

**PLACE Design Task Force Minutes
February 14, 2019 - 12:00- 2:00 p.m.
Neighborhood Development Services
Conference Room, 2nd Floor City Hall**

Members Present: Mike Stoneking, Lena Seville, Clarence Green, Mark Rylander, Serena Gruia, Carl Schwarz for Tim Mohr, and Rory Stolzenberg.

Staff Present: Carrie Rainey, Kari Spitler, Alex Ikefuna, Joey Winter. Amanda Poncy, Jeff Werner, and Phil d’Oronzio.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Stoneking called the PLACE Design Task Force Meeting to order at 12:10 p.m.

1. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC (5 minutes)

None.

2. UPDATES

Rory Stolzenberg: Notes that the City is currently recruiting a Long Range Planner that will hopefully be hired in the coming months to help with the completion of the Comprehensive Plan, the Affordable Housing Strategy, and the Zoning Rewrite.

Lena Seville: What department will this position be associated with?

Alex Ikefuna: The position might be in the City Manager’s office, but it could also be part of NDS. The details are still being worked out and the official job description is still being determined.

Mike Stoneking: Notes that the position takes on a great deal of work for one individual to accomplish.

Alex Ikefuna: Shares that this was not NDS’ preference. If everything is going to come from one company, there will likely be a lot of subcontractors unless it’s large enough to keep it all in-house.

Mike Stoneking: Some of the members of PLACE may be on the selection committee down the road to help determine the best candidate. Perhaps it would be beneficial to take a look at the job description again and tweak it for Council now that the position has been finalized. Is the person hired supposed to finish the Comprehensive Plan or start over completely?

Rory Stolzenberg: Most of the Comprehensive Plan is done, so the consultant will help with the completion of the Land Use and Housing chapters.

Alex Ikefuna: The bulk of the position is primarily to help with the zoning aspect because the Comprehensive Plan is mostly done. The most important pieces of the foundation are complete and the main job of the consultant will be to come up with the strategies for implementation. The zoning rewrite will take up a vast majority of their time.

Mike Stoneking: Asks how we are moving things forward now that this has been determined.

Alex Ikefuna: Right now staff isn't doing anything in particular. The draft that was prepared by the HAC has been reviewed and it was sent to procurement for publishing. However, there was a problem with it and right now everyone is discussing how to move forward. Some members of City Council and the Chair of the Planning Commission thought it might be a good idea to consolidate these 3 elements.

3. HOUSING POLICY AND RESEARCH UPDATE (45 minutes)

Phil d'Oronzio: The RFP process was moving along for a while but it has now slowed down a lot. One of the big issues that we faced was the sheer time that it takes to move this process along. It became clear to the Planning Commission's Chairman, Lisa Green, that we needed to discuss how the two efforts have been siloed. We wanted to create something that would pull in the additional resources and include things like a Land Use and a Zoning look to move forward in a productive way. Right now we are trying to determine how to make modifications to the RFP to get it turned around. The interactive analysis tool that we created looks at a 9 figure problem and while the housing strategy isn't here yet, we are still faced with providing funding for projects that are moving forward very rapidly. These types of projects are substantial and they need commitments for funding by the City much sooner than this strategy will be in place. The goal is to build something to show us a model and then break it out to show each band of AMI. For example, if we want to develop a certain amount of units, how much money does the City need to put into it, and when? These are the types of questions we are aiming to answer through the tool. It is designed to give us a sense of the costs over time so see what the timeline would be for various projects. This is all about money and how much of the City's money is going to have to go into what and when. We hope to have a good handle of each intervention to make intelligent decisions about how to move forward. Lastly, we are trying to pull in different staff like Human Services that can help show us interventions with a secondary impact. The most recent version of the tool is being updated right now and that will be completed very shortly.

Serena Gruia: Do you have types of interventions that you are looking at?

Phil d'Oronzio: We are primarily going off of what we've done in the past. For example, we know a good bit about the affordable dwelling requirements under the ordinances and we can make assumptions about land use and zoning that will influence other decisions.

Mike Stoneking: Has the City articulated an envisioned future statement for this to work?

Alex Ikefuna: Notes that the assessment is of the data and the existing conditions. Once we have an Affordable Housing Strategy, we can then create that statement.

Phil d'Oronzio: We can also talk to the consultant about the problems we want them to fix and provide a certain timeline we want it done by, and they can help determine how it can be achieved.

Lena Seville: When we discuss the interventions and the tool to determine what money goes where, there is a decision process of priorities. How is that being addressed?

Phil d’Oronzio: The tool helps figure out the cost of those priorities. It isn’t designed to be the actual strategy, but rather to help cost out the strategy.

Serena Gruia: The tool is very much appreciated, but where is there room for innovation and creativity?

Phil d’Oronzio: Well there are also interventions that are experimental and we aren’t sure what the output will be. It is designed primarily to give an idea of how much it will cost the City over time and depending on the results, it can inform what changes we want to make to it. It also assumes that we have an affordable housing fund to handle these things.

Mike Stoneking: Typically unit costs are based on what has been done in the past. What other ways can we accommodate people who aren’t in apartments and houses?

Phil d’Oronzio: This tool is designed to accommodate that as well. We can make decisions on a policy level of what we want to emphasize and in what order it should be in.

Lena Seville: Notes that she understands that priorities are to be determined in the future, but is there a process lined up for it? Regarding the tool, does it include long term affordability?

Mike Stoneking: It’s one thing to have a small group developing the tool, but eventually there will be a Long Range Planner on board to help. We may then want to consider creating a steering committee to allow the community to help decide what is chosen priority wise.

Phil d’Oronzio: An important piece of this is to have a qualitative dive. The consultant can use local resources to elicit the needs from the community.

Rory Stolzenberg: Does funding need to be submitted upfront in applications or can it be determined later on in the process?

Alex Ikefuna: To give an example, we are on the 3rd review of Friendship Court and they are able to submit the application and get the funds later.

Phil d’Oronzio: Notes that we need to make that commitment as the City now, but there are many moving parts. The timing of a project of that size changes very often and they aren’t sure what the tax credits will be. For example, Friendship Court may not need any money this fiscal year, but we have to fund it this fiscal year because of how the calendar falls.

Alex Ikefuna: Once the City is committed to the project, they will find a way to work it out. However, the money has to be clearly stated when the application is submitted. The City’s commitment is also a huge benefit to the application process.

Lena Seville: Expanding on an earlier question, is there long term affordability?

Phil d’Oronzio: Yes. Ultimately, the fixes will provide fixes. There are long term solutions and an affordability piece is built into it. If we make these changes to land use and density, how will that change over time? It is designed to provide a tool to make funding decisions, not a strategy.

4. CITIZEN NEEDS DISCUSSION (45 minutes)

Clarence Green: Notes that he has been working to find solutions to the various issues we have as a City, which is why the Citizen Needs group was formed. Community Engagement is very important, particularly involving having a better the sample size and diversity of the sample size. In turn, we’ve been working to create a solution-based hub to tackle this. The mission of the organization is to build racially equitable and environmentally sustainable communities by finding solutions to social concerns, building diverse relationships, and inspiring individuals to action for local residents, businesses, and organizations. A main factor centers on community conversations that are based around common topics that can hopefully be used to increase sample size. Serena Gruia has been doing a participatory budget with Walker that looks at things that might increase community engagement and help increase their impact. We ultimately want to create community conversations all throughout the year that will help create a larger conversation for the City of Charlottesville to determine what the community members want and to make sure all neighborhoods are represented.

Mike Stoneking: It would be a fun marriage to connect the public effort to reach out with the private groups already doing it.

Phil d’Oronzio: Notes that Council very clearly stated that we have infrastructure out in the community and we need to connect with them to extend our outreach effort. If we only ever try to build from the ground up we will be doomed. However, there are existing groups that already do similar work and we should focus on connecting with those groups. One challenge the HAC has seen when working on the affordable housing efforts is that there are many people doing things that are not working together.

Clarence Green: Many efforts have been under a silo effect, which is a big reason why the project was started.

Lena Seville: Notes that it also adds work to a job knowing that something needs to be done and just not knowing how to do it when there are resources out there to make it easier. For instance, we want to expand our diversity in the bike and pedestrian community and there are certainly people out there, but they just aren’t in our group. We know people walk and ride bikes, we just don’t have a strong way to get to everyone.

Serena Gruia: Ultimately we want Charlottesville to have representation in leadership in the future and coming together through Clarence’s organization can help with that. Clarence’s project is not government driven, or money driven, or even project driven. We’ve had tons of conversation about race in the community, but this offers a way to take those conversations and apply them in a larger context.

Mike Stoneking: How do citizens know when the community gatherings are?

Clarence Green: It is mostly done through word of mouth right now, but there is a Citizens Needs Facebook page and website as well that people can go to for information.

Rory Stolzenberg: Shares that this is a good idea because there isn't a large funnel of people coming in to government oriented events or meetings as it stands. If this organization can serve as a central hub to broadcast people's messages, it could be a great signal boost to discuss other work going. If people are hooked into one platform, they can suddenly know all the things going on within the City and have up-to-date information.

Clarence Green: Notes that problems can be fixed very quickly through social media efforts because it's easily accessible and the word can be spread very fast.

Serena Gruia: How can PLACE collaborate with Citizen Needs leading up to the big event?

Clarence Green: Citizens should know about PLACE in terms of what it does and how it works, so having an online presence to broadcast that information eliminates one of those hurdles. PLACE could plan to attend one of the Citizen Needs conversations.

Mike Stoneking: Attending an event would be an excellent way to interact with the community. The members could be there organizationally or simply as participants at the gathering.

5. NEW BUSINESS (15 minutes)

a. BPAC Memo

Carl Schwarz: There are many things that BPAC wants to change in the Standards and Designs Manual after reviewing it. There are a few items that were flagged for the members of PLACE to review because they have significant impacts on the built environment and/or speak to the philosophy of what the manual should look like. Specifically, we are talking about block length and pedestrian safety. Right now the block length minimum is 500 feet for a standard street and 250 feet for smaller streets, which is very large. However, there aren't any maximum block lengths. Aside from the 250 bypass, there aren't any streets where the minimum block lengths should be 500 feet. For new streets, the bike/ped committee made a recommendation to set a maximum block length of 250 feet and not require any minimum. This would encourage connectivity and it could also prevent the construction of super-block sized buildings. In general, it touches on the zoning code that we don't have a building more than 250 feet long ever again.

Mike Stoneking: Would this be a one size fits all type of change, or would there be neighborhoods that might be even smaller? In other words, could there be a smaller maximum in different neighborhoods?

Lena Seville: We could do that, we just want a maximum block length as a standard. Notes that part of this is about having a bike and pedestrian right-of-way that doesn't have to be pavement, but breaks it up somehow.

Mike Stoneking: Agrees that we need to reconnect our grid and open as many avenues as possible. As we close streets create more and more dead ends, we are only constraining our City.

Carl Schwarz: There are some places where that can't be done. However, as a City we do need to consider adjusting the code to prevent single family residential neighborhoods popping up on the last bits of land we have.

Rory Stolzenberg: Agrees with the idea in general but 250 feet might be a little too low for a maximum. Are roads like John Warner and the 250 bypass the types of roads that we want as a City, or do we want more avenues and smaller streets? The arteries in the City, which are the avenues, are the roads with the most connections.

Mike Stoneking: Notes that we need a complete hierarchy of streets with a ton of roads like Hinton Avenue that go from a block to a block.

Lena Seville: It would also be safer for pedestrians to create more of the smaller avenues.

Mark Rylander: This all depends because Charlottesville has so many dead ends already, there are topographic water challenges, and there is a railroad running through it. A block that is 500 feet is not inherently evil.

Carl Schwarz: It's also important to think about where we want to be as a City in 50 years. We need to made decisions now that will guide us in the future to prevent gridlocking the City.

Mike Stoneking: We may not need to worry about the block length because we are going to change it in 6 months if the zoning rewrite is successful.

Carl Schwarz: The ultimate goal is to make it safer for bikers and pedestrians. Another topic that came up was the topic of the 20 foot street width minimums for large trucks to pass through. We suggest that the clear space provided should only be what is needed. 20 feet is needed for outriggers and maneuvering when a truck stops, but it doesn't have to be continuous. It would be a great benefit to have some smaller street types like lanes or yield streets. If a developer wants to build narrow streets within a small community, they should be able to do so. This could mean that changes be made to the zoning code to allow smaller buildings, more access points, fewer occupants, etc. Most of the rest of the memo deals with philosophy changes and updates that can be a guide for future traffic engineers of the City. Lastly, chapter 7 deals with best practices in sustainable design, however they are all suggestion-based and none of it is enforceable. Perhaps the Planning Commission and PLACE can come up with some ways to incentivize some of the sustainable features.

Alex Ikefuna: Notes that this is a conversation that needs to be had with the Fire Chief to make sure they would be on board with these types of changes.

Mike Stoneking: The general feeling from the Fire Chief in previous conversations has been that they were at least open to the possibility of change.

Carl Schwarz: One possible solution to this might be to not follow VDOTs footsteps and guidelines, which we aren't required to do as a City. However, this would mean that the City would have to provide a lot of the funding itself, and we could even find that it might be more profitable to not receive that money.

Alex Ikefuna: To put it in perspective, in the past few years the City has gotten over \$60 million from VDOT.

Lena Seville: Ultimately, we would like to know if PLACE would be willing to endorse the memo from BPAC and have support to address these topics and issues. It could even be a slightly different rendition, but we are ultimately asking for support on these problems.

Mike Stoneking: There's no doubt that they are important issues that need to be addressed, but we tend to get hung up on the details. Overall, PLACE can support addressing these issues and we can dig deeper into the details of the changes at a later time.

Carl Schwarz: It would be great to team up with a few committees to help make these decisions.

Mike Stoneking: Requests that BPAC submit the memo as submitted, and PLACE will create a similar draft. We can work on fine-tuning the specific numbers afterwards. Ultimately it is going to take a philosophy change in order to make some of these significant changes in the City.

Lena Seville: How can this be fine-tuned it once this is done?

Mike Stoneking: We can come up with a subcommittee to discuss it in more detail and come to those decisions.

b. Other

Jeff Werner: Notes that technology is changing rapidly and the Planning Commission had a long conversation about lighting in the City during their last meeting. There is a sense about how we'd like to see the future shaped, however it's important to understand that there are things that are going to happen regardless. It is important to try our best to think ahead to anticipate some of these changes that are coming because everything seems to be accelerating quickly and we need to try to get ahead of them. For instance, there is a reliance for the development community to come in and develop, but there may also be things within the City right-of-way that can be worked on.

6. MATTERS BY THE PUBLIC (10 minutes)

None.