

DSAP Goals, Policies and Strategic Actions STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING #7 MINUTES APRIL 23, 2013

<u>Steering Members in Attendance:</u> Dana Beckley, John Hinds, Randall Smith, Barbara Smith, Chad Gleason, Rita Bailie, Jennifer Dye

<u>City Staff in Attendance:</u> Ben Wolters, ECD Director; Fred Satterstrom, Planning Director; Gloria Gould-Wessen, Long Range Planner; Jeff Watling, Parks & Community Services Director

Watling stated that the city needs to look at opportunities and ways to reconfigure or repurpose existing public park spaces as downtown begins to transition into more urban livability. City policy speaks to the establishment of a signature park (or park of significance) where the public meets the private sector and depend on each other. A downtown signature park would create opportunities and require some big civic and public investment and if configured differently would lend itself to being more supportive to retail, commercial, and residential goals.

Beckley stated that the Parks next to the railroad tracks would be better served for retail space rather than for parks or apartments due to noise generated by the trains running through those locations daily. He stated that the City won't acquire a significant level of private investment next to railroad tracks, opining that a park would be a better natural use as it relates to the city's funds and existing land portfolio, suggesting converting some of the other downtown parks for other purposes.

Watling stated that staff has analyzed railroad parks, determining that they do not serve well as a public gathering space, but serve more as a green border which has its benefits. Watling stated that the city evaluates what could be a higher better use for those parks such as using those spaces for vehicle parking next to transit spaces as well as being intentional on the placement of public gathering spaces so they support and serve retail, residential, and the commercial community.

Bailie suggested converting the area of Gowe and Meeker Street where vacant store fronts and bare property exist into a park, to encourage development of downtown apartments and to draw people to Kent on Cornucopia Days. Bailie suggested that people could park down by the railroad tracks to access the park.

Gleason stated that parks along the railroad should be used for commercial development, as commercial development spurs activity. He spoke in support of a larger communal park that would become a more vibrant gathering area and benefit growth in downtown.

Watling stated that as the city moves towards commercial redevelopment the Parks Department will look at how the city's public spaces support downtown livability and evaluate how to strategically position park development as a necessary accessory use.

Watling stated that he believes there is great potential for a symbiotic relationship between Town Square Plaza and the library as they are both public spaces, further stating that in order for a vibrant urban park to survive, it needs private energy, whether from residential, commercial, retail or a mix of uses.

Satterstrom stated that the theme for this developing plan is a livable and economically viable downtown. He stated that there has been discussion on how to increase incentives and remove barriers for downtown living. Satterstrom opined that as the Goodman Building project progresses towards the adoption phase, it is symbolic of where this plan is headed which is development of downtown residential. The residential and business development

will place more people on the street and in the park which will compete with the homeless population using the park at this time. The role of open space has been discussed with the conclusion that little pockets of open space are neither well utilized nor programmed right, with our Parks Department evaluating the adequacy of the pocket parks or the need for a more substantial green space.

Beckley stated that the city should first focus on commercial/private investment first as focusing on parks drains the municipality's resources. Watling stated that strategic planning needs to happen on both ends.

Beckley stated that Kent has great land with the potential for parks, great existing parks, but they are more of a haven than an accessory to private investment. Watling concurred, posing the question; does the currently existing land bank in downtown make sense to support the livable space or do we want to rethink the land bank when the livable space comes to downtown.

Gould-Wessen explained that the policies and goals of the Downtown Subarea Action Plan (The Plan) have changed. In order to comply with Puget Sound Regional Council's and King County policies on urban standards, staff proposes to expand Kent's urban center to allow for more land for residential and for jobs that Kent can account for in the Urban Center. Currently Kent's Urban Center consists of 292 acres. In comparison Bellevue's urban center is 422 acres in size, Renton is 551 acres, and Tukwila is 940 acres in size. Kent proposes to expand the Urban Center land use plan designation.

Staff proposes to rezone parcels of land that includes the ShoWare site to General Commercial Mixed-Use, which will allow ShoWare to expand its facility in the future. Staff proposes to change zoning along Central Avenue to General Commercial Mixed Use rather than Community Commercial Mixed Use, as community commercial requires 20-foot rear yard setbacks. The Urban Center supports a mixed use zoning.

Additional changes consider allowing for building height increases in the Downtown Commercial District (DC) and rezoning Meeker Street to Downtown Commercial Enterprise (DCE), where the rule allows for unlimited height. Gould-Wessen stated that the practicality of building on river bottom land means that there will not be skyscrapers, but the DCE zone will provide a developer with more flexibility.

Satterstrom stated that a portion of First Avenue retains DC zoning and staff feels this area has more value, is more historic in nature with more buildings on the local register.

Wolters shared new ideas and concepts prompted by feedback received from the Steering Committee, from the public and from staff's development of the Plan. He stated that the public sector has made significant investments in downtown in order to transform it into an active and vibrant community. He stated that the transformation of retail, shopping centers, new buying and spending habits has transformed the landscape.

Wolters stated that as he looks at development plans, the question is how does the city realize the full vision for **Kent's historic downtown**, and move faster towards the vision of the community. The Plan is trying to lay out this vision in terms of the limited powers of city government.

Development of Kent Station recreated downtown but now we have to find a way to move that energy forward. Wolters stated that the city has always had an interest in having a specific gathering place in downtown and Town Square Plaza is just that. He clarified that Watling was talking about ways the city could explore to expand upon the creation of Town Square Plaza in a meaningful and beneficial way that would create an even more active vibrant space.

Wolters stated that although the city has limited opportunities, one tool government uses is incentives. Wolters stated that he wants the city to develop an incentive package, citing an incentive package that Auburn created. He stated that he would like to explore an incentives

program as a way to move forward for a specific area of downtown located between Second and Fourth Avenues. Wolters stated that as an incentive, the city would choose to forego revenue in the near term by exempting development fees within a very tightly defined area. He proposed that this incentive be restricted to the most critical area where no development has occurred. Wolters stated that an incentives option is his personal recommendation and is a concept that has not yet been considered by the Mayor or City Council. He stated that this option is within the context of this action plan and within the purview of actions that city government can take.

Wolters stated that implementing incentives is a difficult decision for policy makers as you are forsaking something in order to get something else. He cited the City of Renton as implementing incentives on a project by project basis, stating that **Frey's Electronics** was incentivized to locate in Renton as the result of **Renton's** decision to waive transportation fees with the understanding that their payback period would be four years. When the store opened Renton was paid back within 14 months and receives constant annual revenue from that business.

Wolters stated that a recent conversation he held with Ben Porter (a significant property owner along Meeker), informed him that Mr. Porter would entertain offers on his properties, and that Mr. Porter sees his buildings as no longer holding any value and perceives them as tear-downs. Wolters stated that part of the challenge is how to re-envision Meeker Street and that the starting point for himself includes bulldozing that area. He stated that the other side of the strategy is to renovate those structures that may have value and unique features in an incremental fashion that will attract tenants to create a critical mass, which is what has happened on the Meeker Square building.

Wolters encouraged the city as a community to spend time re-envisioning what Meeker Street should be; such as retail on the ground level with 3-4 stories of living space with parking, or something else. What role would a more assembled park play, building off of the plaza. The fragmented, piece-meal land banking the city has going on is not good allocation of scarce city resources and not serving the public well now or where we are going in the future.

Barbara Smith questioned if it would be possible for businesses to have temporary patio platforms built for use in the summer months and then pulled off and stored in the winter. She stated that one business has been in touch with her inquiring about what they would need to do to get permitted, and that she had emailed Kurt Hanson with this businesses request. Kurt defined these patios as street seating. Smith distributed a picture of what these patios look like. Wolters stated that he would do everything he could to assist any business who might be interested in having these temporary patio platforms.

Gleason stated that he is in favor of removing height restrictions in the downtown core area and supports the incentives that have been offered. He opined that from a commercial standpoint the city is moving in the right direction.

Satterstrom stated that staff has evaluated the environmental impact statement and is creating a streamlined environmental process for development not only for that two block area, but for the entire downtown area under consideration which is another development incentive. Satterstrom stated that next steps include a workshop in May with the Land Use and Planning Board (LUPB), a talk with the Kent Downtown Partnership at their May 17th breakfast, then holding a public hearing before the LUPB in June.

Adjournment

The meeting concluded at 6:30 pm

Pamela Mottram, Administrative Secretary Economic & Community Development