

PLANNING COMMISSION
M I N U T E S

The Winchester Planning Commission held its regular meeting on Tuesday, July 19, 2011 at 3:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, Roush City Hall, 15 North Cameron Street, Winchester, Virginia.

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Adams called the meeting to order at 3:00 pm.

PRESENT: Chairman Adams, Vice-Chairman Shore, Commissioners McKannan, Slaughter, and Talley (5)

ABSENT: Commissioners Beatley and Wiley (2)

EX-OFFICIO: Councilor Tagnesi and City Manager O'Connor

STAFF: Youmans, Moore, Diem and Walsh

VISITORS: Philip Weber, Patricia Weber, Sam Leinbach, Jim Vickers, Mitch Moore, Evan Wyatt, Linda Ross

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Vice-Chairman Shore moved to approve the minutes of the June 21, 2001 meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Talley.

Motion passed 5-0.

CORRESPONDENCE

An addendum packet was presented that included the following:
Item 3A – Two Draft Resolutions for Millwood Avenue Traffic Diversion Study

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Phillip Weber, of 609 Bellview Avenue, stated that he wanted to voice his opinion on the Millwood Avenue closure. He mentioned all the publicity given to the study and stated that he hoped the citizens were contacting their council members to share their thoughts and to give input on this topic. Mr. Weber stated that after attending the joint work session of the EDA and the Planning Commission, it was clear that the closure of Millwood would enable the university to further its plans and to expand. He did not see the benefit to the citizens of Winchester. He stated that during that meeting, Chairman Adams asked whether the gateway entrance and defined perimeter could be done without closing the road. The response was that it could, but it would not be as nice. Mr. Weber asked that this issue be tabled to allow a traffic impact analysis to be done. Almost 37,000 drivers could be forced to use the Jubal Early Drive intersection causing major traffic congestion. He stated that the people and the Council need to know the impact before making a decision. He stated that the traffic impact analysis is too important not to be done. He added that Spring Street needed to be included in this study to get the full picture. He thanked the Commission for their time.

Sam Leinbach, of Fairmont Avenue, stated that he wanted to express his support of Mr. Weber's words. He stated that more consideration needed to be taken before making this decision. Based on his review of the plan, it looked as though the right turn lane will not be justified. He stated it is, in fact, a zero acceleration lane. He explained that Virginia has spent millions of dollars to fix these all over the state due to the danger they pose, including the one northbound onto I-81. He stated that Winchester still relies

on its manufacturing base which relies on trucks for deliveries. He stated that it would be very difficult to move trucks through the intersection. The businesses downtown will also still need to be able to get their deliveries. He stated that Millwood helps to relieve the traffic congestion coming from Route 50. Without it, it will jam the gateway and move more to traffic to already congested Routes 7 and 11. He asked for more time to consider how this change will affect the City.

REPORT OF FREDERICK COUNTY LIAISON

Chairman Adams stated that Frederick County Commissioner Chris Mohn was unable to attend.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

None

NEW BUSINESS

A. Resolution {Supporting/Opposing} the Recommendations of the Millwood Avenue Traffic Diversion Study

Mr. Youmans explained that two draft Resolutions, one supporting and one opposing the study recommendations, had been prepared per the Commission's discussion at its work session. He explained that the first three recitals in both Resolutions were identical and contained factual background information. The differences between the two resolutions were in the remaining recitals.

Chairman Adams asked that all the Commission members take this time to make comments on the Resolutions and then follow it with a motion.

Vice-Chairman Shore asked Jim Vickers if a traffic impact analysis would be part of any of the engineering studies they plan to conduct.

Mr. Vickers stated yes.

Vice-Chairman Shore then asked that, at the end of the study, if it is determined that this would not be a positive decision, if the University would abandon the project.

Mr. Vickers stated that a complete study will be done to allow them to begin to design the road. Once it is done, it will have to go through the appropriate channels to get approved by the City, including Council. They have already looked at eight alternatives and it has already been determined that it will work, however there is still a lot of work that needs to be done before they can begin.

Chairman Adams asked why all of these studies were not completed before they got to this stage.

Mr. Vickers explained that a Memorandum of Understanding was completed in 2009 between the City and University to review the Millwood Interchange in order to improve traffic flow. The MPO was given the task to go out and select an independent traffic engineer to do the study. Eight alternatives were suggested, one being the relocation of Millwood. The next step was to have the committee meetings at the EDA, the Planning Commission, and the Old Town Development Board to get their input.

Chairman Adams stated that he was pleased at the number of residents who attended the joint work session of the EDA and Planning Commission. He stated that he was surprised that there are not more here today. He stated that he has no problem with a new gateway entrance and that he has been a proponent of corridor enhancement. He stated that he has no problem with a defined perimeter for the University. However, he stated that it could be done without closing the road. In terms of the Comprehensive Plan, he stated that it had been under review for at least five years. The MOU was in effect since 2009, but did not make it into the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that, in his opinion, the closing of Millwood Avenue just did not make sense. He stated that he could understand how the University would benefit, but could not understand how the City would benefit with the added traffic congestion.

Commissioner Talley stated that a great deal of work went into the study and that he respected the opinion of MPO, but like Chairman Adams, he did not understand the need. He stated that the fastest way between two points is a straight line and that adding a complicated right turn did not make sense. He stated that the Beltone entrance should have been considered. He stated that they were pushing out a business that has been there a while.

Commissioner Slaughter stated that he appreciated what had been said. He stated that there has been more conversation about this than any other issue that has come to the Planning Commission. He stated that he had given it a lot of thought and come to the conclusion that, while it is important to look at everything, when you have a complicated issue like this you can sometimes get stuck in the weeds. He stated that he took a step back and looked at what this project will accomplish. They are trying to work with a strategic economic partner and the overall concept makes sense. He stated that, at this conceptual stage, it should not be pushed back. Tax incentives are given to businesses in the historic district to help assist growth; he saw this in the same light. This is an improvement that will not cost the City any money and it makes sense. He stated that it was prudent to move forward to see if it is going to work and that it is worth further exploration. As far as the Comprehensive Plan, he stated that it is generally consistent with the even though it is not spelled out specifically. He stated that you cannot expect everything that comes before us to be specifically called out.

Commissioner McKannan asked Mr. Youmans if there were a significant amount of trucks coming into Old Town through the Millwood Avenue section.

Mr. Youmans explained that trucks come in from all directions as there are multiple distributors each way. Recently, Council had adopted prohibition on through trucks in the City and large trucks downtown, and also defined routes for trucks delivering in the City. This would be a step in the right direction.

Commissioner McKannan stated he can see an issue with trucks being able to make the turn.

Mr. Youmans stated that that is an issue that would have to be addressed in an engineering study.

Chairman Adams asked aloud if it will work and responded that he does not know. He stated that the road should not be closed until it is determined that it will work. He stated that they already have bottlenecks on Jubal Early and that this is verifiable by accidents reports, skid marks, and broken pieces of headlights. He stated that adding one more bottleneck would be putting the cart before the horse. He stated that more information is needed.

Commissioner Slaughter asked what the timeframe would be if the project were to move forward.

Mr. Youmans stated that it is difficult to say. A large part depends on the allocation of funds. The University did say that they do not plan to use public funds. He stated that it would take at least four to five months for a detailed engineering study.

Commissioner Slaughter asked Mr. Vickers what timeframe the University would have for funding since City money would not be used.

Mr. Vickers stated that funding will not be an issue, so there would not be a huge delay. It would move in a reasonable timeframe.

Commissioner Slaughter stated that there were many positives and that it did not make sense to stop this now. He added that some of these issues may get worked out in the process. He stated that it would not make sense for the University to invest money in additional studies if it does not know it has support. It may be negated later if something comes up in a detailed study.

Chairman Adams stated that there is no such thing as a free lunch. The City will end up paying somehow and the traffic problem may be it.

Commissioner McKannan asked if this project would be brought back for final approval at a later date.

Mr. Youmans explained that there were limited reasons for this to come back. One would be vacating and conveying portions of Millwood Avenue to adjacent property owners and the other would be a site plan, possibly for the proposed concert hall.

Mr. Youmans stated that he wanted to speak to the traffic impact analysis that was discussed. A TIA looks at the future conditions both with and without a proposed development. No TIA was done here because there was no proposed development. However, the study did look at future traffic projections through 2035. As much of a traffic study was done as could be based on these projections. The consultants could not do more projections than what was already done by the MPO.

Vice-Chairman Shore stated that the analysis was not able to plug in that structure. He asked to what extent it would be relevant.

Mr. Youmans explained that a certain amount of growth was already anticipated, such as the connection over I-81.

Vice-Chairman Shore asked what the current enrollment of Shenandoah was.

Mr. Vickers stated that there are 3600 students, but 1100 are part time. However, they are not driven by growth; they are driven by program development. A long term goal would be to have 5000 students, but that is over several years. They would like to add a concert hall that would be there for the future expansion.

Vice-Chairman Shore stated that this is a controversial topic. He stated that there is always a fear of change. He stated that he thinks there are some attractive ideas involved, such as closing entrances and having more internal structure on the campus for movement. He stated that he thinks that Commissioner Slaughter has a point and that he did not want to slam the door on this project at this stage, but to investigate it further. He stated that he would be of mind to allow this to go to the next level as long as the brakes would be put on if it was found that there would be a problem. He stated that he doubted that the University would want to do anything that would create a long-term detriment to the City.

Commissioner Slaughter moved to adopt the Resolution Supporting the Recommendations of the Millwood Avenue Traffic Diversion Study and to forward it to Council. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McKannan.

Vice-Chairman Shore stated that he was generally in support of the Resolution, but not necessarily in agreement with all of the parts of it.

Commissioner Slaughter asked if the Commission wished to change any parts of it.

Vice-Chairman Shore stated that it would be difficult to get agreement on all of it and that it was okay to leave it as it was written.

The motion passed 3-2 (Chairman Adams and Commissioner Talley in opposition).

B. Administrative Authorization:

- 1) **SP-11-419** Painter-Lewis PLC 315-317 S Loudoun St Apartment Building
Commissioner Talley moved to grant administrative authorization for SP-11-419. Motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Shore. Motion passed 5-0.

ADJOURN

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 4:07PM.

Nate Adams, III, Chairman