

Montpelier Planning Commission
June 23, 2003
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Chair David Borgendale, Members Irene Facciolo, Carolyn Grodinsky, Bryan Mitofsky, Curt McCormack, Planning Director Valerie Capels, Planner Stephanie Smith.

Absent: Anne Campbell, and Sara Teachout.

Call to Order

Mr. Borgendale called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. He reminded those in attendance that if they choose to address the Commission they should identify themselves and speak clearly into a microphone.

Transportation Plan Update

Ms. Grodinsky thanked everyone for coming to participate in the Transportation Forum Update and stated that this was part of a series of forums the Planning Commission was holding to work on the update of the Master Plan. Ms. Grodinsky and Mr. McCormack reviewed the agenda and the draft vision for transportation and asked the audience and the stakeholders to comment on ways the Planning Commission can take the current Master Plan forward.

Stephan Syz, Chair of the Montpelier Bike Path Committee did not have an opportunity to discuss the draft vision statement and respond to the issues as outlined in the agenda with the Bike Path Committee. Mr. Syz outlined the committee's accomplishments and said the charge of the Bike Path Committee was very narrow.

Several commission members thought that the City Council should re-evaluate the charge of the Bike Path Committee to include review and proposals to expand traditional bike/pedestrian connections, sidewalks and bike lanes in roadways. Ms. Capels stated the reevaluation of the charge of the Bike Path Committee and/or an expansion of their duties could originate within the Master Plan as a recommendation.

Councilor Smart commented that funding is limited for bike/ped enhancement projects and a committee should prioritize enhancement projects and place consideration on dual use and making meaningful connections which benefit the city as a whole.

A commissioner asked how bike path construction projects are funded. Largely projects are funded by State and Federal grants, and most require a match from the municipality.

Steve Gladczuk, Transportation Planner with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission discussed regional transportation issues and projects in the works. He stated growth is anticipated along the interstate and Route 100. In Washington County the greatest amount of growth is expected at Berlin Corners, where the town plans to develop a new town center. He expects this level of development will have a great affect on the traffic on Berlin Street and compete with businesses in Montpelier. Mr. Gladczuk predicts development will also happen out Route 2 and Route 302, which may also increase traffic on these roads.

Mr. Gladczuk spoke of extended commuter bus service, possible rail service to Chittenden County, and

removal of Amtrak rail service in the western part of the state. Mr. Gladczuk also spoke of potential benefits to both businesses and individuals who use ride share, and offer flex-time opportunities. The discussion gave way to alternative transportation corridors including Cross Vermont Trail from Wells River to Burlington, the VAST network of trails and the Central Vermont Regional Path which will connect Montpelier to Barre Town. He told the Commission that the Washington county airport in Berlin is contemplating reintroducing commuter passenger service.

One type of transportation service that is frequently forgotten is the transport of goods across Vermont. There are three (3) highways in the area which provide those connections. Mr. Gladczuk said as the use of rail to transport freight diminishes, the pressure to ship goods will be placed on our roads.

Mr. Gladczuk suggested to the Commission that the following should be recommended in the new Master Plan: completion of an access management study, installation traffic calming devices on scenic and residential roadways, assess the functionality and condition of bridges in downtown (Langdon Street, and Taylor Street), completion of a Pavement Management Plan, and use the downtown circulation model to study land use proposals and changes in traffic patterns downtown.

Mr. Mitofsky asked how roads were classified. Mr. Gladczuk said it is based on the type of connection the road provides and the traffic volumes.

Ms. Grodinsky said that the state should take the lead in providing incentives for use of public transportation. Mr. McCormack thought that CVRPC should take an interest in developing commuter rail service to Chittenden County from Washington County.

Tom McArdle, Asst. Director of Public Works thought it was important for the Commission to realize that there are regional transportation issues of that the city is not able to control. In Montpelier, the road network has changed little in the last 20 years. The city is able to improve capacity with the construction of turn lanes and travel lanes, and changing the timing of lights in the downtown. He suggested that the Commission look at reevaluating the traffic impact fees, which are assessed with land development proposals, to mitigate for growth and offset other cost incurred as the city builds out.

Mr. McArdle explained that it is important for the public to understand the issues with regard to developing transportation connections i.e. sidewalks, shoulders, paved bike lanes, and the importance of these types of connections throughout the city. People need to be realistic with regard to project development, and the projects must benefit the community.

He would like to see the city focus on obtaining rights-of way for sidewalk and other improvements. Councilwoman Sherman suggested that the City take opportunities to secure trail easements to establish connections between parcels of undeveloped land when planned development occurs.

Mr. McArdle said the DPW is in to process of completing a Pavement Management Plan, as suggested by Mr. Gladczuk.

Aaron Frank of Chittenden County Transit Authority (CCTA) has been active in restoring public bus service, after the demise of Wheels. CCTA plans to organize a number of new routes to service people in central Vermont. They determine these routes by analyzing traffic generators and large employers in the area like the State of Vermont and the Hospital. Mr. Frank stressed the importance of adequate

comprehensive and safe pedestrian connections, which connect people to transit stops. Other programs CCTA has is a van pool program which is partially funded by the State and the Federal Government. Mr. Frank stated that they are still growing. CCTA recently hired Steve Maglione as the Green Mountain Transit Authority (GMTA) General Manager.

Mr. Borgandale asked if they had a marketing plan in place. How will GMTA plan for the future? Mr. Frank said they are putting together a plan and have a marketing coordinator. They hope to get input from the public who use or want to use the system and then fine tune that system.

Councilwoman Sherman asked who manage the Ticket to Ride service, where drivers are put in touch with riders who need specific rides to destinations. Mr. Frank stated that the Central Vermont Council on Aging has been organizing that service.

Mary Hooper, Montpelier Downtown Community Assoc. stated that she has become increasingly passionate about transportation. Her husband was part of a van pool service that recently ended due to lack of ridership. She related a personal experience with not being able to get to downtown Montpelier from her home when she was unable to drive, and stressing the need for improved bus service from neighborhood to neighborhood. On a broad note she feels that the community needs to change their behavior and attitudes towards personal transportation in order to make a difference in the future of transportation networks.

She thought it would be important for the Commission to look at the transportation of students to school and asked what happened to busses to high school and elementary school, and asked why students don't walk to school anymore.

In reference to the draft vision statement, Ms. Hooper would like emphasis on what Montpelier residents cherish about the city, and that should create a framework for the goals for transportation. She spoke of concepts like compact urban form, natural resources, unique character, pedestrian oriented, and thought the master plan should strive to protect these features. She recommended removing the phrase "improve automobile mobility", as that is anathema to some to the cherished characteristics about Montpelier.

The MDCA has been active with regard to transportation improvements like the State Street Improvement Project, Post Office Parking Project, and improvements to pedestrian amenities.

She urged public works to keep sidewalks open and safe year round, and for the city to finish the bike path network. She suggested the Commission look at transportation guidelines and alternative roadway design (circular network of streets, or grid system) and to complete the Barre Street extension to Taylor Street. Ms. Hooper stated that knowing there is a public restroom downtown may encourage people to make trips to downtown on foot. She also asked the Commission to recognize the value of our historic bridges.

Tony Redington, Vermont State Employee Association, and advocate for roundabouts and alternative transportation spoke about the need to increase our car free space in downtown. These spaces would consist of parks and promenades. These spaces would further be connected to each other with pedestrian corridors.

Mr. Redington would like to see the concept of “safety” worked into the vision, and went on to say that new and improved roads do not always equal safety. He would like the need to decrease energy consumption in the vision statement and agreed with Mary Hooper about needing to change behaviors.

Adjournment

No more input from the community was provided. Mr. McCormack moved that the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Mr. Mitofsky. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Smith, Planner

These minutes are subject to approval by the Planning Commission. Changes, if any, will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting at which they were acted upon.