

MINUTES OF MEETING

Project: Eastern Market Metro Park & Plaza

Project #: 28005

Date: October 1, 2008

Attending: 101 Community Members (see attached sign in sheet)

Moderator: Councilmember Tommy Wells

Task Force:

Sharon Ambrose
Ken Golding
Ken Jarboe
Barbara McIntosh
Margaret Missiaen
Susan Perry
David Perry
Donna Scheeder
Tip Tipton
Dick Wolf

Weinstein Studio

Amy Weinstein
Vrushali Oak
Andy Murray

Gorove/ Slade Associates

Lou Slade
Steve Pinkus

Oehme van Sweden & Associates

Marisa Scalera

Subject: Community Wide Forum

Distribution: distributed to Task Force Members, posted to Website

Ward 6 Councilmember Tommy Wells opened the meeting as moderator. He welcomed the community and was enthusiastic at the level of interest shown by the attendance. He stressed how this process represented a great opportunity for the community to make progress towards much needed improvements to the Eastern Market Metro Plaza and Park. He hoped that a positive response from the community would help to move the process forward. He then introduced former Ward 6 Councilmember Sharon Ambrose, a new member of the Task Force, and invited her to address the community.

Mrs. Ambrose noted that the re-design of the Metro plaza was not a new idea, that early plans for a re-design had started several years ago when she represented Ward 6 on the DC Council. She also mentioned that Tommy Wells and the ANC had also been involved in the early discussions. She said that the plans done by Oehme van Sweden in 2003 were exciting and that she looks forward to seeing the design concepts developed by the new design team.

Tip Tipton, chair of Barracks Row Main Street and chair of the Task Force, spoke on behalf of the Task Force. He acknowledged that mistakes had been made early on, leading some members of the community to feel that they were being excluded from the process. He stated that this was never the Task Force's intention and he said that in order to achieve greater transparency, the Task Force will post study-related material on the website, it has added members to the Task Force, including immediate neighbors of the Metro Plaza, and it will hold additional community meetings.

Noting that a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been prepared, Mr. Tipton addressed several questions from the FAQ pertaining to who initiated the study and how it is being funded and carried out. He then reviewed the agenda for the evening which included a presentation by the design team of its findings during the information gathering stage, followed by a question and answers session.

David Perry (co-chair of the Task Force) then elaborated on the goals of the project. He described the widely shared view of the Metro Plaza area as barren and uninviting, and said that it was unworthy of the Capitol Hill community. He described the objectives of the design study as fourfold:

1. To create a beautiful and sustainable landscaped area for the community.
2. To create a better designed multi modal transportation hub that both meets today's needs and anticipates changes in the transportation network that may be forthcoming.
3. To improve pedestrian safety
4. To improve the Metro Plaza area as a center for the community and as a connective tissue that more effectively links the 7th and 8th Street / Barracks Row commercial areas.

Mr. Perry reminded the community that the Metro Plaza design study is entirely separate from the proposed redevelopment of the Hine Junior High school site. He said that in the case of Hine, the District of Columbia owns the site and, in all likelihood, will use a

Request for Proposal process to select a private developer to undertake that project. He did, however, stress that care should be taken to ensure that the two processes inform and support each other. He then described the schedule for the next steps as it is currently conceived.

1. The design team is to work on and develop three distinct design concepts, and then present them to the Task Force for its review and comment. The design team then will incorporate the Task Force's input into the three designs and conceptually price each alternative.
2. The revised concepts and pricing, along with the design team's analysis, will be presented to the Task Force. The Task Force then will seek to reach consensus on a Preferred Alternative.
3. The three concepts, including the Preferred Alternative, will be presented to the Community and Federal and DC government agencies for their review and comment.
4. The design team will incorporate input it receives from the Task Force, the community, and the various government agencies and further refine the Preferred Alternative including development of a conceptual construction budget.
5. A final written report will be produced and submitted to the Task Force.

Mr. Perry stressed that there will be ample opportunities for community input as the process moves forward.

He then invited Amy Weinstein to make a presentation on the findings of the design team to date. Ms. Weinstein introduced the study team members along with Weinstein Studio including Gorove/Slade Associates (transportation planners) and Oehme van Sweden & Associates (landscape architects). She outlined the boundaries of the study area and discussed the urban design goals of the project as a whole. She then presented a history of the site, including an analysis of historical data, before discussing the existing physical site conditions. Lou Slade and Steve Pinkus of Gorove Slade then presented information on existing transportation conditions including existing challenges of the area and possible changes to the public transportation infrastructure. Marisa Scalera of Oehme van Sweden then presented an analysis of the existing landscape conditions and showed examples of how these issues might be addressed in the re-design with greater sustainability.

The floor was then opened for questions from the community.

One resident asked for clarification on what was known about using Pennsylvania Avenue as an emergency evacuation route. Lou Slade answered that District of Columbia DOT has an Emergency Preparedness Plan that has Pennsylvania Avenue SE assigned as one of the radial corridors to help with the evacuation of the city – that in the

event of such an emergency the signals would change to maximize the flow of traffic out of town and that no vehicles would be allowed to cross Pennsylvania Avenue. He said that he is not aware of any separate evacuation plans developed by Congress or the Architect of Capitol in spite of rumors suggesting that there is one. He went on to say that in his work for the Architect of the Capitol on traffic planning issues and in talking with people who work on the Hill, there has never been mention of such a plan.

A questioner asked what Congress might do in the event of a bomb, whether streets would be closed and barriers put up, and what the resulting effect of this might be. Tommy Wells said that there are pop-ups on both Independence Avenue and Constitution Avenue that could close off those roads in the immediate vicinity of the Capitol but that he is unaware of any plans for wholesale street closings.

One resident wanted clarification on the boundaries of the study area. Ms. Weinstein showed the map illustrating the study boundaries (the area from 7th Street, SE to 9th Street, SE, bordered by D Streets on the north and south).

One questioner asked what kinds of bike facilities might be considered at the site, such as a two-story parking rack or smart bike racks. Steve Pinkus said that such facilities are being looked into by DDOT.

One resident expressed frustration and disappointment that the presentation had not made explicit reference to the recommendations that had been put forward at the community meetings that preceded this one. In particular, she felt the Task Force should have reported on the meeting held on September 9, at which time many people indicated they do not favor any changes to the current configuration of the roadways. Mr. Tipton responded that the Task Force is not prepared at this early stage in the design study to preclude studying a range of design alternatives. A resident then asked whether there are already plans to divert traffic down 7th & 8th Streets SE. Mr. Perry answered that the design team hasn't even begun to develop alternatives at this point. He reiterated that following this meeting, the design team will begin to develop three distinct design concepts, all of which subsequently will be reviewed by the Task Force. He said that the design study can only benefit and be made stronger by investigating a range of possibilities.

A resident said that this was the first he had heard of the process and that in general he feels that there is much support in the community for improving and beautifying the Eastern Market Metro Plaza area. He then went on to express serious concerns about the consequences of diverting traffic in to the residential areas along 9th, 7th and 8th streets. A number of people in the room supported this view and said that they didn't want traffic diverted into the community. Mr. Wells said that he could see why people might be opposed to the study if they thought that this would be the outcome. He assured everyone that anything that would make the existing traffic situation worse or divert traffic into the wider community was clearly a non starter.

Another member of the audience expressed what she thought was causing the overall sense of frustration in the community in that nowhere in the presentation or the process to date was there any sense that the community was being listened to, either in acknowledgement of meetings or in recognizing the feedback they had given.

Another member of the audience raised the question of trust, and how the process so far has not helped gain the trust of the community. He suggested that making public the Weinstein Studio's Scope of Work would help to address this concern. Mr. Tipton responded that the Scope of Work will be made public and will be posted on the website within a week.

A resident expressed the view that the Capitol Hill community is well informed and intelligent and that it makes sense to wait and see what the design study comes up with and then let the community have its educated input once there is something to respond to. Mr. Wells said that he welcomed that statement and that it would be counterproductive to strait jacket the design process before it even starts.

A resident brought up the issue of the Hine redevelopment--how it seemed pointless for the two processes to be separate given their proximity and given that the two sites will have an impact on each other. He said he thought it even would be preferable to wait to see what happens at Hine first before anything is done at the Eastern Market Plaza. Mr. Wells said that the Hine process is complicated and is subject to a number of distinct legal and public processes. It would take too long and be counter productive for one or the other process to wait. He did, however, readily acknowledge that each process should inform the other.

A resident stated that he appreciated the presentation and had come to understand rather than to react. He asked whether the Metro right-of-way precluded putting any roads underground, either Pennsylvania Avenue running parallel to the tunnels or 8th and 9th streets running under them. Ms. Weinstein explained that given the placement of the ventilation shafts and the shallow depth of the subway tunnels, the preliminary analysis is that it would not be possible to place roadways underground.

A question was raised whether the city or DDOT has any broader or long term plans to reduce overall vehicular traffic coming into and passing through the District. Mr. Wells said that this issue is extremely complicated and that there are efforts underway to try to mitigate the adverse effects of traffic passing through residential neighborhoods like Capitol Hill.

A questioner asked whether the Task Force is trying to replicate Stanton Park on the site. Ms. Weinstein stated that there is no desire or plan to replicate Stanton Park on the site. She stated that turning the existing 3 lanes of traffic on D Street into 4 or 5 lanes of diverted Pennsylvania Avenue traffic right next to existing front yards was a non-starter. Rather the team will look into a number of possible changes to the space and road configuration in order to evaluate their relative merits.

One resident pointed out that the presentation had helped her understand that there had been an unintended benefit in the past from changing the road configuration when South Carolina Avenue had been closed during construction of Metro, and that as a result, a larger area of contiguous public space had been created.

A suggestion was made that the Task Force create a blog for the community to exchange opinions and ideas. Mr. Tipton explained that the idea had been discussed but that the Task Force had concerns about the idea, not least because of the time and money needed to moderate and manage such a blog. Mr. Perry said that the FAQ document and minutes of this meeting and all previous meetings would be made available on the website. In addition, emails that the design team receives will be distributed to every member of the Task Force; members of the Task Force then can distribute those emails as they deem appropriate. The overall intention is for information to be public and accessible. Mr. Perry also stated that the FAQ document is not static; it will be periodically updated to address new questions that arise.

After the formal close of the meeting, several individuals approached members of the Design Team with additional comments:

- it was pointed out that some of the trees in the existing plaza/park were not the original 1970's trees, but had been planted in the 1990's.
- a resident questioned whether mosquitoes might breed in the storm water run-off tree boxes illustrated in the presentation (the answer is that the water would not stand in the box – it constantly flows away).
- A residential, with respect to the idea of the blog, suggested that if there is to be a blog, that there be four distinct areas for comment: 1) Design Ideas/Themes, 2) Concerns with Square Concept, 3) Concerns with Plantings, and 4) Positive Comments