

WESTSIDE SPECIFIC PLAN STAKEHOLDERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING # 3: FEBRUARY 23, 2021

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Brian Bailey, Jack Cline, Juliet Goff, Ming-Shin Kou, Richard Lucas, Judith Merlo, Andy Perkins, Ben Shanassafer, Doug Williams, Kevin Wilson, Marlene Ybarra

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT: Carlos Fandino, Dan Wall, Manny Garcia, Angela Kimmey, Abigail Mejia

CONSULTANTS PRESENT: Phil Burns, Ian Dickenson, Bob Paternoster, Lance Lowrey, Zachary Zabel

Introduction:

The Zoom meeting was called to order at 3:06 PM by Moderator Bob Paternoster. He reviewed the draft minutes of Meeting #2. He set forth the Agenda for Meeting #3, noting that we will not jump in immediately where we left off at the last meeting discussing action area preferences. Rather, in light of concerns raised by the Committee at the last meeting, we will first review potential uses in action areas, and then discuss traffic issues and potential solutions.

Potential New Uses:

Ian provided a brief review of the consultant team's identification of four building clusters which create possible areas for diversification of land use. Of the four, the consultant team saw the best opportunities in Santa Fe north (from just south of Vernon to 28th St.) and in Santa Fe south (from 57th St. to 49th St.). At the last meeting, the Committee also expressed interest in Pacific south (from 52nd St. just south of Fruitland to Chambers).

Ian stated that any diversification of land use in these areas would be a gradual transition from pure production to some combination of production with retail, residential, and/or office. He used examples of a brewery with retail beer sale and an artist live/work studio. He emphasized that residential uses, while important, may not be in all areas or be predominant in any area.

Transportation Issues:

Zachary outlined the transportation issues in Vernon, focusing on traffic problems. He stated that because of its location, between Downtown Los Angeles to the north and residential

communities to the south, and adjacent to major freeway interchanges, Vernon suffers from a lot of through traffic. Although 53% of Vernon employees live within 10 miles, most take private automobiles to work. All three of the major north/south arteries (Alameda, Santa Fe, and Soto) are at or near capacity, with nearly 30,000 daily vehicle trips on each. The east/west streets are less travelled, with only 18,000 daily vehicle trips on Vernon/Pacific. In contrast, the north/south Alameda East access road is utilized far below its capacity.

Zach showed bicycle route plans of the City of Los Angeles and the City of Vernon, noting that many bicycle lanes and trails are proposed to run to and through Vernon.

Bob asked the Committee to pose questions to Zach and to discuss traffic problems and potential solutions.

Juliet stated that we must address the poor signal timing on Alameda East if it is to become a successful truck route. She pointed out that trucks serving businesses on the east side of Santa Fe must use Santa Fe for access. She questioned how much traffic is through traffic, and what techniques might be employed to divert it.

Zach replied that trucks serving local businesses would be permitted on Santa Fe and all other streets not designated as truck routes. Although origin and destination data are not available, it would appear that most of the truck traffic is serving businesses within Vernon, but much of the automobile traffic is through traffic. One technique for diverting traffic is to reduce the capacity of the street by reducing the number of lanes, which encourages through traffic to seek alternative routes. Designations of truck routes and good signage can help direct truck traffic to preferred corridors.

Kevin confirmed that the signal green time for through traffic on Alameda East is so short that trucks are discouraged from using it. He pointed out that the signal timing is controlled by the City of Los Angeles. He recalled that in the past Santa Fe had parking on both sides of the street, with no center turn lanes. He suggested that parking could be restored on at least one side if the middle turn lanes were removed. He noted that even though commercial uses have been permitted for years on much of Santa Fe, such uses have not been attracted to the street, perhaps because of the strict off-street parking requirements in the zoning ordinance.

Brian agreed with Juliet and Kevin regarding the signal timing problem on Alameda East, and stated that the location of the truck weigh station on Bandini is another reason trucks tend to favor Santa Fe, rather than go back and forth between Alameda and Bandini to obtain and deliver their weigh tickets. He stated that the potential link between northern Santa Fe and the LA Arts District is difficult, and that he prefers a link to the Huntington Park business district via Pacific.

Lance pointed out that the southern boundary of Vernon along Pacific is just south of Fruitland, and it is 3,750 feet, or a 20 minute walk, from the Huntington Park business district, making it unlikely that the business district could ever be extended into Vernon.

Jack expressed concern that we don't have the control necessary to correct the signal timing on Alameda East or to reduce traffic exiting the 10 Freeway at Santa Fe.

Phil responded that Vernon does control potential measures to divert traffic from Santa Fe, such as reducing the cross section south of Vernon to one lane in each direction, or removing the center turn lanes north of Vernon in order to restore curbside parking.

Juliet suggested building parking structures and then providing a shuttle service to get people to their destinations. She noted that truck turning radii from Santa Fe are too tight, and that Alameda East would be a "brilliant solution" if the signal timing problem could be corrected.

Jack stated that better use of Alameda East could improve productivity in Vernon, particularly south of 38th St. where current lower rents reflect the area's more difficult freeway access at present.

Doug stated that trucks have great difficulty making the right turn from Vernon westbound to both Alameda and Alameda East northbound. He encouraged the Committee to focus on a vision for the future, rather than on present and past problems.

Kevin pointed out that a major FedEx terminal is located on 28th St. east of Santa Fe, requiring substantial truck traffic on that portion of Santa Fe. He also reflected on the original planning for the Alameda Corridor, noting that one of the alternatives considered was to place the trench between southbound lanes and northbound lanes. That might have provided better truck access to Vernon from Alameda, but would have required trucks coming from the north to make troublesome u-turns to reach many of Vernon's minor east/west streets.

Richard asked Kevin, Dan and Manny, with their vast experience in Vernon, if they support limiting truck traffic on Santa Fe. Kevin replied that it would not be a problem, but would create heavier volumes on other streets. Dan suggested that we look south of Vernon first, requiring trucks to use Pacific rather than Santa Fe. Manny stated that we can do it if we make Vernon/Pacific into a truck route.

Juliet and Andy stated that trucks could very well serve their businesses on 48th St. from Alameda East, but they would have to exit onto Santa Fe because 48th is too narrow to allow them to turn around.

Bob thanked the Committee members for providing all of their first-hand insights into the traffic problems and potential solutions, and said that the consulting team will take all of this into account as it proceeds to devise solutions to the issues of traffic and parking in the Eastside.

Preferred Action Areas:

Phil reviewed briefly the four potential clusters of buildings conducive to diversification of use, noting that although the consultant team had initially felt the two on Santa Fe to be the most viable, the Committee had made a strong argument for also considering the cluster along Pacific. He sought the Committee's thoughts on designating all three as potential action areas, noting that types of uses and development timing might very well vary among the three.

Richard reported that a large warehouse building in the southern cluster at Santa Fe and 57th St. had just been sold.

Kevin stated that a major problem along Santa Fe is that the small parcels cannot easily provide the off-street parking required by zoning for retail uses.

Ben supported Phil's proposal to study all three areas, but expressed his preference for the area at the north end of Santa Fe because of its proximity to the LA Arts District. He pointed out that Vernon has always been marketed as an industrial community, and that the City must begin to spend money to market it for a broader variety of uses.

Jack noted that it was low rents rather than the building fabric that attracted investment in the Arts District, that it was surrounding demographics that prompted reinvestment in Sleepy Hollow, and that it was one particular artist who had generated interest in Frogtown. He continued to express his preference for the Pacific cluster, where there are many obsolete small buildings, and where diversification of use can take place without having a negative impact on existing industrial uses in the middle of Vernon.

Richard stated that retail uses don't pencil out for property owners along Santa Fe, because even though the rent per square foot would be higher, the number of square feet would be substantially lower because of the need to demolish portions of structures to make way for off-street surface parking.

Juliet expressed her preference for the southern cluster along Santa Fe if we can solve the parking problem.

Jack noted that the Cornfields Arroyo Seco area in LA developed successfully with “makers’ space” despite no required off-street parking.

Phil concluded the discussion by thanking the Committee members for their input, and he stated that the consultant team would proceed to the conceptual design phase on all three clusters discussed by the Committee: Santa Fe north, Santa Fe south, and Pacific south. He estimated that the first phase of this work would take about six weeks to complete.

Future Meeting Schedule:

Bob asked the Committee to tentatively mark their calendars for Meeting #4 on April 6, reflecting the six-week work schedule cited by Phil. He thanked Kevin for submitting comments in writing following the last meeting, and invited other Committee members to email any comments that they were unable to make at this meeting or any thoughts that they may have in the days following. He adjourned the meeting at 4:39 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Paternoster, Moderator