

Special Transportation Commission Minutes

Thursday, May 3, 2012

Commissioner Kathy Moehring called the Transportation Commission to order at 7:02 p.m.

1. Roll Call

Roll was called and the following was recorded:

Members Present:

Kathy Moehring
Thomas G. Bertken
Jesus Vargas
Sandy Wong
Michele Bellows
Christopher Miley

Members Absent:

Rajiv Sharma

Staff Present:

Obaid Khan, Supervising Civil Engineer
Matthew Naclerio, Public Works Director

2. Oral Communications – Non-Agendized Items / Public Comments

Matthew Fitzgerald announced that the Disability Capital Action Day would be held on Wednesday, May 30 from 10 am- 3 pm in Sacramento. Buses would leave from Hayward to Fremont to Livermore and onto Sacramento. The day contains free activities and for more information, the public should call Christina at (510) 881-5743.

3. New Business

3A. Gibbons Drive/Northwood Drive/Southwood Drive Improvement Project – Recommendation to not proceed with the proposed project.

Matthew Naclerio presented the staff report for the Gibbons Drive/Northwood Drive/Southwood Drive Improvement project.

Commissioner Vargas asked if the funds identified by Caltrans were fixed to the specific improvements or if there are any options for other improvements.

Matthew Naclerio stated the funding is linked to the specific improvements outlined in the application. However, there may be alternatives that are in compliance and Caltrans may have

some flexibility. Ultimately, the changes would have to be approved by Caltrans and any additional cost will have to be paid for by the City.

Commissioner Moehring asked for any additional comments from the public.

Gary Oda lives down the street from the proposed project and opposes the project because of the number of parking spaces being taken away and the limitation to emergency vehicles that could enter the street. He was not at the previous meetings, but heard that maintenance costs involving the landscaping of trees and grass would have to be paid for by the neighborhood. Finally, he mentioned when he drives up to High Street and Gibbons Drive, he notices that the road is narrow. So, any large vehicle must maneuver carefully up to the bridge.

Walt Grady applauded the recommendation to take no action on this item. He wrote a letter to the board shortly after the meeting, but heard no response from the Commission about his letter. He referred to an article by the local Alameda Sun newspaper and he questioned whether the grant was activated because the language was never clear.

Mike Kelly presented 275 petitions of signatures that say not to make changes to the Gibbons Drive/Northwood Drive/Southwood Drive intersection. He wants the City to continue to encourage kids to use the Alameda Safe School routes. He mentioned this is the second time he has been here and he disagreed with the director at Lincoln School that there was little interest in the project. On July 15, 2011, the City applied for the grant and this is the beginning of Alameda's bridge to nowhere. He felt there were three secret meetings held between September 2011 and February 2012 to discuss going forward with the project. Ultimately, he believes an informed public is essential to democracy, but the only thing that this project has produced is distrust for government and bitterness.

Jim Strehlow, Alameda resident and local employee, stated this is a City not in touch with its citizens. He has lived on Gibbons Drive next to High Street for over 55 years and Gibbons Drive is a beautiful tree lined street that is welcoming to Alameda visitors. He considered the intersection beautiful as is and because of its strange design, drivers are more cautious than normal. About seven years ago, a Gibbons Drive resident approached the Fernside Homeowner Association about her concerns for the Gibbons Drive circle and the attendees said it was not needed. Again, she voiced her opinion, and the attendees voiced against it again. Alameda Public Works should have noticed the proposal to the public first before continuing with the project because the project seems to be a "Berkeleyization" of the neighborhood. Ultimately, he would like the City to return the grant money and keep the intersection as is.

Jay Seaton has lived within proximity to the Gibbons Drive intersection for over 12 years. He was a supporter of the original petition that the staff mentioned with some calming of the area. Although initially it was for a roundabout, he found that there was no community consensus around the design. He is now in favor of the recommendation to not proceed with the proposal.

Ruben Ramirez has resided overlooking the intersection for over 29 years. Initially, when he was approached about the center of the intersection he found it interesting. When the City came back

with the design, he found that it was overkill; he did not see the safety hazards there. He hopes the Commission supports the recommendation of the staff. However, he is dumbfounded to see that this project had legs and he does not understand it.

Gordon McConnell, Fairview Avenue resident, stated he attended two out of the three public meetings. Public Works were not responsive to the residents' views, and the overall public consensus of the second meeting was to do nothing. He called into question the integrity of the City Manager and the grant application. He stated there was an initial meeting with residents to develop minor traffic calming measures but not to the extent that the Public Works Department proposed.

Paula Kaneshiro explained that she did collect signatures to end the project and one of the things that she appreciated was the fact that residents wanted some type of traffic calming on their street. She also questioned why Public Works continued with the project when the public stated they did not want the project to continue. Finally, she said it started as a traffic calming effort and she does not understand why the City went out for a Safe Routes to School grant.

James Tham stated this project is doing the wrong thing. The intersection is already safe and he has traveled through the intersection by bike, foot and car for the last 40 years. He felt the City should have been frugal with their money and not waste with staff work hours. Thus, he believes the project is wasteful and other projects should require much more attention than this one. He encouraged the Commission to look at the Public Works Department and review their business plan.

Jim Anglom has lived near the project for more than 30 years and he does not want to see the project proceed. The project would bring reduce property values and parking spaces. Furthermore, he believes additional improvements to the intersection would create complications and a liability to the City.

Commissioner Moehring asked for any additional comments or questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Bertken stated he believes the public provided plenty of information for the Commission to proceed with a decision. However, there was one question about a public statement regarding secret meetings between City staff and a select number of individuals.

Matthew Naclerio replied that staff is prohibited by the Sunshine Ordinance to conduct meetings involving a decision to proceed with a project without public notice. However, initial meetings were conducted with residents who brought forth the petition, which is standard procedure.

Staff Khan replied City staff does this for other projects when they receive a petition and they talk to the petitioners and then they go to the community about everything staff is proposing.

Commissioner Miley applauded the public for coming out to speak about the project and it is important to receive public opinion. He questioned how the City prioritized its projects and he knows that staff is working on the list currently. He asked if this type of project falls within the priority list and if not, then why not.

Matthew Naclerio stated this project would fit in a general Safe Routes to School or traffic calming projects under the general category. The difficulty is the department does not have specific projects so it is hard to rank a general category. Thus, staff relies on residents to bring concerns to City staff. Per traffic calming and procedure policies, they are asked to go out and try to build public consensus.

Commissioner Miley replied so with traffic calming policies and procedures the Commission views it as the final stages rather than up front.

Matthew Naclerio stated for traffic calming, yes but there are still opportunities for an applicant or petitioners to appeal the decision.

Commissioner Miley said in terms of the number of petitions for traffic calming, what is the general number received by Public Works.

Matthew Naclerio stated that there are several that staff is currently working on right now. They are working on Fernside Drive between High Street and Tilden Way, Otis Drive and Franklin School. Again, the public came to the department and staff worked with the smaller group before bringing the issue to the larger community to build consensus.

Commissioner Miley asked how long does the consensus building and proposal processes normally take from the submission of the petition, until the Commission receives the final proposal.

Matthew Naclerio replied that it took a little longer than normal for the Gibbons Drive project and that was based on the complications of the project where staff had to familiarize themselves with roundabouts. Other projects are typically standard such as adding crosswalks, speed advisory signs and partial street closures. So, it depends on the actual project.

Staff Khan replied if they have to hold public meetings, which they normally do, it takes a couple of months for each community meeting. Overall, a typical traffic calming project takes 6 to 8 months to complete if there are no other priorities on traffic calming are present.

Commissioner Vargas said that he received Walt Grady's letters and he thanked the public for sending in comments regarding the project. Government transparency is important and given public comment tonight, he hopes the Commission will make a quick decision.

Commissioner Moehring commented about the public outreach on this and she does understand when staff is presented with a lot of signatures regarding an issue they have to do a feasibility study and this is public government at work. She appreciated that staff spent a lot of time on this and it may not have been to the public's liking, but they did come to the ultimate decision to not move forward on the project.

<p><i>Commissioner Miley</i> made a motion for the Commission to accept staff's recommendation. <i>Commissioner Bellows</i> seconded the motion. The motion was approved 6-0.</p>

4. Announcements / Public Comments

Jon Spangler, Alameda resident and a League of American Cycling Instructor, explained that on Saturday, May 5, everyone is welcome and anyone who wants to take a class can register at www.ebbc.org/safety. He would like to offer feedback about what he knows about the Gibbons Drive intersection while being on the Transportation Commission. He felt that Safe Routes to School and traffic calming issues need to be in the transportation priority list and need to be discussed often and citywide. When he was on the Commission, they talked about traffic calming on a neighborhood in Bayview and knew a citywide policy was needed. Part of the problem that he sees is meetings were held in the neighborhood and the rest of the City was cut off. So, the place to have meetings is at the Transportation Commission meetings. At that time, the Commission had been decimated, but Commissioner Moehring continued with public comments despite the fact. Now with a fully functioning Commission, he would like them to discuss traffic calming issues more often. Furthermore, he continued to be disturbed about the ambiguity of Gibbons Drive intersection whether by bike, foot and driving.

Commissioner Miley asked with the East Bay Bicycle Coalition is it going to be just people who cannot ride bikes, or will there be safety training class for people who commute by bicycle and do not know how to ride in traffic.

Jon Spangler, Alameda resident and a League of American Cycling Instructor, explained they will also offer a 1-hour commuter workshop session on how to commute by bicycle, and conduct the second half of their on the road session about how to handle bikes.

Commissioner Vargas stated that the East Bay Bicycle Coalition will have an activity on Thursday, May 10 at the Old Oakland Area, it is called a Bike Happy Hour Party.

5. Adjournment

7:55 pm