

SUPER NEIGHBORHOOD 22 COUNCIL
Minutes for the June 14, 2010 Meeting

I. Call to Order and Introductions

Janice Martinez, Marcy Perry, and Patrick McIlvain (First Ward); Jane West (Old Sixth Ward); Matthew Barre (West End); Paul Nicosia (Magnolia Grove); Doug Jones, Phyllis Thomason, and G. Leffink (Rice Military); Tom Dornbusch and A. Risovi (Woodcrest); Mary Jane Buschlen (Cottage Grove); Tom Kornegay and Scott Johnson (Camp Logan); Mike Van Dusen and Scott Talley (Crestwood/Glen Cove); Meg Poisant and Jeanette Chinelli (Washington Corridor Business Association); Sam Dike (CM Costello's Office), William Trevino (State Representative Jessica Farrar's Office), Mike Halpin (Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee's Office); T.J. Marks (COH Parks Dept.), Connie Roebuck (METRO), Tim Brookover (CM Lovell's Office), Bill Carry (Senterra); Jerry Pennington (Washington Shops Center).

II. Presentation and Discussion (45 minutes): Andrew Burleson - Congress for New Urbanism, Urban Development, Transit Oriented Development and Parking Economics

Mr. Burleson addressed the issues of urban development, transit oriented development, and the economics of parking and tailored his presentation to the Washington Avenue Corridor. Mr. Burleson also graciously agreed to provide SN 22 a copy of his slide presentation for posting/linking to the SN 22 website. The following is a summary of Mr. Burleson's presentation:

Although there are many types of environments, natural, economic, social, built - we focus on the built environment when we deal with city related issues and find that the built environment defines choices we make. For example, recycling is great but if there isn't a recycling center or services available we're not likely to recycle. Property values provide a snapshot of how we're doing because they provide a collective judgment of what a unique piece of property is worth. Attraction is a source of value. What can we do to encourage an attractive built environment; or just a built environment that we would like. Ideally, development should be compact and complete. Development in the Washington Avenue Corridor is pretty complete - it could use more grocery stores and retail. It could also benefit from improved connectivity - the bayous are physical barriers and better ways to cross the bayous is something to pay attention to. Internal connectivity is also an important issue. For example, there are no connections through the apartment complex at Memorial Heights. Attractive streets are convivial streets full of life; our streets aren't full of life because the public space isn't that attractive. How to approach the issue of making our streets more attractive? He proposes looking at three categories: structures, interface and conduits. Private house, that's the structure; the interface is all the publicly visible and accessible space including the facade, ie from the curb to the facade. The conduit is the street in front of the house. If the street is a place where people can hang out that's also an interface but I-10 is all conduit and no interface. Conduits are also power lines and pipes, *i.e.* paths for moving things but not people. An interface is the space where public social interaction happens. A Midtown example: two projects built at similar time with similar units for similar rents but with major differences are the Post and Camden projects. The Post project is an urban mixed-use project and Camden is a garden apartment project. Parking at Camden takes up two city blocks; while the parking at Post is almost invisible. The Post project is surrounded by wide sidewalks, while the sidewalks at Camden are barely passable apparently because no one thought that anyone would actually walk there. The leasing offices tell the same story: The Post leasing office is people oriented and the Camden leasing office is oriented towards the cars. The Post project sparked great development around it; the Camden project did not - it's improvement are all internal. Comparing these two projects illustrates why interface is so important and why interface can make a huge difference to spread value.

How is the interface on Washington Avenue?

Most new buildings are missing sidewalks and pedestrian entrances from the street - tiny details that make big differences.

Narrow sidewalks in front to Brown Chapel, side streets and houses facing the street with fences facing W/Ave; interface isn't great but its getting better. Raia's building is one of his favorite new buildings on Washington Avenue, but the details need improvement. For example, there is no connection between Washington Avenue and the front patio and the only connection to the patio is from the back parking lot.

The Core has good, wide sidewalks, but no connectivity. This is where public sector leadership may help accelerate the process to continue good sidewalk development.

Senterra's new development has a good interface in front, but the sidewalk is trashed out and small. The only pathway to The Social is a side sidewalk or a sidewalk in the back. Connectivity at the sidewalk requires walking through the grass and a tree planted in the middle of the would-be path inhibits this connectivity. There a few simple rules that should be followed: No blank walls, pedestrian entrances from the street; parking behind or beside the building, maximum setbacks with wide sidewalks instead of minimum setbacks with narrow or now sidewalks, and contiguous sidewalks.

Interfaces spread value more than structures; conduits have more moderate effect, and structures don't make huge difference beyond their immediate neighbors. Designing walkable urban thoroughfares an ITE Recommended Practice. The value of walkable urban development tends to develop more slowly, peak later but rise over time whereas auto oriented, *i.e.* suburban, development provides a quick rise in value but then declines. Examples how it should be done come from other cities: For example, in Minneapolis a Target store on a corner.

Making it happen; leveling the playing field; leading the way; and creating incentives

How: It is a myth that developers don't want walkable urbanism. What developers don't want is others mooching off of it without creating similar development because right as someone's walkable, urban development is peaking in value, a neighbor may be negatively impacting that growth by developing something else. The city should level the playing field by creating standards so that developers and their investors will know what to expect.

Another myth is that it costs too much. The construction of walkable, urban development isn't more expensive, the problem is fighting the city. Cumbersome parking regulations create a problem. It is not always possible to fit the parking required on the same site as the development so people need to be creative about sharing parking otherwise redevelopment in a mixed area is very difficult. National developers don't like to come to Houston because its weird. The Senterra project is great and could be even better with a few cobblestones so that the sidewalks could be linked to the walkway fronting the building.

Parking

There will always be an imbalance of parking in popular areas. Lots of people want to park right in front of the door and if such a parking space isn't available, they drive around looking for a space and either jam up the streets or park in a nearby neighborhood. The private sector can't build public parking because private developers can't get it financed. That's the status quo right now. A change in the equation is to do market parking where you charge highest price for most convenient on street parking, and less for parking that is located farther away. This type of structured pricing encourages carpooling and carpooling brings more people but fewer cars. The solution becomes apparent to price on street parking to control crowds and thus control negative impact on neighborhoods. **Portland built a streetcar with parking revenues from metered parking.** Parking regulations in every city have always failed, people are always fighting for variances because every property is different and every solution is unique. The key to successfully managing this issue is to not let on street parking be free. Give residents free passes if needed but create economic incentive for public parking. The SN 22 transit plan is great but without the walkable urbanism the transit won't be workable. In places that are really walkable, that really fit the description provided above, transit is such a natural fit that it's not controversial. Beyond the basics, mixed use, small blocks, seating, sun/shade; motion, color, texture, sound, food, vendors make people part of the street. Niche facilities - splash pad - tennis court - layers and vistas. Examples are a side street in Philadelphia that pulls people into deep blocks. A bellman at a hotel opens the door for patrons and keeps an eye on things. He notices when something's going wrong, and is the first person to call police and bring attention to negative activity. Washington Avenue has three out of the ten elements required for attractive, successful, urban development: mixed use, small blocks, and food. If we can get more the more the better; few places have ten out of ten; if we can get there it'll have a radical impact

Jeanette Chinelli asks if there are any examples of places that have all ten elements. Mr. Bureson said that examples of ten out of ten include the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the Strip in Las Vegas, and the Champs de Elysee in Paris. The River Walk in San Antonio and Sixth Street in Austin are close.

Paul Nicosia asked how can we work with the city to develop standards? Mr. Bureson responded that the city already has such standards embodied in the urban corridors ordinance. He recommends that we go beg the city to apply the

urban corridor ordinance to Washington Avenue. Observing that the urban corridor ordinance only applies to the areas close to the light rail lines, Paul Nicosia asked how do we get it? Mr. Burleson said that the Midtown and Downtown communities are working to have it apply in their entire areas and that we should, too. He acknowledged that the city is hesitant to put standards anywhere. He stated that he served on Midtown planning committee, and that five years ago Midtown was where we Washington Avenue is now. He said that development comes from being undervalued, and encouraged us to capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm we've got by working to compliment the entertainment industry that's thriving here. He noted that the maximum set back is the feasible distance from door to the street.

When asked what the market price for parking on Washington Avenue should be, Mr. Burleson responded that the market will find the price; maybe \$5/hour on Friday night. Stating that area developers say that they can't follow the city's rules and make more parking than they do now, Tom Dornbusch asked what the SN could do to help them. Mr. Burleson responded that a business can't be run without parking. Jerry Pennington asked where, other than downtown which has a captive audience, are parking meters working? Mr. Burleson responded, nowhere but downtown. Nevertheless, he'd argue that there is a captive audience on Washington Avenue. It was observed that there are a shocking number of trips that are six blocks or less. Unfortunately, places to look for better examples are not in Houston, some in Austin and Washington, D.C. Mr. Burleson stated that all residential streets in these areas are metered, and that all residents get one free hangtag. Mr. Burleson acknowledged that there isn't a great example in Houston, and that but in Houston there isn't a great example; and also acknowledged that behavior/crime problems stemming from bar patron parking in area neighborhoods must be addressed by other means, e.g., curfews.

III. Consider and Approve Minutes from May 10, 2010 Meeting (5 minutes)

Patrick McIlvain moves and Paul Nicosia seconds motion to approve the minutes for the May 10, 2010 meeting. Motion carries.

IV. Old Business:

A. **SNAP/CIP Update** (5 minutes) 2010 SNAP responses are posted on the city's website:
http://pdinet.pd.ci.houston.tx.us/snap_public/index.asp.

B. **Washington Corridor Business Association and Quiet Zone (QZ) update** (J. Chinelli, 5 minutes)
Next WCBA meeting to be held Tuesday, June 15, 2:30 p.m. at The Social (Washington at Yale) - Former Councilmember Peter Brown will discuss streetcar for Washington Avenue and special district funding.

C. **Cultural Arts District Application** (J. West) (5 minutes)
The steering committee preparing the formal application for the cultural arts district designation for the First and Sixth Wards was unable to meet the 2010 deadline and is now focused on submitting an application early next year.

D. Committee Reports (30 minutes)

(1) **Transportation Committee** (S. Johnson and T. Dornbusch)

Presentations have been made to Camp Logan, Magnolia Grove, and West End civil clubs, and the Washington Corridor Business Association. An SN 22-wide presentation was held on Monday, May 24th, 6:30-8:30 pm which was attended by over 100 people, including residents of all SN 22 neighborhoods. The next presentation will be held on Monday, June 21st at 6:30 in the Dow School at 1900 Kane for the First and Sixth Wards anyone interested. If your neighborhood hasn't scheduled its own presentation yet and would like to do so, please do so tonight.

(2) **W/Ave Advisory Group Subcommittees:**

The following subcommittees continue to meet sporadically but no recommendations have yet been formulated.

(A) Infrastructure (R. Taylor)

(B) Mobility (P. Nicosia)

(C) Quality of Life (T. Dornbusch and P. Thomason)

(D) Parking (J. West)

(3) **TxDOT Drainage Ponds** (T. Dornbusch, M. Perry, J. Martinez, M. Barre)

William Trevino from State Representative Jessica Farrar's office reported that contracts for the drainage ponds have been let, work on drainage pond construction is planned to start in August, and once completed the ponds will be maintained by the Harris County Flood Control District.

(4) **Bikeway Plans** (F. Herrera, S. Johnson, T. Dornbusch)
No new information was reported on this issue.

(5) **Capacity Building** (J. West, P. Thomason, F. Herrera)
Committee Chair, P. Thomason, reported that the committee is gathering materials and information on best practices for conducting civic club meetings, recruiting members for area civic clubs, and encouraging participation in community projects for eventual posting on the SN 22 website. The committee is also developing welcome packets for distribution to new residents.

(6) **Crime** (J. West and J. Simmons)

E. **City Appraisal of Recycle Drop Off Center at 3602 Center for possible sale.** No new information was reported on this issue.

V. **New Business** (20 minutes)

A. **TIGER II Grant to fund streetcar on Washington Avenue**

J. West reported that approximately six developers who have formed WADA (Washington Avenue Developers Association) have each agreed to contribute \$6,000 to an account at Better Houston for the purpose of paying transportation consultant Sam Lott to prepare an application for submission to the federal government for the purpose of obtaining funds needed to complete the planning and environmental studies required to implement a streetcar on Washington Avenue. J. West reported that each of the organized civic clubs are being asked to contribute to this fund. The Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Assoc. will be considering a proposal to contribute \$500 to this fund at its next meeting, and it is hoped that other civic clubs will make similar contributions. Better Houston is a charitable organization headed by Peter Brown and contributions are tax deductible.

B. **Endorsement for Renew Houston**

J. West lead a discussion of the Renew Houston initiative for a ballot referendum to create an enterprise fund for drainage improvements. After a general discussion Paul Nicosia moved and Scott Johnson seconded a motion to draft a resolution endorsing the effort. The resolution will recognize concerns raised during the discussion regarding the proposal for a development impact fee, the reasonableness of the proposed drainage fees, and the need to provide incentives for low impact design features in the enabling legislation. A draft resolution will be brought back to the SN council for final approval.

VI. **Announcements, Community Reports, and Open Comments** (5 minutes)

Monday, June 21st, 6:30-8:00 p.m.: Transportation Committee Presentation of Proposed Transportation Master Plan to the Old Sixth Ward Neighborhood Association and the First Ward Civic Association - all are welcome to attend. Power Point presentation may be viewed at SN 22 website: www.SN22.org.

Monday, June 28th, 6:00-9:00 p.m.: Final Public Meeting of City of Houston Term Limits Review Commission, City Hall Annex. Final Report for City Council will be presented for consideration.

Tuesday, June 29th, 6:00-8:00 p.m., Buffalo Bayou Partnership Shepherd to Sabine Community Meeting, United Way Building, 55 Waugh Drive.

Wednesday, June 30th, 7:00 p.m.: Central Positive Interaction Program meeting, HPOU building, 1600 State St.

VII. **Adjournment:** 8:30 p.m.