

City of Falls Church
JOINT MEETING
Economic Development Authority and Citizens Advisory Committee on Transportation
Meeting Minutes - APPROVED
Tuesday, February 2, 2016 – 7 p.m.
Falls Church City Hall – Dogwood Room
300 Park Avenue, Falls Church, VA 22046

I. Call to Order – The EDA meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Chairman Novotny. Chairman Baldino of the CACT deferred a call to order as members continued to arrive.

EDA Board Members Present: Mike Novotny, Barry Buschow, Bob Young, Erik Pelton, Brian Williams, and Ed Saltzberg.

EDA Members Excused: John Sandoz.

EDA Youth Representatives Absent or Excused: Tyler Gogal and Kiran Menon.

EDO Staff: Rick Goff and Ingrid Racine.

CACT Members Present: Paul Baldino, Hal Morgan, Andrea Caumont, Bill Ackerman, and Doug Devereaux

City Staff Present: Paul Stoddard, Mike Collins, Stephanie Rogers, and Jeff Sikes.

Public Attendees: City Council Members Letty Hardi, Marybeth Connelly, Phil Duncan and Karen Oliver; Planning Commissioner Lindy Hockenberry; Steve Yaffe and Kieran Sharpe.

II. Approval of January 5, 2016 Minutes

Mr. Buschow moved approval of the minutes, seconded by Mr. Young, and approved unanimously.

III. Petitions from the Public: Ms. Hockenberry spoke about the great success of Watch Night 2015 in downtown Falls Church. She noted that the event has increased in popularity every year and may expand physically along Broad Street next year. She said that Watch Night organizer Barb Cram wishes to present a report to the EDA board and to underscore the importance of EDA funding support for the annual event.

IV. Presentation on Arlington Rapid Transit

In advance of the presentation, EDA Chairman Novotny led introductions of members of the two boards and City staff. He explained the EDA's interest in transportation and related issues, and said the EDA shares many interests in common with the CACT. He highlighted some of the EDA's investments in transportation and traffic improvements, including sharrows for bicycle routes and signs for public parking. Mr. Novotny said

he welcomed the evening's dialogue with the CACT, noting it marked the first time the boards were meeting jointly.

Mr. Baldino explained the role of the CACT in advising the city manager, City Council, and Planning Commission on traffic and traffic calming issues in Falls Church.

Mr. Stoddard introduced featured speaker Steve Yaffe, operations manager for Arlington Rapid Transit (ART). Mr. Yaffe noted his familiarity with Falls Church and its former transit service, GEORGE, the buses for which ART received under the terms of a service contract with the City when Falls Church ceased to operate GEORGE on its own. He then described the process and work involved in updating Arlington County's Transit Development Plan. He pointed out that many of the steps required to update Arlington's plan are steps that Falls Church will need to consider in creating its own transit plan or one that connects with its neighbors.

Mr. Yaffe said that market analysis is a fundamental first step in building a transit system. Population and employment projections, transit use propensity, identification of service gaps, and strategies to address those gaps are important data to gather. This information then informs an evaluation of alternative service strategies. Arlington undertakes a robust public engagement process, he said. Mr. Yaffe described how ART isolates "cost drivers" in its operations to minimize budget risks and to separate pricing for different services that it has under contract. He also explained ART's use of performance standards to evaluate its efficiency and effectiveness, as well as to shape its service program.

Mr. Yaffe responded to questions from the EDA and CACT. There was a discussion of potential shuttle services in Falls Church. Mr. Yaffe said ART provides some targeted, free shuttles for County residents on a contractual basis. The prospect of extending ART services to and from the East and West Falls Church Metro stations was also discussed. Mr. Yaffe said ART would need to add buses if the City seeks to contract for new routes. He said a benchmark of at least 12 passenger boardings per hour on a bus route is needed to achieve cost effectiveness, adding that routes which include stops at affordable housing are important to target.

Mr. Baldino asked Mr. Yaffe what information the City should seek in a shuttle feasibility study. He responded that the City should gather demographic data on population densities, residents with disabilities, low-income individuals, and households with no cars. This basic information will identify where connection routes will be needed to close service gaps and feed primary routes. It will show how many vehicles will be needed, and then help determine the costs of a shuttle program. He noted that the drop-off area at the East Falls Church station already has become congested with the operation of multiple private shuttles.

In response to a question, Mr. Yaffe said that the cost of ART's Transportation Development Plan update is about \$800,000, including funding support from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. He estimated that a similar product for Falls Church that emphasizes a shuttle transportation solution would cost about \$200,000 and take about six months to complete.

Mr. Williams said the City should be building a transit system to attract carless tenants in new development projects. Waiting to put a system in place after these projects are occupied will mean they are filled by new residents with cars, he said.

Mr. Yaffe was asked if zip cars, taxis and Uber are harmful to ART's business model. He responded that they actually help by saving costs to extend the ART system to hard-to-serve, low-volume locations. In response to another question, Mr. Stoddard said that Arlington County is expected to extend BikeShare to the East Falls Church Metro station by 2017 or 2018. He added that state transportation grant funds are now available on a competitive basis and the City has applied for \$2 million to purchase and install 16 BikeShare stations. The state is expected to make its grant award announcements in May 2016.

V. Items for Discussion

a. Shuttle Service

In addition to the preceding discussion, the EDA requested an estimate of the cost of a shuttle feasibility study from Mr. Stoddard relative to similar transportation studies by other jurisdictions. The EDA also discussed the possibility of a "shuttle summit" involving existing shuttle service providers in the City. Mr. Pelton said he would follow-up with staff on this item.

b. BikeShare

Mr. Stoddard elaborated on his earlier comments about grant funds for BikeShare in the City. He said that the grant request also includes funding for a feasibility study to determine the best locations for stations. He added that grant funds will not cover BikeShare system operating costs, estimated at about \$160,000 per year. There was a discussion about ways to cover costs, such as developer proffers and corporate sponsorships.

Mr. Baldino cautioned that the City's infrastructure for bike routes is very limited at this time, as pointed out by Charlie Denney of Alta Planning and Design, the managers of Capital BikeShare, when he spoke at an EDA forum several years ago. Mr. Baldino said that City Council has set aside \$25,000 for building a first phase of a basic infrastructure for bikes.

c. Improving Parking

Mr. Novotny summarized a list of parking related items identified by the EDA at its summer retreat. Mr. Goff responded to a question about the status of the Kaiser Permanente parking deck for public use. There was discussion of the merits of metered parking in heavily used retail areas of the City. Several CACT members cautioned that there would be negative public reaction to metered parking. Mr. Collins said that metered parking may lead to unintended consequences such as a shift of parking demand to residential neighborhoods.

Mr. Stoddard described a recently completed study that determined there is a substantial surplus of parking spaces available in private lots in the library and City Hall area. The study was conducted to assess alternative solutions to a \$3 million parking deck to serve library and other public uses. The study concluded that strong opportunities exist to strike agreements with owners of private lots for leased public spaces at a fraction of the cost of building a parking deck. Mr. Pelton said shared-parking agreements between owners of private lots to provide more convenience to customers and visitors is another potential solution and alternative to City capital expenditures for parking decks.

d. Increasing Demand for Traffic Calming

Mr. Baldino reported on the volume of traffic calming requests received by the CACT in recent years. He said that CACT studied best practices by other jurisdictions and implemented new policy that requires applicants to assume more of the burden for making a case for traffic calming measures and infrastructure. He observed that new development projects will increase demand in the City for traffic calming and he noted, anecdotally, that there are more young children in residential neighborhoods now than during the past several decades that he has resided in the City. He said that City funding in the CIP for additional traffic calming is available only through the next fiscal year.

e. Play Streets

Ms. Caumont described a concept she has researched that would permit neighbors to close a section of street so that children can play together, similar to street closures for adult mixers or block parties, but perhaps on a regular basis. She said that play streets are popular in Provo, Utah and other cities. She added that these events raise awareness of traffic safety in neighborhoods with young children and build a sense of community. Play streets can provide a recreation alternative especially where park facilities may not be readily accessible, she said.

Ms. Rogers said she is working with City departments, including police and fire officials, to allow for play street demonstration events, and to establish a process and rules for programming of this kind. Ms. Caumont reported that the Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board are also interested in the play streets concept. EDA members expressed their support for the concept, as well.

f. Pace Car Program

Mr. Baldino described Washington, DC's "pace car" program that requires new, school-aged drivers to take a pledge to observe traffic rules, including speed limits, and involves messaging through the use of bumper stickers. He said the CACT is working with Falls Church City Public Schools to adapt the program here for young drivers getting their operators' permits. Mr. Stoddard noted that he makes a point of never exceeding the speed limit and often drives slower than 25 miles per hour in the City.

g. Walkability and Bikeability Surveys

Mr. Baldino said that the CACT is using proven templates to devise an instrument for Falls Church to survey residents who walk and bike in the City. Feedback will be gathered about pedestrian and bike amenities, impediments, safety perceptions, and other data. The focus will be on commercial streets and streets with sharrows. A report will be produced later this year.

h. Streetscape Amenities for Pedestrian Transportation

Mr. Young explained the origin of the initiative to fund and install benches, bike racks, trash and recycle cans along W. Broad Street. He said Mayor Tarter expressed concern that no bike racks exist in front of the Hilton Garden Inn. This initiated a broader review of pedestrian and bike amenities along the commercial corridor from N. Washington Street to the hotel. Mr. Young said he worked closely with City staff to walk the corridor and assess the best locations for the amenities. The cost of the project is estimated at \$35,000 and, if ordered now, the amenities can be installed in spring 2016.

Mr. Goff said the city manager advises that funds should be available to pay the cost of the project from unspent downtown improvement dollars. However, if basic funds are not available or costs exceed \$35,000, Mr. Shields welcomes EDA funding assistance. Mr. Goff added that a resolution prepared for EDA and CACT consideration contains a provision that the EDA “pledges up to \$35,000, if necessary, to support the project and its timely completion.”

Questions were asked about potential locational conflicts with bus shelters and the installation of the amenities. Those considerations were made and conflicts avoided, according to Mr. Young. A suggestion was made to work with businesses on the corridor to place benches so that they can be easily moved to best accommodate business activity and also assure adequate sidewalk clearance. Mr. Young said he would speak with store owners impacted by the amenities. A suggestion was made and accepted to purchase benches equipped with an additional, central seat arm.

VI. New Business: Benches, Bike Racks, Trash and Recycle Cans on W. Broad Street

a. Discussion

The boards decided to take action separately on a pre-drafted resolution in support of the project and distributed to each member. A CACT member suggested that a reference in the resolution to a “lack” of existing street furniture be changed to “scarcity.” There was a consensus of both boards to make the change.

b. EDA and CACT Recommendation and Contingent Funding Commitment

A motion was made, seconded, and approved unanimously by the CACT in support of the resolution. Mr. Young made a motion, seconded by Mr. Pelton, and approved unanimously by the EDA Board, also in support of the resolution.

Mr. Young commented that street art will be a next step to improve aesthetics along W. Broad Street after functional improvements are completed.

Mr. Baldino said that the joint meeting had been very beneficial and extended an open invitation to the EDA to meet again together. He said that each group should assist the other on initiatives and projects where mutual interests exist. He invited Mr. Novotny to present the Downtown Plaza proposal to the CACT at an upcoming meeting to obtain its formal support.

VII. Other Business: None.

VIII. Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn, which was seconded, and carried unanimously. The joint meeting adjourned at 10:22 p.m.

IX. Post Adjournment

At approximately 10:30 p.m., the EDA reconvened in the Dogwood Room to continue its discussion of commercial development at the George Mason High School site and to discuss other business. Mr. Saltzberg had excused himself at 10 p.m. during the joint meeting and did not attend this portion of the EDA meeting.

a. Downtown Plaza

Mr. Goff reported on the status of the project as a proposed element in the City's FY17 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). He said the Planning Commission received a staff presentation on February 1 and a number of questions were raised about the project. There is a second Planning Commission meeting, public hearing and work session on the CIP scheduled for February 16. Mr. Goff suggested that the EDA Board send speakers to the meeting to join staff in addressing questions about the project. Mr. Pelton and Mr. Young volunteered to attend.

b. George Mason High School Site and Redevelopment Process

Mr. Pelton introduced a draft of a letter addressed to City Council, the School Board and the city manager expressing concern about the process underway for redevelopment of the school site. The letter urged that the process be revised to include provisions for involvement of the EDA, Planning Commission, and perhaps other members of community groups such as the PTA and Chamber of Commerce. There followed an extended discussion about a lack of transparency in the current redevelopment process, lack of communication from City Council and the School Board about the status of the process, and an expression of doubt that a referendum in November 2016 to fund the school projects could be approved given the current public perception of the process.

Mr. Sharpe stated his support for the letter and restated a case for the creation of an independent citizens group to evaluate the campus redevelopment project. He first brought this concept to the EDA Board at their January 5, 2016 meeting. Mr. Young

raised questions and issues about this approach and said he did not support it. There followed a discussion of the proposal but the board chose, by consensus, not to take action to endorse it.

Mr. Pelton made a motion, seconded by Mr. Young, and approved unanimously to endorse and forward the letter as written to City Council, the School Board and city manager. The 'post' meeting adjourned at 11:08 p.m.