

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING

URBANA PLAN COMMISSION

APPROVED

DATE: March 6, 2003

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: Urbana City Building
400 South Vine Street
Urbana, IL 61801

MEMBERS PRESENT: Christopher Alix, Laurie Goscha, Lew Hopkins, Randy Kangas, Michael Pollock, Bernadine Stake, Don White

MEMBERS EXCUSED: Alan Douglas, Marilyn Upah-Bant

STAFF PRESENT: Rob Kowalski, Planning Manager; Tim Ross, Senior Planner; Teri Andel, Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT: Robert Antequino, Nick Karcz, Bob Leach, Susan Taylor, Bob Zimmerer

1. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m., the roll call was taken, and a quorum was declared.

2. CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

There were none.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Goscha moved to approve the minutes from the February 20, 2003 meeting. Ms. Stake seconded the motion. There was one change to the minutes. The minutes were then approved as corrected by unanimous voice vote.

4. COMMUNICATIONS

- MTD Fixed Guideway Presentation Report
- Copy of Resolution for MTD Fixed Guideway that had been included in the City Council Packet

5. CONTINUED PUBLIC HEARINGS

There were none.

6. NEW PUBLIC HEARINGS

Plan Case #1852-M-03: Annual Update of Zoning Map

Tim Ross, Senior Planner, presented the staff report. He began by explaining that the Illinois Municipal Code requires municipal authorities to annually publish a new Official Zoning Map each year to reflect annexations, zoning changes, subdivisions and other map corrections. This case includes the changes to the Official Zoning Map that occurred between March 21, 2002 and March 3, 2003. Mr. Ross then reviewed those changes. He noted that in trying to improve the legend, staff added the Historic Landmarks and Historic Districts. He read the options for the Plan Commission regarding the case and presented staff's recommendation, which was as follows:

Staff recommended that the Urbana Plan Commission forward this case to the Urbana City Council with a recommendation for approval of the revised and updated Official Zoning Map.

Ms. Stake inquired what it meant to convey 25 feet from west to east? Mr. Ross responded that under a Certificate of Exemption, a petitioner would be able to shift a lot line up to 25 feet without formally having to subdivide. In the case regarding the Carle Guest House, Carle Hospital owned all four properties, and through the Certificate of Exemption, Carle moved the lot line from the western properties to the east, so that the eastern properties became larger and the western properties became smaller.

Mr. Alix reiterated two requests from last year. The first was that staff would bring an amendment to rationalize the zoning of Meadowbrook Park to convert it all to CRE, Conservation-Recreation-Education, Zoning District. Currently, only half of the park is zoned CRE, and the other half is zoned an obsolete residential zone. The second request was that staff brings an amendment to rezone all of the properties under control by the University of Illinois to CRE or be rezoned to a new university zone. Although there is some dispute as regards to the University with regard to who has zoning authority over that land, it is unreasonable to expect that the City gains any value by maintaining the obsolete zones that are scattered throughout the University properties. A principle example would be the Agricultural use in Orchard Downs, which is being used for medium-density housing. These examples are all through the University of Illinois. It reduces the impact and apparent intent of the City of Urbana to sensibly zone if the City does not address these long-standing obsolete zonings in the University of Illinois area.

Mr. Kangas moved to forward this case to the City Council with a recommendation for approval. Mr. White seconded the motion. Mr. Hopkins commented that he endorsed the two requests made by Mr. Alix. The roll call was as follows:

Ms. Goscha - Yes Mr. Hopkins - Yes

Mr. Kangas	-	Yes	Mr. Pollock	-	Yes
Ms. Stake	-	Yes	Mr. White	-	Yes
Mr. Alix	-	Yes			

The motion was passed by unanimous vote.

7. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

8. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

9. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

There was none.

10. STUDY SESSION

Presentation of MTD Alternatives Analysis Study and Tramway Examples from Other Communities.

Rob Kowalski, Planning Manger, began by introducing Bill Volk, Director of the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (MTD), and Laura Huth, City Councilperson for Ward 5. He mentioned that Ms. Huth and himself have been assisting on the Champaign-Urbana MTD Fixed Guideway Technical Advisory Committee and have participated in a couple of trips to explore some different tram systems. They wanted to take this opportunity to share those experiences with the Plan Commission. He noted the copy of the Resolution that was handed out earlier. He explained the order of the presentation.

Bill Volk's Presentation

Mr. Volk stated that the process was started in 2000. MTD's Board spent a year developing a strategic plan for the district. One thing that resulted in a policy, which the Board set down, was that the percentage of residents who were using bicycles, walk-in and transit to work was going down. There was the feeling that the Board should try to reverse that to prevent future congestion of vehicles on the road. Therefore, the Board set a goal to increase the percentage of residents who used bicycles, the transit or walked to their destinations to 35% by 2010. They also set up a policy and some general goals.

He noted that one of the first things the Board started looking at was what kind of capacity MTD had. They found that MTD does not have a lot of capacity to increase ridership. They already carry 9 1/2 million rides a year. They have 50 buses an hour that operate on Wright Street from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. northbound and another 20 buses an hour that operate southbound on Wright Street. If they were to increase their ridership by 25% over the next 10 to 15 years, they would have

difficulty doing that, because they would have to add more buses on the campus area. As a result, the Board began to look at other systems. Eventually, they decided to fund a \$500,000 Alternatives Analysis Study in looking at options that MTD might have to increase their capacity.

The study has come up with a couple of alternatives, which are a fixed route bus option and fixed route rail options. The study is still ongoing. They are having some difficulty because there is not a traffic model in Champaign or Urbana. Some consultants have put forth an effort to try to create a traffic model. MTD was trying to see if the Federal Transit Administration would go along with that model. At the same time, the Champaign Urbana Urbanized Area Transportation Study (CUUATS) are getting back up and putting their traffic model together. However, MTD does not expect that traffic model to be finished until the end of the summer or early in the fall.

During this time, reauthorization of the Transportation Efficiency Act is ongoing in Washington. Reauthorization is done every six years. If they do not authorize a project, then it makes it extremely difficult and rare for a project to get funded and appropriated during the following six years. In other words, if MTD does not get this project reauthorized now, then they run the risk of finishing the Alternatives Analysis process later this year and then having to wait six years before they could attempt to get it authorized.

Mr. Volk noted that the primary goal with the study is to increase development in the core/downtown areas as well as along the lines. The MTD Board hopes to take certain areas such as Lincoln Square, the Green Street Corridor and the Broadway Avenue North Corridor and increase the housing density and to make the downtown areas more attractive to development.

Mr. Volk mentioned that the Board did not intend on taking people away from driving, because there are enough new people who move here every year. There is about a 25% to 28% turnover of people in the community.

He noted that the Board has goals for increasing transit ridership and improving MTD's efficiency and effectiveness. He noted that this project was part of a larger effort in terms of CUUATS and what he expected out of the Long-Range Transportation Plan that was being looked at right now. Basically, they were looking at making transit improvements in the core of the community and making road improvements on the outside of the community. Along with MTD's efforts to get this project authorized, CUUATS is also attempting to get Olympian Drive Corridor authorized, as well as attempting to get the Curtis Road Corridor authorized.

Rob Kowalski's Presentation

Mr. Kowalski gave a PowerPoint presentation on the fixed guideway system. He talked about the following topics:

- *What is a "Fixed-Guideway"?*
- *Why consider a "Fixed-Guideway"?*
- *What are we talking about?*
- *What we are NOT talking about...*
- *What we ARE talking about...*

- *Portland, Oregon – Streetcar*
- *Portland’s Goals*
- *System Characteristics*
- *Portland Redevelopment*
 - *Increase in value of property values within one block of tracks*
- *European Examples*
 - *Caen, France*
 - *Oreleans, France*
 - *Strasbourg, France*
- *The Phileas – Bus Rapid Transit*
- *The Phileas – Impressions*
- *Lohr Industries – Translohr*
- *Accessibility*

Laura Huth’s Presentation

Ms. Huth continued with the PowerPoint presentation of the CU-MTD Fixed-Guideway Study. She talked about the following things:

- Implications for Community Public Transit
 - Stimulates Economic Development
 - Saves Money
 - Creates Jobs/Access to Jobs
 - Eases Traffic Congestion
 - Fosters More Livable Communities
 - Boosts Real Estate Values
 - Improves Air Quality
 - Reduces Energy Consumption
 - Ensures Safety
- Downtown Plan Goals
- What could be realized...

Chair Pollock thanked Mr. Volk, Mr. Kowalski, and Ms. Huth for giving their presentations. Then, he opened the meeting up for the commissioners to ask questions.

Mr. Alix noted that there appears to be two relatively unrelated and maybe even contradictory goals. One goal would be to reduce congestion and deal with the fact that since MTD was working so well on campus and effectively operating at capacity, MTD could not physically fit any more buses down northbound Wright Street at the time of day that they are trying to serve. Another goal would be to try and attract more people who live in outlying areas of the City to use transit.

Mr. Alix did not understand how a fixed guideway system would address both of these two goals relative to more conventional alternatives. In the case of campus, some of the arguments that are being made in favor of the fixed guideway system rely on closing streets, re-engineering platforms, or creating dedicated right-of-ways for the transit system. It would seem that those

would also yield benefits if applied to buses. The City could correct some of the traffic intersection problems, increase the turn radius on some intersections, have bus only lanes, build platforms or some other infrastructure improvements that might make it easier to operate the buses. Mr. Alix did not have a feel for the relative economics of implementing a fixed guideway system as opposed to implementing some of the things that seemed to make the fixed guideway work, but in the context of the existing or an expanded bus service.

He stated that the other side of this would be attempting to serve outlying areas. Attracting ridership from people who live in outlying areas would be a matter of increasing the number of routes, increasing service frequency, decreasing the average distance from a person's home to a bus stop. He realized that the reason this has not happened was because it was not viable to run that many buses or to have that many routes, because there was not enough ridership. Mr. Alix did not see where the fixed guideway system would not do anything to address that problem, unless it was possible that by doing the fixed guideway system downtown, it would enable the creation of more routes or freed up equipment to be used in the outlying areas.

Mr. Volk responded by saying that MTD was currently operating at capacity on campus. How does MTD get greater capacity? He noted that they could get longer buses, but that becomes a difficult situation. Double articulated vehicles are difficult to operate in an environment that involves making a lot of turns. The ride quality is not very good as well.

Mr. Volk stated that one of the biggest areas that MTD would be trying to attract would be campus faculty and staff. There currently are not a lot of faculty and staff riding buses. At the same time, the University of Illinois is talking about doubling the parking rates over the next five to seven years. This would probably increase ridership on the buses; however, it would create many people having to stand while riding the buses, which would be very uncomfortable. Electric vehicles are much smoother to operate. There is also an attractiveness to rail that buses do not have. Most people consider a fixed guideway system as a higher-class ride. He added that if MTD increases the frequency of bus service in an area, it means that many more buses would be operating, more noise, and more diesel emissions in that area.

Mr. Volk explained that the early concept was to have possibly four nodes that the fixed guideway system would operate. Those nodes would be Illinois Terminal and Downtown Champaign, Lincoln Square and Downtown Urbana, E14 (Parking Lot across from the Assembly Hall), and the Florida Avenue Resident Hall (FAR)/Pennsylvania Avenue Resident Hall (PAR) Area. There would be air-conditioned/heated, restroom-equipped waiting areas there where buses would make transfers to those areas. During peak hours, MTD might be able to make express trips. It would also increase park and ride opportunities.

He went on to talk about how Lincoln Square would be prime for development in the whole scheme of the fixed guideway system. He stated that MTD was not talking about getting everybody to start riding the rail instead of driving their vehicles. MTD would like to increase densities in the core of the community and create more opportunities for people to walk, bike and take the transit.

Mr. Alix stated that his comments were intended to get more at the question whether the types of improvements that would have to be made in order to accommodate a fixed guideway system would not be more economically done so as to benefit a bus system. Would it not be possible to have dedicated bus lanes, curve streets for buses, etc.? Mr. Volk replied that a number of systems are going for “bus rapid transit”. It is on a very straight, narrow corridor; therefore there would not be the twisting and turning. MTD could use bigger buses and make the right-of-way improvements; however, they are not sure whether people would move in that direction and whether it would have the same development impact. MTD does not believe so. The fixed guideway system is expensive and could cost up to \$300,000,000.00, which is about what Champaign and Urbana spends on streets and highways every fifteen years. Mr. Volk talked about the rail systems in Europe and France and the bus systems in the Netherlands and Canada.

Mr. Alix believed that this was very exciting and did not intend for his comments to indicate that he was skeptical. He noted that he likes the idea of having hubs located in less dense areas to which people could drive and park to gain access to the system to take them into more dense areas. People, who work on campus or in the downtown areas in Champaign and Urbana, pay a significant amount for parking. People living in the outlying areas would have the opportunity to drive in towards the City to a point where they could park and then use the transit system. He felt this was a very exciting idea and maybe even a way for people to keep their cars out of center of the Cities and alleviate some of the parking and congestion problems in the downtowns.

Mr. Alix still had a problem with understanding how it would be easier for a fixed guideway system to negotiate campus than buses. He inquired about how MTD would integrate a fixed guideway system into the campus area. Mr. Volk responded that while there would not be separate right-of-ways the entire way through, there would be opportunities for separate right-of-way and the ability to move through the campus quickly. He mentioned some of the possibilities of transit systems getting around campus quicker, which are as follows:

1. Gregory Street currently is closed through the day. There is the possibility that MTD could use this street.
2. Traffic on Wright Street during the day has been significantly reduced through the day as well.
3. The University of Illinois has talked about possibly allowing MTD to use the Stoughton Street right-of-way across the North Quad as a way to go east and west opposed to using Springfield Avenue as they currently do now.
4. White Street from Wright Street to Downtown Champaign is a corridor that MTD designated to redevelop with pedestrian treatments to help reduce through traffic even more. It would make a nice bike path and corridor between campus and Downtown Champaign.
5. If the City of Urbana would use the same street treatment as Champaign has used from Fourth Street to Sixth Street by reducing the streets to one travel lane in each direction plus turning lanes at intersections and applied that to Green Street from Wright Street to Lincoln Avenue, then there would be lots of opportunities for separate right-of-way and green grassy area.

Mr. Alix inquired if the turning radius of the track vehicles were more favorably than buses? Mr. Volk answered that they were not more favorably, but they are pretty tight. Mr. Alix asked if the track vehicles could make the turn at a typical intersection. Mr. Volk commented that there were ways to make it possible (i.e. move cars back a length or two so that curves could be made without affecting the intersection design or choosing intersections where it would be easier).

Mr. Alix commented that it would be an exciting opportunity, and he thought it was very progressive for MTD to look at a project like this. He noted that there was certainly an interest around the country in returning to some of these more efficient modes of transportation. For a City of Champaign-Urbana's size to be as aggressively pursuing this as we are, it says a lot about the community.

Mr. Kowalski added that one of the options of the Alternative Analysis Study was to have an enhanced bus system or even no improvements at all. He noted that one of the main questions that the Portland study group kept asking was, "How important to developers is the track in the street?" During the short time there, the study group met with developers, consultants, planners and even talked to residents, they all said the same thing, which was that the streetcar line and the track in the street drove where development wanted to go. One of the developers had mentioned that many of the buyers of the condominiums that he was selling were buying his building because it was on the line. If the City of Portland had decided to run some kind of shuttle instead that would run up and down his street, then he would not have been able to market his units like he did. People are not interested in pulling out the book to find the times when the shuttle would come or stand out there to watch for it. This would be less likely with the streetcar system. People know that a streetcar comes every three and a half minutes or so. There is also a reader board that tells how much time is left till the next streetcar arrives. He remembered when the study group was traveling on a streetcar, there were empty seats and people were standing because it was such a smooth ride.

Mr. Alix inquired if the Portland transit system had to heavily subsidize having short frequency service or is it the case that streetcars are so much more efficient to operate that they are able to offer more frequent service for the same cost? Mr. Kowalski replied that it all depended on the length of the track line and how the number of vehicles on the line.

Mr. White asked what the total cost would be to install a system with four nodes and a fixed rail? Mr. Volk answered that the Alternative Analysis Study was suppose to come up with a more precise cost. In rough terms, it could be as much as \$300,000,000.00. Mr. White inquired what the source(s) for funding this would be? Mr. Volk replied that federal funding could be anywhere from 50 to 60%, state funding would be 20 to 30 %, and local funding would be 10 to 30%.

Mr. White assumed that an electric vehicle would be less expensive to repair and maintain than a diesel bus. Mr. Volk replied that the life expectancy for a rail vehicle would be longer around forty years. At the federal level, funding for vehicle replacement for buses is eligible after twelve years. The Alternative Analysis Study will also be able to tell how much the operating costs would be.

Mr. White inquired about whether savings in terms of operation equipment and lines as well as money coming back from increased property taxes through development would re-coop the 10 to 30% local funding and add profit to it? Mr. Volk didn't know about profit. It was a nice way to think. The City of Champaign, the City of Urbana and the University of Illinois need to look the ring roads that CUUATS has been talking about possibly redeveloping, which are Olympian Drive being extended all the way through to Urbana, interstate interchange on High Cross Road, Curtis Road, and Rising Road, and a corridor east down Curtis Road from Interstate 57 to High Cross Road. These changes will probably be around \$100,000,000.00.

He mentioned that there are communities across the country that are competing for these types of systems. They are oversubscribed in terms of who wants to build them. The systems that will get built more quickly are the systems that come up with the local funding. There are a lot of systems that are not able to swing the local funding. We need to look at what we want the community to be like over a long period of time and how we want to develop and how we want to set ourselves apart from other communities in the country. Will we be able to attract businesses to the research parks? Would this be beneficial to Downtown Urbana? He believed that this was an opportunity to increase the property value at Lincoln Square as well. If we do not look and explore, then we will not get anywhere. The City of Urbana will eventually get congested and look like every place else.

Mr. Hopkins inquired about the 6 to 1 return. Who gets 6 to whose 1 and in what form? Ms. Huth replied that there are several different studies that talk about the 4, 6 and the 9. For every dollar that is locally invested, the City uses increased property taxes, new retail taxes, and more difficult to quantify social benefits to give back to the community. She would be willing to share the studies with the commissioners.

Mr. Hopkins questioned if within in the four node system the two routes (one from E14 to Lincoln Square and the other from FAR/PAR to Downtown Champaign) would cross and interchange on Wright Street? Mr. Volk replied that was incorrect. There would be more around six different routes where two routes would come into Downtown Urbana theoretically each on ten-minute frequency. One of those two routes would serve the east side of the Quad and the other would serve the west side of the Quad. It would be the same for the City of Champaign, for E14, and for the FAR/PAR. Each route would run on the same track line. The bus system operates in a certain way now, and MTD would certainly want to maintain the ridership on the bus system. The rail system would provide more linear routes.

Mr. Hopkins noted that if one of the main potential benefits was an increase in real estate value, which yields tax revenues, it seemed that the size of the gains would be significantly smaller than say in Portland's case, because the huge portion of the actual right-of-way would have both sides or one side on University of Illinois' property. Therefore, the only value capture opportunities would essentially be Green Street from Lincoln Avenue to Lincoln Square Mall and White Street from Wright Street to the Illinois Terminal. Mr. Volk responded that there would be a return on the initial segment as well as increased attractiveness and from the research park area, where the leaseholds provide property tax revenue.

Mr. Hopkins commented that the park and ride idea would not work, because the only place where people would be able to park would be in the E14 or somewhere in the Research Park, where the University of Illinois was not going to build additional parking lots. People cannot park and ride from FAR/PAR or in Downtown Urbana. Mr. Volk replied that people currently would not be able to park and ride, but that does not mean that more parking could not be created in the future. Mr. Hopkins stated that we are already talking about parking garage parking expense in Downtown Urbana, in Downtown Champaign and on campus except maybe in E14. So, he does not see where the notion comes from for park and ride. The dynamics of this project are really important. How this project grows seems to be pretty crucial from the beginning in terms of how it might actually work. He inquired if there had been a community charette as of yet? Mr. Volk answered by saying that MTD was planning more community outreach events in April and during later stages. There will be more community input. Mr. Hopkins questioned if this project was still preliminary? Mr. Volk answered that it was leading towards a locally preferred alternative. Mr. Hopkins commented that the project could not be considered a locally preferred alternative until there has been a whole lot of local community charette. Mr. Volk responded that there was going to be more community input. Mr. Hopkins believed that a lot of the routes and node locations had not appeared in the community mind. Mr. Kowalski stated that there was a feeling with a lot of people that this project was a lot further along than it really is. He felt it was important to keep in the mind the duration of this study and how long it would really take to come up with an alternative and get the funding. Mr. Volk stated that the routes that were being talked about are very crude and preliminary. The status of locally preferred alternative is federal jargon that has to do with the vehicle type rather than the routing.

Mr. Hopkins commented that even if the value capture potential is relatively small because so much of the track line would be along University property, it seemed to him that when we think about federal, state, and local shares, that the private share should be considered as well. There are actually four shares. The fourth being the Wright Street and Green Street landowners, because they would get a 40% difference from a public investment. There is no reason why those landowners deserve not to pay for that. Mr. Volk stated he was trying to avoid getting into too many specifics where the local share would come from, because there are any number of local options there. One of those would be a value capture from creating a district that the fixed guideway system would operate in and the increment associated with an increase in property values. Mr. Hopkins stated that he was actually talking about capturing the increase in the private value of the land.

Mr. Kangas commended MTD for thinking big and visionary. He was curious about the differences between Champaign-Urbana and Portland (i.e. the high turnover rate, etc.). He suggested that Mr. Volk talk more about why fixed guideway systems are or are not working in other areas. Mr. Volk felt that was a good suggestion. He noted that the study group has talked about creating and looking at zoning, densities, and parking requirements so that it creates a uniform playing field. Mr. Volk commented that was a good suggestion. He noted that if we are going to encourage more people to walk and bike and create more densities, then we will have to think in different terms than what we have been thinking for the last fifteen years.

Ms. Stake expressed appreciation for this study session topic. She thought this idea would be great and was hoping to change the transportation system in Champaign-Urbana. She felt that it was great that the City of Urbana was thinking more about walkways and bike trails.

Mr. Kowalski commented that as MTD gets further along with this process, he would bring this topic back in subsequent months to keep the Plan Commission updated on the process. These concepts would be playing a large in the Comprehensive Plan Update.

Mr. Hopkins inquired about the timeline for the application process. Mr. Volk replied that the alternative analysis would continue to go on until it was finished. The next step would be to try and get the project authorized in the successor to the Transportation Efficiency Act T-21. This Act is active until September 30, 2003 and supposedly Congress will have a new one by October 1, 2003. MTD would also try to seek an appropriation for DEIS, which is an environmental assessment effort, as well as some preliminary engineering. This process would be much more detailed and require a lot more public input. The alternative analysis process and the locally preferred alternative are more aimed at vehicle type and how and what would be operated.

11. STAFF REPORT

There was none.

12. ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

Chair Pollock adjourned the meeting at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rob Kowalski, Secretary
Urbana Plan Commission