

City of Columbus
Regular Planning Commission Joint Meeting
February 20, 2013

The February 20, 2013 regular meeting of the Planning Commission for the City of Columbus was called to order at 7:06 p.m. by Chair Barbara Hvass at the City Hall. Present were Commission members Andy Anderson, Myron Organ, Jesse Preiner, Jody Krebs, and Garth Sternberg; joint with City Council Members Bill Krebs, Jeff Duraine, Jessie Messina, Denny Peterson and Mayor Dave Povolny; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko, Engineer Larry Bohrer, Planner Dean Johnson, and Recording Secretary Karen Boland.

Also in attendance were Anoka County Engineer Douglas Fischer, Patrick Nooney for Bill Kanuit, Mike Hursch, Orville and Jeannine Sachs, Dick and Janice Stiers, Mary A. Hoyt, Mickey Betz, Jackie Flor, Rod Flor, Dave Edquist, Ruth Anne and Darwin Long, Jay Erickson, Cathleen and Ed Cary, Davy Povolny, Bob Farinella and John Derus of Running Aces, and Bruce Miller of MFC Properties.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Motion by Anderson to approve the Agenda as presented. Second by Krebs. Motion carried.

APPROVAL - GRAFFCO INC., - 13957 LAKE DRIVE - CUP AMENDMENT PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES OF JANUARY 16, 2013

Motion by Anderson to approve the minutes from the Graffco Inc., - 13957 Lake Drive – CUP Amendment Public Hearing held on January 16, 2013 as written. Second by Krebs. Motion carried.

APPROVAL - REGULAR PC MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 16, 2013

Motion by Krebs to approve the minutes of the January 16, 2013 regular Planning Commission meeting as written. Second by Anderson. Motion carried.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATION
QUAD 35 TRANSPORTATION

City Engineer Larry Bohrer opened the presentation by outlining the history of the planning process for a new Quad 35 interchange at Highway 97/Lake Drive. The current goal is to determine the new alignment of County Road 54 on the west side of the interchange. Two possible routes are being considered. (See Attached Diagrams labeled Plan B and Plan D.) Bohrer explained that on the diagrams the areas showing red arrows crossing one another denote full-access interchanges. The areas showing two vertical arrows with an arrow jutting out from one side and a path between, denote partial-access interchanges. The purple line shows the proposed path of 54. The blue lines show the extension of local roads. After much consideration, the City Staff is recommending Plan D, because by staying on common lot lines it has somewhat equal impact and right-of-way acquisition for properties on both sides of the new road, it avoids a major wetland, it allows for smoother traffic flow, and it would allow for the possibility of another full-access intersection. Plan D also allows for a straighter road alignment.

Bohrer pointed out that the reasons the staff didn't feel Plan B was the best alignment were that there is more significant environmental impact because of going through a wetland; it also bisects land into unusual shapes, making it less useful and attractive to developers.

Questions from the public were encouraged at this time.

Anderson asked if there are any figures yet for construction costs. There are only very rough estimates.

Bruce Miller with MFC Properties asked if the local road going north from the new proposed intersection of 54 with Lake Drive could be made into a T. He feels the way it is currently drawn (only going east) negatively impacts the property just to the west of that road. Bohrer said making that road a T would have a significant impact on existing wetland.

Jeannine Sachs owns a strip of land on the west side of Zurich where the full-access interchange south of Lake Drive is currently drawn. She does not want that full-access arrow there, as they would not want a road into their property at that point. Bohrer said that a road is not currently planned there, but that arrow could be made into a three-way access, rather than the four-way. Ms. Sachs would like to see that in writing.

Povolny said that the accesses from 23 are going to be cut off eventually. The County would like to close them all. Ms. Sachs asked what is meant by eventually. Povolny said as soon as there are backage roads so the property can be utilized.

Rod Flor asked if all these changes would be made at the same time, and asked how much is State? how much is County? and how much is City? Bohrer said it will not all be done at the same time. It will generally be driven by two things: If the interchange comes first, it will force some of these other improvements – Cty. Rd. 54 and improvements on Lake Drive. If development comes first, then the County will be leery about additional driveways coming out onto Lake Drive. Then local roads would need to be addressed. A comment was made that it is already a safety problem to make a left turn from Lake Drive into the driveways of properties to the north. Mr. Flor asked if there is a timeline. Bohrer said funding for the interchange is not currently on any State or Federal funding list. The City is told this is maybe 15-20 years away. They are trying to do planning to advance that, to get the project into the pipeline. These interchanges are millions of dollars. It all hinges on the funding.

Mary Hoyt said she has two driveways onto her property from Lake Drive. She said if she were to sell her property or split it and then the City says they are going to put the access in the back, that's going to screw everything up. Bohrer said a preliminary plat would have to be submitted to divide the property. The developers have to set aside certain rights-of-way and other things with that preliminary plat, as a condition of the plat. So, any buyer would be aware. That's part of the reason to do this planning, so someone purchasing property has an idea what is likely to happen in the future.

Davy Povolny asked if the road placement in Plan D would disturb Running Aces. Bohrer said they believe there is enough room that the track would not be disturbed. He said the sign may need to be relocated.

Mr. Flor said that on these maps a local road is shown going through his parents' home. He asked if the house would actually be taken out or if they would move the line. Bohrer said the lines were drawn without knowing the individual plans of every property owner.

Doug Fischer is an Anoka County Engineer. He said that this is a rare occasion where the County is offering the City two options. The City is being asked to make the final determination. The County can live with either option; there are pros and cons to both. Pros and cons of Plan D: * the longer roadway means higher construction costs. Depending on the type of road that is built, a lot of the construction cost will be the County's cost. * this option requires the largest amount of additional right-of-way that needs to be acquired, which is another cost implication. The County is roughly estimating a little over 7 acres in additional right-of-way needed for this plan. It will probably also require a full acquisition of the property at the very end (the Stiers property), where the new and old road come together. On County road projects typically the right-of-way cost is a cost borne by the County for the impacts of the County Road. One exception is that for any County road put on a new alignment, the right-of-way cost is then borne by the City because of the development needs of the community. So there would be significantly higher right-of-way costs borne by the City in Plan D. * there are some significant wetland issues on the south end in Plan D. * the remnant road would become a City street with ongoing maintenance costs. Plan D leaves a longer street. * the straighter road in Plan D meets design speeds. * all accesses along the County Road would have to be discussed. Through traffic on Lake Drive would have to be accommodated first and foremost. * proximity to the racetrack has to be thoroughly vetted with Running Aces.

In response to a comment by Jackie Flor, Fischer explained that as long as the properties north of Lake Drive remain as is, they have a right to have an access on Lake Drive. The County is not going to take that away. But as that area develops they will want people to access off of Lake Drive at a controlled intersection for better safety and traffic flow.

John Derus, representing Running Aces, said it would be very hard to relocate the track's sign. The track prefers an option that does not take the sign. They are also concerned about proximity to the track that might be disruptive. As far as their concerned, the further from the track the new road goes, the better. Povolny suggested there would be an advantage to the track in the form of increased access from County Road 54. He also suggested that Plan D could be modified to swing further east and avoid the track sign.

The Holiday store was discussed. Fischer said the County would work with Holiday to get their access moved. Council members are concerned about drivers not being able to take a left into Holiday from Lake Drive. Fischer said access issues will have to be addressed as things develop and when traffic flow is better known. Fischer also pointed out that if the Running Aces sign is taken or relocated because of the road construction, that's a project cost. Derus said the cost is not a concern as much as the difficulty in finding a location that works with the many entities involved.

Messina asked if the speed limit could be reduced from 55 should traffic density become a problem. Fischer said the County doesn't set speed limits. They're set based on speed-zone studies done by MN-DOT. He pointed out that the curves shown in Plan B don't meet the 55

mph standard. The curves would work however, because cars are coming up to a stop sign and traffic will be slowing anyway. As it is developed, another speed-zone study could be done.

Messina asked how right-of-way costs were determined. Fischer said the estimates are very rough. It assumes \$3/square foot for land values. If you impact the Stiers property with realignment, you would need to pay relocation costs and betterment costs in addition to the square-footage value. Those costs would be over and above these projected right-of-way costs. Neither were any wetland mitigation costs figured.

Krebs asked if Plan B could be modified to avoid the Hursch property. Fischer believes it could.

Preiner asked what happens to the old county road in either case. Fischer said the connection to Lake Drive will go away. The City will be responsible for it as a City Street.

Dick Stiers asked what the cost difference is for the two options. Fischer gave a very raw estimate of \$3 million for the Plan B alignment and a little over \$3.5 million for Plan D. Costs are dependent on many things that can't yet be determined. That is construction cost only. The estimated right-of-way costs are about \$600,000 higher for Plan D.

Bohrer explained that the City-owned property (in yellow on the diagrams) was purchased with bonds backed by a mortgage on the property. So the City has to pay market value for every square foot of the City land they use too. He said that if the City plans to take the total of the Stiers property it may be possible to shift the road over to avoid the Running Aces sign and the wetland.

Pat Preiner asked how the City's share of the price for the project will be funded. Will it be assessed back to the property owners along the freeway or will it be done through general bonding for the whole community? Mursko explained that Hornsby Street was funded through the general fund. If The Council feels this project would benefit the entire community they could fund it through the same mechanism, but that would not be determined this evening.

Patrick Nooney, an agent representing Lakehead Oil, asked if a driveway would be allowed within 300 feet of the intersection. He is concerned that the parcel would be landlocked. Fischer said the County would have to allow an access under that use.

Mr. Stiers asked more about how using City-owned land costs the City money. Bohrer explained that the City acquired the City-owned property and they have to pay the bank for the property. If they sell it to a developer, the developer will now pay off the bond. If the City doesn't sell it, then the City has to pay the bank with City dollars. He said that neither the County nor the City will build these roads ahead of development, and in the City's platting ordinance if there is a road planned, a reasonable dedication of right-of-way is part of that subdivision. If the road goes in first, the City would not get reimbursed if a developer purchases it after the fact. Mursko pointed out that all the answers about financing are not known, because it will depend upon whether or not and how the land is developed.

Mike Hursch commented that a driver for this project seems to be development and that will be determined by visibility, lot size, and by access. The interchange is a desirable location, but if you cut pieces up into odd shapes, it affects who can develop that land. Certain businesses can't go into smaller pieces. If part of the end result the City wants is a hotel or a big-box store development, a chunk of land will be required. He believes Plan D provides that to the City.

Jay Erickson said he understood from earlier discussion that the City purchased this land for road development. It was explained that the lands east and west of the interchange were purchased together –as an all or nothing package. The property east of the freeway was worthless land that was used to develop a road to make Highway 97 safer.

Mr. Miller asked what he can tell an interested developer about access and conditions of access to the north of Lake Drive. Fischer said the County has to provide an access. It might be restricted to right in/right out. Miller said that type of access is not conducive to developing that property and the developer already has reservations based on these discussions. Since a backage road is so far away, a business would really need to have full access from the north. He asks that the County and the Council consider that. Another concern would be how the eventual backage roads will be paid for. If it is an assessment, the City would have to prove benefit. It would not be a benefit to cut off access to Lake Drive. Back roads should be paid for with some other funding mechanism.

Preiner asked Mr. Fischer if the City could get more accurate cost estimates that would include figuring in the value of the City-owned land. Fischer said that this is a very complicated area because of environmental challenges; the number of small, individual parcels; odd-shaped lots; the unknowns of the interchange –many unknowns. The County would do their best to work through those with developers and the City.

Messina asked when the City would need to start funding the project if a decision is made tonight. Is the funding many years down the road too, or does it begin right away? Fischer said development will drive it. Right now it is not in his five-year plan. The first step will be design, then right-of-way impacts are determined and purchased, then come construction costs. There is some study money left over from MN-DOT. His next step would be to do some traffic modeling and start studying access issues. The taxpayers pay for County roads too, and want safe roads with minimum congestion. But the County isn't willing to take the next step with two alternatives. They won't embark on work on this until they know what plan they will be implementing.

Povolny said the highest and best use of the land has to be considered in making this decision. Preiner and Anderson would like more solid, accurate numbers in order to proceed. Peterson asked if the County will provide more information. Fischer said he can check with his elected officials, but without being able to make a big investment, they are not going to get figures that are much more accurate. He added that some project costs don't reveal themselves until you are in the midst of the project. Homeowners have to be made whole. It is not just a matter of land value. He could do a low-cost tweak, but it's still only going to show the magnitude of the difference between the two plans.

Pat Preiner asked the market value of the City-owned property. She would think that cost would be much lower than acquisition costs on all those other properties.

Povolny asked if Anoka County would pay for the road if there is no property acquisition, as in Plan B with some tweaks. Fischer said a road just like it is now—two lanes, rural road, with no curb and gutter, sidewalks, trails,—construction would be paid 100% by the County. Upgrades would be paid by the City. Medians are paid 100% by the County. Preiner asked if 54 will always stay just a single lane each way. With the 20-year traffic volume projection on there now, he doesn't foresee a lot of change, but there could be a small piece that is four-lane depending on traffic or access needs.

Hvass asked if there was any more public input. Hearing none, she asked PC members if they were ready to act on choosing a plan. Sternberg said he would like more information, but was hearing that the County couldn't provide it at this point. He said if he had to act tonight, he'd choose Plan B. He felt Plan D looks considerably more expensive. Preiner concurred. Krebs said if she had to choose tonight she'd go with Plan B, because it appears to have less impact on most neighbors. She asked the members of the public to raise their hands for each proposed plan. The majority of those who raised their hands, did so for Plan B. Organ agreed with the others. He is not in favor of cutting up land parcels, but felt B has less impact on present, tax-paying businesses. Anderson would like more cost figures, but if he had to vote tonight, he'd go with Plan B. Hvass concurred.

Povolny asked Mursko about the urgency of a decision. She pointed out that there will be no development on the west side until some of these decisions are made. Time is important to developers and this is the season when they make decisions for projects this year. If more information is desired, staff also need to get direction on what the PC and CC are looking for and how much they are willing to spend to get more information.

Povolny asked Planner Dean Johnson why City staff recommended Plan D. Johnson said that following property lines and having a straight road makes the most sense. The City would not need to acquire right-of-way from the racetrack for all of the property that they own. This would change the right-of-way estimate. He believes bisecting the parcel of City land will be very detrimental to its marketability, and it is the largest single parcel at that interchange. He said it is not known whether the alignment in Plan D could be followed and tweaked to save the Running Aces sign. He thinks the assumption that the Stiers property will need to be bought out, no matter what, may be premature. With a short amount of time, he thinks some of the questions could be answered. He acknowledged that there is no easy solution here. He added that the cost of any right-of-way through City property is real and needs to be considered. Bohrer added that in trying to evaluate cost, the City can't just look at short-term cost. Does one alignment have longer-term community development benefit to the City? Fixed costs will be paid up. Taxes go on.

Povolny asked the opinions of the CC members. Peterson would like more information, but doesn't want to put this off for more than two weeks. Messina concurred. Duraine would like to see Plan D with a 30-mph "S" curve, leave the Stiers property intact, and miss the racetrack sign. Krebs wants to know how Plan B could be tweaked and minimize devaluation of the City

property. He doesn't want to disregard what the public that are being affected think. He concurs with getting more information, but with a short turn-around. Povolny concurs. He thinks Plan D is the best long-term solution, but only if it makes economic sense.

Mursko said Bohrer and Fischer could get figures on right-of-way. Johnson could get some valuation costs. Fischer said if he has a month, he could refine some answers with Johnson, Bohrer and his staff. He feels this meeting was productive, and he now has a better handle on the concerns and sensitivities. He believes he could generate some better answers if he has a month.

It was decided that the PC will consider further gathered information at their March 20th meeting, and then come to the City Council meeting on March 27th and present their findings.

PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

There was no topic raised for discussion for Open Forum.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

The City Economic Development Authority is hosting the 5th Annual Columbiz business forum on Thursday, March 7th at Running Aces at 8 a.m.

CITY COUNCIL AND PLANNING COMMISSION OPEN DISCUSSION

PC and CC members discussed a packet on planning and zoning basics, findings of fact, and an article on how facts can backfire. They discussed the points they found most interesting. Povolny liked the discussion about it being important to put in the time and money up front to create good zoning laws. They are much easier to defend. He thinks it's important to identify a shared vision and goals for the City. He also noticed the mention that it's important to stay ahead of trends in land use and development. Organ liked the reminders to stay on track, and not parrot what's been done in the past. He wonders how anybody could know what's going to happen far into the future. Anderson liked the statements about keeping City plans and ordinances current, and being proactive. Povolny hopes to have more joint meetings to give more clarity to what the Council is asking of the PC.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS' REPORT

Nothing to report.

ATTENDANCE - NEXT CC MEETING

Preiner is scheduled to attend the City Council meeting on February 27, 2013.

Motion by Krebs to adjourn. Second by Organ.

Meeting adjourned at 10:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Karen Boland, Recording Secretary