McIntyre Building so people will become aware of what the City is able to do.

Chair Perkins then discussed the next steps stating that she would like to invite a 3rd party to attend the August 2nd meeting who has expertise in this field and can help refine the scope. She continued that she would like to be able to present the first semi-annual report to the Council in November and then see how much more specific they want the committee to get and the present a final report in May 2018.

Councilor Pearson stated she would like to see focus on connecting greenways from Islington Street to Prescott Park and to find out what other pocket park areas such as Court Street are out there.

Planning Director Walker stated there is an open space plan in the CIP document listing the passive recreation and rural areas as well as downtown areas.

Chair Perkins asked for reactions to the draft principles.

Mr. Legg stated that regarding form, he would like to be more direct and explicit in the language that is used.

Council Pearson stated she would like to see language used that shows we will maintain open spaces.

Mr. McSharry stated he wants to make sure that not losing parking will be considered and not lost in the conversation.

Mr. Eaton agrees that the committee should be mindful not to diminish critical parking needs.

Discussion ensued regarding other ideas that can be brought forward to the discussion with the guest consultant on August 2nd, including amphitheater, seating and space for food trucks, public rest rooms, etc. Assistant City Manager Moore asked the Committee members to be as explicit as possible to communicate the values of what they envision for the area.

Mr. Eaton suggested that the Nelson-Nygaard parking report from 2012 be reviewed by the committee members as it does address green space as well.

Councilor Pearson asked if we have the data regarding private spaces that are available.

Mr. McSharry stated that those spaces were already being used and are just monetized now.

Assistant City Manager Moore stated that the City Council will be holding a Parking Work Session soon.

4. Adjournment

Chair Perkins closed the meeting at 8:45 a.m.