

WESTSIDE SPECIFIC PLAN STAKEHOLDERS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING # 6: October 11, 2022

Conference Room #3, City Hall

MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Brian Bailey, Jack Cline, Steve Freed, Juliet Goff, Ming-Shin Kou, Richard Lucas, Marisa Olguin, Doug Williams, Melissa Ybarra

STAFF PRESENT: Carlos Fandino, Dan Wall, Manny Garcia, Brandon Gray

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

Introduction:

Carlos opened Meeting #6 at 2:10 P.M. and welcomed the Committee. He stated that the City's intent in creating the Westside Specific Plan was to maintain and strengthen a business-friendly City government while attaining a stable political environment. He reminded the group that the State had earlier threatened to disincorporate the City if it did not increase its population. While the subsequent Vernon Village project relieved this pressure, its low-income population cannot really participate in the governmental process. A broader range of new population is required.

Carlos pointed out that what is proposed is an evolution over time; it may well take 30 years to fully implement the Plan. But the validity of the concept has already been proven. Since work began on the Specific Plan, two developers have already, unsolicited, approached the City with proposals of a mixed use nature along Santa Fe Avenue. He strongly urged Committee members to speak their minds today. It is important that consultants and staff hear and respond to all of the questions and concerns as we begin to wrap up the planning process and take the Specific Plan to the City Council for adoption.

Review of Progress to Date:

Bob reviewed the accomplishments of the Committee in its first five meetings as follows:

Meeting #1: Consultants described the project and presented baseline data.

Meeting #2: Committee adopted six Project Goals in priority order (the first was “reinvigorate the City’s competitive advantage as a center of production”). Consultants identified four clusters of older industrial buildings which were especially suited for conversion to mixed use.

Meeting #3: Existing transportation issues were discussed in depth, in response to Committee’s warning that no mixed-use conversion plan could be accomplished unless such issues were first resolved. Three of the four clusters of outstanding buildings were selected for further study: two along Santa Fe Avenue and one along Pacific/Hampton.

Meeting #4: Consultants presented the Transportation Plan which addressed issues discussed in the previous meeting. It included creation of a truck route system, upgrading the Alameda service road into a Vernon Truck Corridor, and redesign of specific critical intersections. Computer analyses predicted that the plan would dramatically reduce truck traffic on Santa Fe, double truck traffic on the new Vernon Truck Corridor, and cut in half the automobile traffic on Santa Fe Avenue south of Vernon Avenue.

Meeting #5: Consultants presented analyses of three catalytic development sites whose present owners had expressed interest in reinvestment, and market analysis had shown to be feasible: Civic Center, 4400 Pacific Boulevard, and 5201 S. Santa Fe Avenue.

Bob stated that the presentation to the City Council at its June 21 Study Session contained no new information which the Committee had not reviewed but did include a proposed implementation phasing program which addressed concerns which had been expressed by some Committee members. The phasing plan would not adopt a truck route system nor make any geometric changes along Santa Fe Avenue until the Vernon Truck Corridor was first completed and proven to work.

Bob then took the Committee on a brief imaginary walk along Santa Fe Avenue in the future when Santa Fe North had become an active production/retail and live/work center, the Civic Center had become a true downtown (active from 6am until midnight) centered around a lively Town Square, and Santa Fe South had become a residential neighborhood with pleasant and active street life.

Proposed Zoning Controls and Design Standards:

Phil and Ian summarized the proposed zoning controls and design standards which had been forwarded to the Committee before the meeting. They set forth the six proposed zoning principles for the Westside as follows:

1. Create Additional Flexibility, by allowing a greater variety of uses in the clusters of legacy buildings.

2. Separate Current Industrial Areas from Clusters, retaining the existing industrial zoning for most of the Westside area.
3. Encourage Hybrid Uses Which Mix Production with Other Uses.
4. Encourage Projects Which Reflect the Industrial Nature and Retain Industrial Heritage.
5. Create Pedestrian-Oriented Frontage that Reinforces Santa Fe Avenue's Role as a Main Street.
6. Introduce Residential Uses Designed to Attract a Population Which Is Most Suited to the Industrial Nature of the City.
7. Modernize Parking, by "right-sizing" parking requirements to unlock development potential while ensuring that each use meets its typical parking demands.

Phil displayed the proposed Zoning Map which sets forth permitted uses throughout the Westside. He focused upon permitted new uses in three districts: Santa Fe North, Civic Center, and Santa Fe South.

Jack questioned if the proposal was for all parking to be below grade, pointing out that such adds cost to the project and takes value away from the land. Phil responded that no specific form of parking is required, but parking is not permitted in the front between the building and the street.

Ming Shin Kou questioned the definition of a residential unit, and Phil responded that a glossary of residential unit types is included in the document, but that a unit remains one unit without regard to its number of bedrooms.

Jack stated that the proposed elimination of warehousing as a permitted use along Santa Fe Avenue constitutes a taking of private property, since it would dramatically reduce the value of the land. Dan responded that the permitting of many new uses, including residential, actually should increase the value of the land, particularly since most of the properties in the designated clusters are too small for modern warehousing. Phil noted that the zoning prohibits new warehousing along Santa Fe, but allows existing warehousing to remain and expand, without being declared a non-conforming use. He pointed out that the proposed design guidelines would not allow residential units to face neighboring truck loading docks or other such uses, protecting existing warehousing from future complaints from new residents.

Ming expressed concern over the increased traffic congestion which the proposed truck corridor would bring to the existing Alameda service road, noting that his employees depend upon the street for access to his property.

Phil then concluded his presentation by describing changes proposed to ease parking problems. The proposed parking requirements for all uses are “right-sized,” meaning that they have been set at the levels actually experienced for such uses, which is generally much lower than Vernon’s existing parking requirements. On-street parking will be added on both sides of Pacific Boulevard. It will also be provided on both sides of Santa Fe Avenue, by eliminating the center left turn lane in the four-lane stretch north of Vernon Avenue, and by narrowing the roadway to two lanes south of Vernon Avenue. Shared parking will be permitted and encouraged. Parking requirements can be met through long-term leases with other owners; City Hall proposes to lease some of the parking space in its parking structure.

Bob then opened the meeting for further discussion and questions by Committee members.

Jack stated that the six goals adopted by the Committee did not include preservation. He believes that no one in Vernon cares about preservation. He would propose that we just open the market to developers and see what the market produces. He noted that Shamtobi could proceed today with his project if we just allow residential use, which he believes can be accomplished with a CUP rather than through rezoning. A similar specific plan has not worked in Commerce; why would it work here? The proposed plan represents a “taking” which will freeze the market for a long time.

Steve stated that he agrees with Jack. We should just concentrate on building 100 units of residential without all of the other fancy requirements in the proposal. He argued that we don’t need to add retail, because residents in our “car culture” will drive to retail in other cities.

Juliet stated that she also agrees with Jack. The City should focus on adding residential units, perhaps through annexation. There should be a cap on the total number of residential units, because the City cannot afford to provide the services which such units will require. She also said that she was opposed to the idea of permitting a brewery opposite the elementary school.

Doug said that the consultants have dramatically understated current land value, which is actually above \$200/square foot. He believes that adoption of the Plan will shut the door to major investment in Vernon. It will discourage the capital markets which are prepared to invest in the growing distribution market. Although envisioned as a “production center,” the Plan would make it a “consumer center.”

Carlos asked Doug what was his original vision for the project when he had strongly supported its creation? Doug responded that many old property-owning families are prepared to sell to major capital markets. He foresees production becoming much “greener,” heavily dependent upon electricity for power. He suggested that Vernon might merge with surrounding cities, thereby adding residential and mixed use without changing the zoning in Vernon.

David Prince, representing Ming (who had left the meeting), reiterated Ming’s concern over increasing congestion along the Alameda service road by making it a truck corridor, noting that several of Ming’s employees had already been injured there in auto accidents. He urged the City to work with Los Angeles to improve the Vernon/Alameda intersection, and questioned the proposed taking of property through inverse condemnation.

Marisa urged that the proposed Truck Corridor be confirmed before the zoning is adopted. She cited a need to include the Washington/Alameda intersection in the traffic analysis. She believes that all of the studies to date have been theoretical; field studies are also needed to understand current traffic on Santa Fe and on Alameda. The City must also coordinate with the City of Los Angeles.

Dan responded that analysis of current traffic patterns was part of the study, and that the City plans to work with the City of Los Angeles as it develops specific plans for the Truck Corridor. He stated that the proposed Truck Corridor showed such positive results in computer simulations for reorienting and improving truck access to existing businesses that the City is inclined to proceed with it independent of the remainder of the Specific Plan. Rezoning is a separate issue. The zoning will be adopted with the Specific Plan, but no infrastructure improvements will be undertaken along Santa Fe until plans are prepared and adopted by the City Council. Based upon recent inquiries by private developers, it appears that some developers are ready to proceed with development of mixed use projects along Santa Fe as soon as the zoning is adopted.

Jack stated that he liked the proposed requirement in the proposed zoning that new residents accept the fact that they have industrial neighbors and give up their right to complain about noises and smells that might otherwise bother them. But he still believes that the City can allow residential development through the Conditional Use procedure rather than through rezoning.

Marisa cited the 25th & Santa Fe development as a beautiful retail area which might be a model for Santa Fe. Ian responded that the project was designed in the suburban strip mall style

which is not reflective of the industrial character of Vernon which gives the City a unique attraction for production-oriented uses and residents.

Brian asked if he could meet with the consultants to discuss his property. Phil and Bob responded that the team would be happy to have further discussions with any Committee member.

Jack and Juliet reiterated their position that the first layer should be residential, noting that Vernon today is not a blighted area. They suggested that residential be permitted in the Pacific-Hampton area while limiting development along Santa Fe Avenue to conditionally-permitted live/work.

Dan responded that adoption of the Plan will put the proposed zoning in place, but it will not approve any specific project, and no action can be undertaken on the infrastructure proposals until designs are completed and approved by the City Council. He stated that if we just permit residential we will likely get projects which attract population which is not conducive to good governance and a stable political environment; the type of residential which Vernon needs will be attracted only if other supportive uses and amenities are provided.

Next Meeting:

Phil stated that the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 29, 2022.

He concluded that what is proposed is a 30-year plan. It focuses more on long-term issues than on immediate, short-term problems. It attempts to set a course for the City to gradually evolve and remain competitive in a changing market place. Whereas in the past the City sought to attract physical investment in industrial facilities, in the future it will need to focus more on attracting talented, creative people to live in the City and to produce in the City.

Carlos thanked all Committee members for their attendance and participation and promised that their concerns will be carefully considered before the Specific Plan is presented to City Council for adoption. He adjourned the meeting at 4:10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Paternoster, Moderator