

Montpelier Planning Commission
July 28, 2004
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: David Borgendale, Chair; Carolyn Grodinsky, Vice Chair; Irene Facciolo; Curt McCormack; Marge Power
Staff: Valerie Capels, Planning & Community Development Director

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Borgendale.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Grodinsky made a motion to table the action on the minutes of the July 12, 2004 meeting. She said that she had not had a chance to review them yet. Ms. Facciolo seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Comments from the Chair

Mr. Borgendale welcomed Marge as a new member of the Planning Commission.

General Appearances

Brian Mitofsky gave an update on the Carr Lot Committee. He said that the City has decided to go ahead with two NEPA studies. The decision is pending attorney advice on whether proceeding on the two simultaneous studies would limit the City's ability to choose between the two sites.

Access Management Overview

Steve Gladczuk, Transportation Planner for CVRPC, gave a presentation on vehicular access management. He identified the goals of access management, including optimization of access, increasing safety, and supporting sustainable development. The elimination or separation of conflict points are strategies for access management. Management elements include combined access between properties, separation of access points, and good design.

Mr. Borgendale said that some of these concepts conflict with the goal of achieving a roadway grid pattern. Ms. Power said that people living along roadways may object to reduced access on those roads. Mr. Gladczuk suggested that the Commission look upon this information as ideas to choose amongst. Some may work for the community and some may not.

Mr. Gladczuk presented options for retrofitting existing problem areas. He said that his office is currently working with Stowe, Waterbury and Morrisville on a Route 100 access study. They are looking at the function of the road, looking at the municipal plans and regulations, and discussing possible solutions. Mr. Borgendale asked whether owners of businesses such as convenience stores were resisting reduced access. Mr. Gladczuk said that he did not believe business suffers from reduced access and that there have been studies on this issue. The benefits of access management include reduced congestion, increased safety, shorter travel times, preserved roadway capacity, safer conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists and more attractive roadways—which tend to actually be good for business.

Mr. Gladczuk said that Montpelier already has pretty good access management in its zoning regulations. The City is in a good position to deal with the issue as it has the advantage of a professional engineering staff with training in this area. Ms. Capels said that she thought that Mr. Gladczuk's presentation might help the Planning Commission in considering policies and

goals in the transportation section of the Master Plan. Mr. Borgendale said that the access control measures are more applicable to arterial roads. Mr. Gladczuk said that they were developed with those types of roads in mind, but that the measures could be applied to some of Montpelier's collector roads such as Towne Hill Road and Berlin Street. Mr. Gladczuk referred commissioners to a training manual he has provided for each of them for future reference.

Transportation Plan Final Review

Lucy Gibson, of Smart Mobility, reviewed the changes in the Transportation Plan she prepared. She said that a section on bridges had been added at page 3. Ms. Grodinsky asked whether inclusion on the National Register improves the chances for funding bridge maintenance. She also asked whether the City has determined which of its historic bridges should get priority for protection. Ms. Capels said that the study that was done for the Taylor Street bridge may have information related to those questions. Ms. Power said that the City has not been proactive in planning bridge maintenance, but instead, is reacting to problems. Ms. Gibson said that the Commission may want the Master Plan to state that the City shall develop a maintenance plan for bridges in Montpelier.

Mr. Borgendale noted that there are conflicts between preserving bridges and the other Master Plan goals like improving traffic flow and pedestrian friendliness. Ms. Power said that vehicles just need to travel at slower speeds. Mr. Borgendale said that he was not saying that it is not a legitimate to preserve historic bridges, but the community should be aware of the possible tradeoffs. Ms. Grodinsky said that in situations where historic bridges have been preserved, there are nearby bridges that move traffic more efficiently. That is part of the balance that the City is trying to achieve. Mr. Borgendale said that he concerned about what is not said in the Master Plan. Many goals create system wide impacts and the Master Plan should discuss those impacts, choices and consequences. He did not want the Master Plan to simply be a laundry list of wishes.

Ms. Power said that the table regarding bridges should include a discussion of what the sufficiency rating means. Ms. Facciolo said that she would like to know who rates the bridges and when the ratings are done. Ms. Gibson said that the State does the ratings. Ms. Power asked whether the sufficiency rating includes factors other than structural ratings such as the width of bridge. Ms. Gibson said that the rating is based upon a sufficiency measure and a use rating that would include other factors like width.

Ms. Gibson said that recent operating data from Green Mountain Transport was added at page 6. Mr. Borgendale said that the table at the bottom of page 5 and the related graph were misleading regarding the number of people who drive alone. The point should be that the situation is slightly better now than it was in 1990. Ms. Power said that there are not very many data points and that the table could be readily understood without the graph. Mr. Borgendale suggested that the graph be eliminated. A member of the audience said that the elimination of the graph would lose the point that Montpelier is unique in that it has had some success. Ms. Grodinsky said that things that make Montpelier unique should be highlighted in a sidebar.

Ms. Gibson said that she added some discussion of the transportation survey results in the appropriate sections. Mr. McCormack said that he was concerned that, until critical mass was achieved on bicycle infrastructure, there is an apartheid situation where cars and bikes are separated. This would be tolerable if adequate funds were put into bike access. The Master Plan may need to encourage "share the road" concepts on all of the city streets. He is concerned that encouraging designated bike routes may be interpreted by others to say that

bikes are not welcome elsewhere. Ms. Gibson said that the Transportation Plan is really just showing ways to accommodate bicycles. Mr. McCormack said that walking and biking should be encouraged on all streets.

Ms. Power said that on-street parking often conflicts with bike lanes. She noted that the combined use of separated alternate transit routes by pedestrians and bicyclist can cause conflicts. Mr. McCormack said that more bike collisions occur on separated paths than on roads. Ms. Gibson said that people who want to use bicycles for commuting should be able to ride safely on streets. Mr. McCormack said that bikes are vehicles and should be treated as such.

Ms. Power said the Transportation Plan says that the “problem” at State and Main Streets should be addressed. She suggested that the intersection should be acknowledged as an area serving multiple uses rather than a problem to be solved.

Ms. Gibson said that the survey results provide illumination on the public transit system. There were mixed results in terms of interest in and willingness to use a public transit system. Ms. Power said that the City needs to address taxis as a transit service. Mr. Borgendale said that taxi services are easy to start and that if no one is offering the service, the need may not be large enough or regular enough to make a taxi business profitable.

Ms. Gibson said that some of the survey results related to parking are on page 25. Ms. Facciolo questioned the basis of the sentence that states that residents “feel the burden of the cost of parking should be assumed by those who visit, work, and do their day-to-day shopping in the city”. Ms. Facciolo also said that the table on page 24 should be clarified. The statement indicating that surface parking is inexpensive to construct and operate is not correct if the cost of land in the downtown area is included in the construction cost. Mr. Borgendale said that the Planning Commission voted to tell the Carr Lot Committee that surface parking is not a good use of land in the center of the city. The Master Plan goals and policies should make that clear. Ms. Power said that the Commission should be careful that the rejection of surface parking in the downtown area is not taken as an endorsement of garages in the center of the City rather than satellite parking at the edges of the city. Mr. Borgendale said that there must be parking for shoppers so that they do not take their business to other locations that have parking. Ms. Power said that the satellite parking should focus on people who work in the city all day. Mr. Borgendale said that the Master Plan could include a policy discouraging all-day parking in the downtown except for residents of the downtown area. Ms. Grodinsky said that there must be incentives to encourage use of parking outside of the city. Ms. Capels said that a previous incentive program in Montpelier was not used by many drivers.

Referring to comments made at the previous meeting, Ms. Capels said that she would like to discuss commissioners’ sentiment that the City should take on the full responsibility for providing parking to serve private development. Mr. Borgendale said that there are different costs associated with providing parking including capital costs and operating costs. He said that operation costs could be covered by fees on individual users and businesses.

Master Plan

Ms. Capels said that she would like to get a sense of what information the Commission members feel is still relevant from the old Master Plan. It would be helpful if Commissioners could work with her outside of a meeting to help update the individual sections that they had previously worked on. She would like to have a new draft to the Commission by the second

meeting in August. Mr. Borgendale said that he would like to focus on housing and economic development at the next meeting. Ms. Capels said that she doubted that there will be time to do that unless the meeting with the other towns does not occur then. Mr. Borgendale said that if the meeting with the other towns occurs, the Commission will not have the discussion at that time. Ms. Capels said that she would like feedback on the draft document in the meantime. She asked that those who focused on particular subjects in the last plan to take a close look at those sections.

Fiscal Impact Study

Mr. Borgendale said that he understood that the study would include a baseline plus two scenarios. Ms. Capels said that two scenarios are built in. One is the no-build/no-change scenario and, at the Commission's request, one scenario focuses on the impact if a major employer were to leave. Mr. Borgendale said that his sense was that the scenario of a major employer leaving does not have to be done. Ms. Capels said it's there because the Commission was unanimous at that time that the scenario should be included. Ms. Power said that the impact of housing and commercial development should be addressed. Mr. Borgendale said that he is interested in what happens if 500 houses are built in the next five years or if 1,000 new jobs are added. He said that he was not interested in parcel specific analysis.

Other Business

Ms. Facciolo gave an update on the Zoning Committee. She said that they are trying to get the contract with the consultant signed. She said that the next meeting will be on Monday at 6:30. Mr. Borgendale asked that a copy of the contract be provided to the Planning Commission.

Mr. Borgendale said that Brian Mitofsky had asked the Commission to appoint a member to represent them on the Parking Committee. Ms. Grodinsky made a motion that Ms. Power be appointed. Ms. Facciolo seconded the motion. The motion was approved 5-0.

Adjournment

Ms. Grodinsky made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Power. The motion was approved 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Capels

Transcribed by Kathleen Swigon

Staff note: the quality of the tape recording of the meeting upon which these minutes were based was very poor.

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.