

CHATHAM COUNTY-SAVANNAH METROPOLITAN PLANNING COMMISSION

MPC PLANNING SESSION MINUTES

**ARTHUR A. MENDONSA HEARING ROOM
110 EAST STATE STREET**

March 13, 2007

1:00 PM

Members Present: Stephen R. Lufburrow, Chairman
Robert Ray, Vice Chairman
Jon Todd, Secretary
Susan Myers, Treasurer
Russ Abolt
Douglas Bean
W. Shedrick Coleman
Ben Farmer
Timothy S. Mackey
Lacy Manigault
Lee Meyer
Adam Ragsdale

Members Not Present: Michael Brown

Staff Present: Thomas L. Thomson, P. E., AICP, Executive Director
Harmit Bedi, AICP, Deputy Executive Director
Jim Hansen, AICP, Director, Development Services
Charlotte Moore, AICP, Director, Special Projects
Beth Reiter, AICP, Director, Historic Preservation
Brenda Smith, Director, Administrative Services
Mark Wilkes, P. E., AICP, Director, Transportation
Melony West, Director, Finance & Systems
Barbara Timbers, Administrator, Information Svcs. & Mapping
Wykoda Wang, Associate Transportation Planner
Courtland Hyser, AICP, Land Use Planner
Roger Beall, Administrator, Information Technology
Carry Smith, Savannah State Intern
Marilyn Gignilliat, Executive Assistant
Lynn Manrique, Administrative Assistant

Advisory Staff Present: None

I. Call to Order and Welcome

Chairman Lufburrow called the meeting to order and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation.

II. Notices, Proclamations and Acknowledgments

- A. The next scheduled MPC Regular Meeting will be March 20, 2007, at 1:30 p.m. in the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room.
- B. There will be a Unified Zoning Ordinance Update on April 3, 2007, at 10:00 a.m. in the Arthur A. Mendonsa Hearing Room.

III. Approval of the January 9, 2007, MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes.

Mr. Todd **moved** to approve the January 9, 2007, MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes. Mr. Ray seconded the motion.

MPC Action: The motion to approve the January 9, 2007, MPC Planning Meeting Minutes and Briefing Minutes carried with none opposed. Voting were Mr. Lufburrow, Mr. Ray, Mr. Todd, Ms. Myers, Mr. Abolt, Mr. Bean, Mr. Coleman, Mr. Farmer, Mr. Mackey, Mr. Manigault, Mr. Meyer, and Mr. Ragsdale.

IV. Old Business

The proposed discussion item for the Subdivision Review Procedures will be placed on the May 8, 2007, MPC Planning Meeting agenda.

V. Regular Business

A. Executive Director's Report

Mr. Thomson gave the Executive Director's Report. He presented an overview on the agency's major accomplishments, awards and special projects, and highlights from each department. He also touched on areas such as budget, funding, personnel, management, and proposed legislation that might be of interest to the Board.

He advised that on June 8, 2007, the Carl Vinson Institute is coming to offer special training for the members of MPC Boards.

B. Metropolitan Planning Organization Primer

Mr. Thomson said that questions had been raised by the Board in previous meetings as to exactly what the MPO is. MPC formed the Chatham Urban Transportation Study (CUTS) in 1963. In the early 70's, the federal government required that there be a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) in every urban area of 50,000 people or more.

Mr. Wilkes presented a Metropolitan Planning Organization Primer tracing the history of CUTS and its evolution into the mandated MPO. When the federal government began funding MPO's through planning grants, CUTS was redesignated.

An area where the urban population is 200,000 or more becomes a Transportation Management Area (TMA), a special type of MPO with additional planning requirements. With the 2000 census, the Savannah-Chatham urban area fell into that TMA designation.

However, we lost funding because of the redistribution of funds throughout the State and because of the growth patterns within the state.

Mr. Wilkes gave an overview of the structure and functions of the MPO and the processes involved in transportation planning.

C. Context Sensitive Design

Mr. Wilkes said that the Transportation Amenities Plan was initiated a few years ago in response to citizen concern about the adverse impact of several local road projects. The MPO decided at that time to assume leadership and try to get involved in the design process in order to have a positive effect on the way roads are developed. The initial focus was on trees and landscaping. A multi-disciplinary City-County-GDOT team was put together to develop the Transportation Amenities Plan. Basically the idea is to listen to what stakeholders and constituents want and design and build the right way in the beginning. The move is away from dumping all traffic into a few wide, ugly, treeless arterials. The goal is networks of narrower roads that enhance the flow of traffic while providing liveable streetscapes that accommodate pedestrians and bicycles as well as automobiles. The Context Sensitive Design Manual is available on the MPC website under the transportation page. Mr. Mackey requested that a copy of this manual be given to each Board member.

D. Status Report: Unified Zoning Code Project

Chairman Lufburrow said that due to the importance of this status report, he would prefer to have the report presented when more Commissioners are present and more time is available for discussion.

Ms. Myers **moved** to postpone the Unified Zoning Code Project Status Report until the March 20, 2007, MPC Regular Meeting. Mr. Farmer seconded the motion.

MPC Action: The motion to postpone the Unified Zoning Code Project Status Report until the March 20, 2007, MPC Regular Meeting carried with none opposed. Voting were Mr. Lufburrow, Mr. Ray, Ms. Myers, Mr. Farmer, Mr. Mackey, Mr. Manigault, and Mr. Ragsdale. Mr. Todd, Mr. Bean, Mr. Meyer, Mr. Coleman and Mr. Abolt were not present for the vote.

E. President Street Concept Development Project

The President Street Concept is a project we have been working on at the request of the City of Savannah with our on-call consultant Reynolds, Smith and Hills. Mr. Wilkes introduced Beverly Davis, Project Manager with RS&H.

This project presented opportunities as well as challenges. Some of these opportunities are 1) the ability to continue with Oglethorpe's model of the City and extend the grid pattern, making the President Street area more compatible with the character of the Historic District; and, 2) the opportunity to provide an eastern gateway into the City capable of handling existing and future traffic.

The concept model which tested out to be the most feasible, efficient, and desirable focused on an improved President Street, making it a six-lane median/boulevard type facility. The outside lane would be paved with a different material and pedestrian and bicycle amenities would be incorporated. There would be pedestrian access into downtown Savannah. General McIntosh Boulevard would be extended to Wheaton Street and configured boulevard style with pedestrian amenities similar to the other boulevards within the Historic District. Liberty Street, also in a boulevard configuration, would extend to a new interchange at Truman Parkway with no functional or operational changes to the existing Liberty Street. When this extension of Liberty Street is completed, providing parallel capacity, President Street will become four-lane and the area paved with a different material will provide on-street parking, keeping the pedestrian and bicycle amenities.

Chairman Lufburrow congratulated Mr. Wilkes and Ms. Davis for seeing the tremendous potential for what is now a problematic area. He commended them for thinking “outside the box” and for coming up with truly creative, innovative designs.

Ms. Myers said that Liberty Street has been a “hot-button” issue in the past and that the public needs to be involved very early in the process and educated to the fact that the extension of Liberty Street to Truman Parkway would in no way diminish the existing amenities or increase the traffic flow in and around the existing Liberty Street neighborhood.

Mr. Thomson said the reason the City asked our help on this is because developers north and south of President Street need President Street rebuilt in order to access their developments. The beauty of this plan is that we can build President Street as the six-lane roadway needed now and as redevelopment occurs, the grid pattern can be restored and the roadway converted into a four-lane, context-sensitive roadway.

F. Status Report: Wireless Telecommunications Ordinance

Mr. Bedi thanked the Board for its support through this process. A number of meetings were held with service providers, citizens and City and County Attorneys and a joint meeting was held with City and County elected officials. When the draft ordinance was presented, a number of changes were suggested. After consulting with the City and County Attorneys, changes were made and Ms. Moore presented those changes to the Board. She believes that the revised version of the ordinance will be ready to present to the Planning Commission in April.

One of the changes requested and made is the appeals process. Appeals to MPC decisions would go to the appropriate elected governing body for review rather than to Superior Court. Both Attorneys advised that the appeal should be limited only to review of evidence and testimony presented before MPC. No new information may be brought forward during the appeal that was not presented to MPC.

G. MPC Planning Academy

Mr. Bedi said this academy is intended to give citizens the opportunity to participate and learn how they can become part of the planning process to improve the community in

which they live and beyond. Surveys to determine interest were sent to randomly chosen homeowners and neighborhood associations. The response was heavy and about 94 percent of those who responded expressed interest.

The academy will be conducted April 10 through July 10 on Tuesdays from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Mr. Bedi asked Commissioners to help spread the word to those they believe may be interested. The tuition is \$30.00, which will cover the cost of the material. Scholarships will be available to those who would like to attend but cannot afford the fee. Mr. Farmer and Mr. Bean offered to sponsor some of those who might not be able to attend due to cost.

Mr. Thomson said this program is in direct response to the strong desire of Board members to provide more education to the general public regarding the MPC and the planning process.

VI. Other Business

None

VII. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the March 13, 2007, MPC Planning Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas L. Thomson, P.E., AICP
Executive Director

Note: Minutes not official until signed