

MINUTES OF MEETING

Project: Capitol Hill Town Square

Project #: 28005

Date: September 9, 2008

Attending: **93 Community Members**

Task Force

Ray Gooch
Barbara McIntosh
Margaret Missiaen
Donna Scheeder
Harry Schnipper
Tip Tipton
Dick Wolf

Weinstein Studio

Amy Weinstein
Vrushali Oak
Andy Murray

Subject: Adjacent and Nearby Neighbors Meeting

Distribution: Website

Tip Tipton opened the meeting by welcoming everybody to the meeting. He thanked the community for getting the word out to neighbors about the meeting. He then introduced himself as the head of the Task Force and Amy Weinstein as the head of the Design team.

Amy Weinstein introduced herself and the Weinstein Studio team members. She mentioned that the purpose of this meeting was to get input from the community regarding what they would and would not like to see in the re-designed plaza. She then opened up the meeting for questions from the community.

In response to a question from the community, Amy Weinstein described the overall area to be covered in the design study.

A question was raised whether there is any inter-relationship of the Hine project and the Eastern Market metro plaza study project. Amy Weinstein explained that these were two completely different projects, that the Hine project is in the hands of the city government which expects to put out a Request for Proposals to private developers in November whereas the Capitol Hill Town Square project is a study undertaken by a group of individuals (the Task Force) and is in its initial phase.

In response to a question, Amy Weinstein mentioned that in 2003 the Landscape firm Oehme van Sweden and Associates had done a concept sketch for improving the landscape of the plaza. The sketch posted on the Capitol Hill Town Square website was part of that study. She also added that there is no specific plan or layout being currently contemplated by the design team or the Task Force and that traffic patterns and its effects will be studied during the design process.

Amy Weinstein then explained to those present that the Capitol Hill Town Square project was in its “Data Gathering” phase and that this meeting was part of that phase. She reiterated that the design team will not start to draw or sketch any plans until this phase was completed. She stressed the importance of studying different design alternatives that are distinct from each other - A thorough study of different options leads to a better understanding of different aspects of issues. A design option that comes out of this type of process usually turns out to be a much better design than if only one option was chosen at the beginning of the process.

One of the community members remarked that the process should include a study of the traffic conditions first and that architectural solutions be applied to it after traffic problems are resolved. Amy Weinstein informed the community that the study will include a thorough review of current and future traffic problems and that one of the goals of the study is to improve pedestrian safety and resolve traffic issues. She also added that Gorove/Slade, Traffic and Transportation consultants with many years of experience with DC transportation projects, are also part of the design team.

Barbara McIntosh introduced herself as President of the Eastern Market Metro Community Association (EMMCA) and suggested that any fixes considered by the design team and the Task Force be weighed as benefits to the residents against benefits to the businesses. She also stated that the residents on D Street, north of the plaza, do not see the plaza as a square. They see it as a quiet residential park and would like that character to remain in any design considerations. She noted that the park provides a buffer from the traffic on Pennsylvania Avenue and was a good place for children to play. The residents would not want any additional bus stops, vendors or other businesses, and any increase in traffic or emergency routes.

Barbara McIntosh enumerated a list of design issues that EMMCA has proposed the Task Force to consider:

“Task Force shall not consider any design that:

1. increases or widens the number of lanes or decreases available parking on what is currently the 800 block of D Street SE, or 9th Street SE between Pennsylvania Ave SE and South Carolina Ave SE; or
2. for the footprint that currently makes up the residential park bordered by D Street SE, 8th Street SE, Pennsylvania Ave SE and 9th Street SE, does not maintain as its exclusive purpose a non-commercial and quiet nature setting, or permits commercial venues to be located there at any time; or
3. increases or widens the number of lanes or decreases available parking on what is currently 7th Street SE between Pennsylvania Ave SE and South Carolina Ave SE, and 8th Street SE between Pennsylvania Ave SE and Independence Ave SE.”

A show of hands was then taken with a majority of people attending expressing a preference to maintain the existing roadbed configuration and traffic pattern.

Barbara Riehe submitted to Tip and Amy a list of 20 questions that EMCCA requests answers to (see attached).

A question was posed – What is wrong with Eastern Market Metro Plaza and why is there a need to make any changes?

Donna Scheeder, representative of the Eastern Market Community Advisory Committee and Task Force member, noted that there will be changes in the future for the community based on what DDOT or the federal and city governments plan for the Eastern Market Metro plaza area which may pose additional traffic and transportation issues. She expressed concern that the community needs to consider that if they do nothing about it, then changes may be imposed on them and they may not be given a choice at that time. She also asked the community to try and protect the atmosphere they cherish and likewise protect the change that happens to the community.

Several people questioned the choice of the name “Capitol Hill Town Square” instead of “Eastern Market Metro Plaza”. Amy Weinstein responded that a lot of people associated the name Eastern Market Metro Plaza only to the parcel with the metro entrance. The name Capitol Hill Town Square is meant to suggest that the study area includes all six park parcels and not only the one with the metro entrance.

A resident asked – What are the goals for this study? How and why was this study started? Tip Tipton explained to the community that initial thoughts of a study started when Barracks Row Main Street and other Barracks Row businesses wanted to make an effort to increase flow of pedestrian traffic to Barracks Row which would help increase business for Barracks Row merchants. One of the goals of the study is to create a better connection from the Eastern Market area north of the plaza to the existing 8th street business corridor south of the plaza thereby increasing pedestrian traffic to Barracks Row.

Another resident expressed concern that this would mean a continuous commercial strip will be created from 7th Street, north of the plaza to 8th Street, south of the plaza, which was not desirable for the community.

Several people expressed concern that the traffic lights when crossing Pennsylvania Ave. are not long enough and hence, unsafe for pedestrians. It was suggested that the traffic lights be made to have longer delays for pedestrian safety. Suggestions were made to incorporate better signage to help pedestrians navigate.

People also expressed concern that the traffic on Pennsylvania Ave. is very fast and that there is a need for traffic calming. It was noted that traffic at the Navy Yard has increased tremendously and that 7th street is now being used by trucks thereby affecting the residents. Increasing commercial activity would further increase traffic. One community member suggested the use of speed bumps.

Some parents expressed that the park is not actually a nice place for children to play because of the fast traffic as well as it being hardscape, uninviting and badly maintained.

People expressed concern about how the U.S. Capitol's evacuation route on Pennsylvania Ave. would be affected by any re-routing or changes to the traffic pattern.

Dick Wolf from the Capitol Hill Restoration Society and Task Force member pointed out that decisions are made routinely by the city planning and transportation departments and changes are inevitable. He reiterated that additional bus routes and street cars were being planned for this area by DDOT and that this study is an opportunity for the community to control the change that is coming their way.

Several people expressed discontent and raised suspicion about the process with which the study was being conducted especially in regards to communication with the community. There was a suggestion made that there be a continuous communication between the study team and the community as plans and sketches are developed for the plaza.

It was noted by a community member that there are two types of businesses – night time and daytime, which have different roles in the commercial aspect of the plaza. It was also noted that Eastern Market is now an attraction for visitors to the area only on weekends. It was asked that these facts be considered while studying the commercial connection between 7th Street and 8th Street businesses.

Linda Elliot asked if the Task Force will announce at the community meeting in October that the unanimous vote of the people attending this meeting was to not make any changes to the current roadbed configuration.

The answer was that the Task Force would consider whether such an announcement should be made. (the notetaker did not count a unanimous vote, we would characterize it as a significant majority).

Several people wanted to know again what the goals were for the study. Amy Weinstein reiterated that the commercial connection between 7th to the north and 8th street to the south was only one of the many goals for the project. She enumerated other equally important goals for the study –

- a. Ecological and environmental goals
- b. Increasing sustainability of the area which would be better accomplished with a larger park area than disjointed smaller parcels. Correct irrigation problems and increase growth of trees that are currently affected by compacted soil.
- c. Pedestrian safety
- d. Traffic calming

A resident inquired where and how in the future could the community find announcements for future meetings, updated and forward comments to the study team and Task Force.

Amy Weinstein informed the community that announcements for future meetings can be found on the home page of the project website “capitolhilltownsquare.org”. She also added that people can submit their comments by following the “Contact us” link on the website. The comments will be received by the project manager and forwarded on to the Task Force.

A question was raised – what is the budget for the project and where is the funding coming from?

Tip Tipton informed the community that funding for the project has come from various grants received by Barracks Row Main Street, a non-profit organization, and from earmarks from the government. He added that the funding was not enough to support actual construction of the project and additional funds would have to be raised.

It was suggested by a community member that that if the goal of improving flow to the businesses on 8th Street was a goal, then maybe it was more advantageous to look at the opposite end of barracks row, and to maybe create a destination, which could possibly hold concerts or other such attractions, to draw people into the area from Eastern Market.

It was suggested by a community member that a possible ‘take home’ from the meeting be available, that task force need to improve communication with the community, and that the overall process, and more specifically the structure of the task force, needed to be revisited.

A question was raised about whether there was a contractual stipulation about what could or couldn’t be studied by the design team, and was that in any way limiting the field of study.