

South Downtown Steering Committee Meeting #1.5

June 8, 2010

St John's Episcopal Church

2036 SE Jefferson

Kenny opened meeting

Attendees:

Kenny Asher

Ken Pirie

Mike Zilis

Katie Mangle

Jeanne Garst

Arlene Miller

Dion Shepard

Ed Zumwalt

David Aschenbrenner

Mike Miller

Christie Schaeffer

Lisa Batie

Mark Gamba

Sarah Smith

Kenny explained that the purpose of the meeting was to articulate issues; listen to each other; share experience of place. They need to trust in experience of others.

Kenny reviewed the agenda: staff want to hear clearly what concerns them about the revisions to the pattern language and what they support. Their job is to be very frank. There are not going to be very many opportunities to have these meetings and we need to take advantage of the time we have.

It is very important for Walker Macy to tell us where they see the pattern language failing us. They have walked the land and studied the patterns. They have a lot of experience overseeing projects. Let's see where we really have disagreements. One of Kenny's role is to monitor the time and take discussions as far as possible in this meeting.

We need to see if there are huge open issues like having cars in the space. E-mails will do for smaller issues. Kenny encourages all the committee members to e-mail concerns and questions to him.

There are 6 Theme's for today.

1. Size and Use of Plaza
2. Circulation – presence of cars and interim solutions
3. Parking Structure and Terrace on McLoughlin
4. Crossing of McLoughlin: on-grade versus pedestrian bridge
5. Connections to Station
6. Second Ring of Buildings and Colonnade

Mike Z – He supports the pattern language – it is a good document for Milwaukie. The focus of the changes: is this a place in your downtown or an enclave to downtown. Memo was a first pass at what they see as potential changes to the pattern language.

Arlene – what areas are we talking about? Mike Z – the one in the patterns.

Kenny said that we would go around the room to ask which items are preferred for discussion.

Order of importance: 2, 3, 4, 1, 6. Kenny is dropping #5 for today.

Dave A – the station pattern was more about the station area and not the triangle site. Station, platform, and triangle site are 3 distinct items. He wants the new pattern language to be more precise. TriMet views the platform as the station.

Arlene suggested we use two distinct names for the station and the platform.

Mike M asked about the referral to the high school in the memo. The school faces west. It does not face south. The pattern needs to be corrected. When we talk about moving parking lots at school it is out of the scope of this project.

2. Circulation.

Mark G – he recognizes there needs to be some access to the area. He wants this to be a safe, restful, and quiet place to hang out. The only times cars should be there is when no one wants to hang out. If cars go through there it is no longer a plaza. We can't keep cars out only on the week-ends as has been suggested. When you put cars through there it is a street.

Lisa B – European plazas are free of cars – may not be quiet, but it is safe for people to be there. There were bollards that went down between 6-10am to allow for deliveries. The bollards went back up at 10:00 am to keep cars out. We need to have some provision for cars and for people who live near the plaza and that need parking places. Mark – suggested that people could come through the back and not the plaza.

Dave – during the CES process access was envisioned at the north end for people to be dropped off or for deliveries. The south end would be closed off. 21st and Washington could be an access area during the day when bollards are up. How would you access the back area?

Mike Z – this is a worthy goal, though people will want to get close to home when bringing groceries, etc home.

Mark G – when living in NY he did not ever use a car for bringing groceries home.

Katie – there will need to be access for businesses and residents.

Dave A – it is more about through traffic. The group did not address the back ring. The RR tracks will affect that area. Cut through/pass through traffic is what he is concerned about.

Mark – rear access to the buildings is one thing – it should not go through the plaza.

Sarah – the plaza is huge for downtown. With appropriate landscaping we may be able to protect the plaza and still get people into that part of town.

Lisa – one less block for people to drive through cannot harm the area. Does not want to see the plaza as a kiss-and-ride space.

Arlene - what kind of commerce is going to be there that will need traffic?

Mike Z – retail will struggle [in this area] and will need drive by traffic.

Mark – there will need to be less traffic in the future. We are building this for the future and what life will be like in 20 years.

Ed – Americans like their autos – in whatever form that is. We are already losing 50 parking spaces away to light rail. We need limited circulation through plaza.

Mark G – young people don't have cars.

Mike M – we have been talking about no cars and being quiet – what about busses – where are they going to go? KA – the bus line will be along 21st.

Mike M – how does he get downtown from Lake Road? He will need someplace to put his car to get to plaza.

Kenny A – the plaza is not the only access to downtown.

Mike M – this plan will push traffic into the neighborhoods.

Kenny A – the plaza with or w/o cars will not influence the use of cars. We need to stay focused on the character of the space.

Mike Z – history shows that circulation in downtown is healthy. There is no benefit to cutting off traffic to keep it viable. Circulation helps vitalize the area.

Lisa – people traveling on Lake Road behind Post office is minimal.

Mark – people don't use that street for connectivity circulation.

Kenny A – when you cut off streets and connectivity you have less people.

Katie – bikes will use the area to get through.

Mark G – bikes are okay.

Lisa – we are dealing with periphery already and not a major circulation area.

Mike Z – when you ask for retail those businesses want circulation – coffee shops, restaurants, shops.

Mark G – there are empty storefronts in North Main and circulation has not made a difference. When there is a cool place to hang out it will bring people in. It is not a magic bullet to have circulation. Giving people a place to be is what makes it vital.

Dave – circulation needs to be addressed. How does it all work – is there a way to start working towards that. 21st and Adams is a circulation area. You don't have to park next to a store to make it successful. Is there a way to use Adams? We need the plaza to be a feeling – how do you feel then you are there.

Kenny showed on the map areas that are proposed to be closed.

Arlene – what will happen to current buildings and businesses in the area? She has a lot of questions about what will happen to those properties.

Kenny A – we are trying to figure out what will happen to those buildings and properties during this phase of the project. He will be meeting with property owners tomorrow.

Mark G is saying it can be a place so special that people will get there without cars.

Mike Z talked about the farmers market in Corvallis and the use of a back street that is less used. He is hearing that they want the space in the downtown to be a full time plaza. He cautioned about not giving up connectivity.

Mike Z – buildings do not need to be the edge of the plaza. A combination of good types of access is what will work – it will be a challenge. He has not seen a model they are talking about that works.

Ed Z – can anyone come in and develop anyway they want right now? Katie said they can only do what is in the downtown design plan – no retail or residential. It is zoned as a business center. Ed talked about what happened in Eugene when they closed all the streets in the downtown area – it killed the downtown. The streets have since been opened.

Christie S – was in Eugene recently – it is being revitalized now that it has opened up again. It is a balancing act.

Mark G – malls being built has as much to do with downtowns dying as access to them.

Dion S – is there a downside to putting circulation on the back sides of the buildings?

Mike Z – retail likes people coming by and circulation behind the buildings will not get them there. For retail to survive we need to combine things as much to our advantage as possible. We need to talk about all those things during this part of the process.

3. Parking structure and Terrace on McLoughlin.

Dave – the terrace was not discussed as a restaurant space. When you stand on the plaza it would give you space to walk towards the river – an extension of green space. Under it would be limited parking. On top even with the plaza it would be a green space that draws you to the river. WE would be taking open space and opening it up farther. Pedestrian traffic across McLoughlin is not going to get better. It is not likely that the traffic will be slowed down. Having a different access to the river would be safer.

Arlene M – is riverfront park just grass? Dave A – no there is whole plan. Kenny showed her a drawing.

Dave A - having the plaza connected to the riverfront via an overpass is a visual feeling.

Lisa B – need to keep the vista open from the plaza to riverfront – putting McLoughlin out of site.

Mark G – there is a four lane fortress between downtown and the park. It keeps the riverfront from being as vital as it should be.

Lisa B supports the bridge to the riverfront. It would have to be at a higher grade than the plaza.

Ken P – doesn't think it has to be. Mike Z – they are working on a drawing. With an overpass, how do you get down on the other side because of the height? There is a good example of an overpass that works in Vancouver. We should not give up on McLoughlin. There are a lot of places that have made intersections more pedestrian friendly. Timing of the lights is the issue right now – they can be managed if people are diligent. How a bridge gets down on the other side needs to be looked at.

Kenny A – people will want to get from the plaza to a terrace and across McLoughlin.

Dave A – realigning the orientation of buildings at the north end of the area would give more space. Parking would be a good thing for the cash spot. Mike Z – it is really the only use for that spot. Dave – don't want a parking lot on top.

Kenny A – a lot of questions have been raised, from the memo, about a parking lot at that location. We need to accommodate people driving to the area. The pattern language questions the viability of putting a parking structure at that site.

Mark G – it is the only viable site for a parking structure in the area. If we don't have that, people will park other places. It is important to have a parking structure.

Mike Z – who will the parking structure serve? Not residential. It would help the riverfront park and downtown and maybe some retail. The site could be a residential location.

Kenny A – the parking structure will prohibit park-and-ride use.

Kenny A – he is hearing that people want a parking structure but for residential use at the Cash Spot property. The armature over estimates the amount of available land in the south downtown area.

Dave A – what about retail on the other side of 21st? It could serve residents and the high school.

Kenny A reviewed the uses of that area right now. It is a dead end street. We could put parking there.

Dave – it could have retail on bottom. It could have limited permit parking for students. It should not be a park-and-ride.

Kenny A – there may be a traffic signal at Adams and 21st. It would be for businesses on Adams.

I. Size and Use of Plaza

Mark G – one thing that will bring people in is the farmer's market. The plaza is about the size currently be used for the Framer's Market. It would fill the plaza space proposed right now.

Mike Z – what other activities do we want to see there? If it is only sized for the farmer's market it could be too big.

Christie S – she gave the example of the Saturday Market in Portland and the fountain that is used all the time. [Was designed by WM]

Dave A – we could us it for concerts. Maybe move the Library concerts – there would be more room.

Mark G – it could be used for festivals – like Milwaukie Daze.

Carlotta – suggested there could be food carts.

Sarah Smith – food carts are trashy.

Dave A – it can be a place for people to sit and read; and a place to sit and wait for the train.

Arlene – the train overpass is near her home. In Chicago there was nothing under the 'L' that was good. Wants it to stay classy and nice.

Mark G – it is starting to get classy but is not there yet.

Dave A – nothing will be under the rail because of the creek.

Kenny A – they need to think about the edges of the plaza. Will it have chairs and tables and what are they there for. Need to be clear on what they envision there. It does not have to be retail – it will be a while before we get shops in the area.

Dave A – he envisioned the second floor of the buildings that could have something other than housing. Maybe there could be classes as a satellite campus to Portland State – especially with Light Rail coming in from PSU.

Kenny A – asked what they see people doing in the plaza area?

Lisa- employees could be having lunch

Sarah – kids playing

People take kids to Waldorf playground.

Connection to Kellogg Creek – maybe have an interpretive center.

Restaurants at edge of plaza.

A place for kids to play at the park.

Art AlaCart

Kenny A – we need to talk about scale. Lots of activity keeps it safe. Let's talk about the size. Is it too big? Is the shape right?

Mike Z - the shape is what it is. The scale right now is too big. Need to think about how things will fit. There is a connection to river. Where would a stage go – would not be permanent. Pioneer CH Square is successful because of the number of activities that happen there. There are interactive fountains to bring kids in. Pioneer CH Square is surrounded by different sizes and shape of edges.

The new plaza next to Fox Tower – the edges are good. The committee members should go visit it. It is a block from Pioneer CH Square. There is suppose to be a restaurant there – right now it has food carts.

Dave A – the armature is really just a blob of space that is broken up into sections.

Sarah - could there be planters?

Kenny A – people don't like fixed seating – prefer movable furniture.

Kenny A – would Ed rather have the riverfront for concerts or the plaza? Ed – the river always. He would want smaller concerts at Library and larger ones at the riverfront on week-ends and evenings.

Kenny A – what about Scott Park? Ed – the library likes the concerts there, it brings people to the library.

Kenny A – second ring of colonnades is being suggested for elimination. Mike Z - It blocks the sun – the design is for really warm weather places and not the northwest that has so many cloudy days.

Dave – would like to have a space that you can see out from a higher level.

Mike Z – the plaza would be at the first floor level, with a set back second floor could work.

Dave A – want active space on the second floor where the views would be phenomenal.

Carlotta – doesn't like bus shelters that have ridges [like the ones in downtown Portland] – they collect leaves.

Kenny A – the colonnade was proposed by Chris A as a special space that breaks down the scale and is architecturally important. He was not thinking about sun in the northwest. Would like to know what the group thinks about the architecture in the area.

Carlotta C – wants it to have timelessness about it – like the plaza had always been there – organic materials – ageless quality with emphasis on quality materials.

Ed Z asked who will decide what the design should be.

Arlene – San Luis Obispo is a really nice example. Sweet Home is another good example.

Mike Z – there is an issue of space and what can be built to meet city code and setbacks established in the code. There is the railroad close to the second row of buildings. Who would want to be in that ring and how would they get there? There may also be fire code issues. They will lay out the geometry. It could have multiple layers as part of the first ring. There are fire access issues with the plan as set out by CES. Who would want to live in that second ring? People are not going to want to be close to the tracks and would need a large wall for noise.

Ed Z – the space needs to be welcoming and light.

Dave A – the Group of 9 had reservations about the viability of the second ring and it does not necessarily need to be kept.

Mike M – is worried about height. Three stories should be max – 1-2 would be best. Mike Z – they were thinking of multiple stories but not more than 4.

Lisa was not opposed to 4 stories and have them set back; and different heights in different locations.

Arlene - are we aiming for people living in downtown?

The group supports more people living in downtown.

Ed – we need a grocery store.

Dave A – liked the Town Center plan that had housing on the 4th floor with setbacks from the street. It is all in how you build it.

Kenny A – thanked the group for all the great work today. He will be visiting with property owners tomorrow with Marilee Utter. They will spend time with development advisors in the afternoon on how it could look – not about the land. Marilee is on the leading edge of downtown development. There is a social event at Wine 30 at 5:00 tomorrow.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.

Notes by Jeanne Garst