

**JOINT WORKSHOP
FORT MYERS BEACH TOWN COUNCIL
AND
LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY
JANUARY 7, 1999
NationsBank Building, Council Chambers
2523 Estero Boulevard
FORT MYERS BEACH, FLORIDA**

I CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Mayor John Mulholland opened the meeting on Thursday, January 7, 1999 at 6:30 P.M. Present from the Town Council were: Vice-Mayor John Mulholland; Council Members Daniel Hughes, Anita Cereceda and Garr Reynolds. Present from the Local Planning Agency: Co-Chairs Betty Simpson and Roxie Smith; Members Linda Beasley, Bill Van Duzer, Dave Smith, Rod Vayo, Jodi Hester, Harold Huber, and Jennifer Kaestner. Also present at the workshop: Town Manager Marsha Segal-George and Town Attorney Richard Roosa. Excused from the meeting: Mayor Ray Murphy

Mr. Mulholland read a letter from Mayor Murphy apologizing for being absent from the meeting. He is attending a meeting of the State Council of Regional Planning Councils in Tallahassee. Mr. Mulholland welcomed the new members of the LPA and noted the contributions of the outgoing LPA members: Lena Heyman, Johanna Campbell and Ron Kidder.

II PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

All assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

III PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public comment.

IV PRESENTATION BY BILL SPIKOWSKI AND VICTOR DOVER ON PLANNING VISION FOR OLD SAN CARLOS AND CRESCENT STREETS

Bill Spikowski introduced Debbie Amari, Tom Cooper and Victor Dover. He said that in November, about 35 people came together to begin the next stage of planning for the downtown area. He said the pictures he will show are fairly specific, but no one should be alarmed—they are not near the end of the project. This just shows where they are right now. They took all the ideas and put them into a single plan. Sometimes that helps you see the problems and opportunities that you didn't see before. They identified lots of good ideas, some problems, and they want to focus on opportunities. They want to focus on the end state that they might get to.

Victor Dover spoke about the hands-on process they used to arrive at this. Sometimes they camp out in a town for a week or ten days to do this. Then after about three days they develop a first look that they know will be wrong. This is where we are tonight. He showed sketches from each of the four groups. They each had some things in common and also some new ideas. They also took into consideration the WRT study. All of the groups looked at providing generous sidewalks, whether a parking garage would work, and making a public space out of the waterfront at the bay. Some looked at the redevelopment of Helmerick Plaza, tree plantings on the street, infill development on Old San Carlos, and a beach park where the parking lot is at Lynn Hall (including volleyball courts, landscaping, etc.) He showed maps of the existing conditions, one with moderate infill, and a more intense scenario that assumes structured parking. The plans will take teamwork of public and private so that some things can be combined to allow parking in more strategic places. The synthesis plan shows pretty continuous development on Old San Carlos, less continuous development on Crescent, redevelopment of Helmerick, and room for a parking structure. The most critical element is the design of the streets, which unlocks the real estate value. There exists an interesting character in the area with a renewed interest in redevelopment, eclectic architecture which is positive, but the pedestrian experience is below par. The sidewalks are not continuous and head-in parking leaves insufficient room for good sidewalks. He has never seen a place with so many signs saying that this is my private parking and you will be towed (in the public right of way.) He showed a cross-section with the head-in parking changed to parallel, which allows two road lanes of the correct size, with 12'

sidewalks. That size sidewalk is reasonable but not as wide as you would want ideally. (A 15' sidewalk is preferable.) But it is big enough for landscaping in tree wells and to allow some arcades or colonnades to provide some shade and protection for pedestrians. The idea of allowing usable space coming over the sidewalk can be a good thing, but is not a requirement. Some encroachment like an awning or marquee is good and necessary. Pedestrians like continuous shopping, not separate buildings and parking lots. The buildings do not have to be alike, but should be built to the same build-to line. He showed a cutaway of Crescent Street where the space is more cramped. It would be more residential in character than Old San Carlos. It will continue to have small businesses like the bagel shop mixed in with residential. It won't have parking on both sides because there is not room, and the sidewalks will not be as wide.

Regarding the idea of a park on the bay, they looked at the possibility of moving the parking under the bridge and behind buildings rather than on the waterfront. It would be a business decision of the town. There would then be a park at each end of Old San Carlos. It would be a passive park for gatherings and special events.

He talked about building types. There is no need to have a strict architectural theme. Part of the charm of this place is the eclectic nature, and you need to keep a great ensemble. There would be different roof lines, etc. but what they have in common are doors and windows on the street and taking care of the pedestrian with the sidewalks and shade.

There is nothing wrong with parking garages if the financing is right, but there are right and wrong ways. Wrong is when you blunt the street with them. That is why mid-block parking garages are more preferable. You build normal buildings along the street and tuck the garage itself behind the liner of buildings. Parking structures are rarely profitable by themselves. It can cost a lot per space, and they must have income to offset the cost of the garage. Our parking needs do not last all year long and most people do not choose a garage first, so there is a question about whether it can work financially. Over time you add buildings and uses so step by step the parking demand grows or changes. It is some indication of success when there is more demand for parking than there is space. The existing conditions in this area are little rectangles of buildings and areas in between them for parking. Basically there is no single large supply of parking. The generic formula of parking is so many spaces for each new use. The industry standards are very high and are more for shopping strips and places out in urban sprawl. It is for auto-oriented conditions. We are not like the industry standard. We are a resort condition. People use their cars differently. People want to park once and then take short trips on foot or by bicycle. We want to encourage making our streets more walkable, and also water taxis and off-island parking and trolleys.

Currently we have 46 % of what the formula says we should need. If we used the moderate infill scenario, and added a great deal of commercial and housing or lodging and provided parking spaces in surface parking lots only, that would give 69% of the formula parking requirement. This would take a lot of teamwork to organize those lots and get that many spaces. On the more intense infill there would be parking structures. We are not ready for this, but we need to plan so we don't foreclose the possibility at a later date. The plan for the center garage near the bridge would be to have a structure that would be at grade at one end and step up as the bridge rises. He showed a skinny garage that could hold 408 spaces. There are other possible sites near Snug Harbor, and in the Helmerick space. If you build up to the more intense infill scenario and put in all three garages, that would get you to 89% of formula. He does not think that is very reasonable to build all three garages. If you only build one garage, with same amount of intense development, that would bring you to 67% of formula.

Mr. Spikowski said the questions about creating these parking spaces are how to get there, how to pay for them, and how much do we really need? What is good for the town? How willing are we to live with the parking shortages, at least during parts of the year? How do we keep the town from get actively involved in the parking? Expensive parking garages may not be feasible when the demand is only strong four months of the year. Ms. Cereceda asked Mr. Dover how realistic the picture from the top of the bridge is. He said they took a photo from the bridge and built the drawing from it. It could look very much like that. Ms. Cereceda asked how we could achieve the public space. Mr. Dover said through teamwork-- hopefully not through eminent domain. Hopefully the government would not have to become that heavy handed. He thinks a whole lot of structure for parking is overkill. We are just barely getting to the point where we could even consider making a parking structure work financially unless it is subsidized or they can count on year-round constant use. He thinks if you could achieve around 50% of the formula, it would feel better. You don't need to reach 90%. Mr. Spikowski said he has talked to two parking companies who would like to build and operate a garage here. But they say it cannot be a private venture only. Mr. Mulholland asked if it is easier to have a partnership of the town with a garage, or to be able to convince

the landowners to consolidate their lots behind the buildings. Mr. Dover said the consolidation takes a series of moves to accomplish, so it is harder. You can do the at-grade parking as an incremental process, but with a plan. Mr. Spikowski said if you require parking with redevelopment, it is a great incentive, but the developers would rather pay for the possibility of the town putting a garage together at some time in the future. The on-grade parking does not have to be built all at once. The Kentucky Fried lot could be done now. If Pizza Hut decided to redevelop, that could be added, then La Playa might want to join in. Mr. Hughes asked about the height of the three parking garages. Mr. Dover said the 408-space garage would go up in steps to 5 levels of parking, and the ones near Snug Harbor and Helmerick would be all 5 parking levels (which is less tall than a 4-story building.) It assumes parking on the top level. Mr. Hughes asked how many parking spaces are in the lots that would be displaced by the parking garage. It was determined that the one near Snug Harbor would displace 35 spaces and the one in the middle would displace 111. Mr. Hughes said he likes the idea of the park at the end, but it seems that it would require buying the land. Mr. Spikowski said it would not be cheap but there is grant funding available. Mr. Smith asked if it was viable to have a ramp off the bridge directly to a parking garage. Mr. Dover said our situation is different because our traffic travels at such a slow pace that it is possible that it might work. Most places it would not even be thought about. It has not been checked out from an engineering point of view. It has definite pros and cons. A pro is that it doesn't add to the congestion on the street. A con is that it would add a big expense to the cost of building the garage. Mr. Cooper said that scenario can bring people off the bridge quickly, but you lose the exposure to all kinds of retail. Mr. Dover said that usually you want new visitors to get to parking areas by making a series of easy right turns where they pass a lot of interesting things they want to walk back to. Mr. Reynolds said that in the first overlay there was the suggestion of parking behind the buildings on Old San Carlos. It seems Mr. Dover has switched to the other side of the street. Mr. Spikowski said the WRT plan had parking behind both sides of Old San Carlos, including back by the water. But it is a much narrower site and a waste of a water access point that could be perhaps used by a water taxi. Instead they show parking down nearer Snug Harbor on that side. Ms. Smith said that when the CRA was discussing parking problems, they told us we don't have much of a problem, but our parking is ill-managed and ill-defined. If we rearranged and managed, where would we be? Mr. Dover said we would be at 46% of the formula. The town really can't be off that much or we would be out of business. There is no magic answer. We are not at an optimal situation now, but we could deliver a lot more if we were going with a plan. But a lot of people would have to sign on first. We are probably at about 90% of what we need.

Mr. Van Duzer said the big problem is how do we get the area to go into that situation. How do we get the Pizza Hut to tear down their building and move it out to the street and rebuild? Mr. Dover said you can build your way out of problems if it is done right. It takes a whole different way of thinking. If you have mixed use in the area, it allows for different parking peaks at different times of the day. Typically franchises are built to amortize over a relatively short amount of time. Kentucky Fried has moved to a different prototype so they have moved on and the building is insignificant. McDonalds usually amortizes on 8-10 years. So they can be encouraged to build a different way, but only if everyone else is and they are encouraged to do so. Land development regulations can encourage and make it a lot easier to build what you want than what you don't want. Mr. Spikowski said our overlay is now optional, but that is not necessarily the way to keep it. You need greater cooperation and it may be time to make it mandatory. Mr. Smith said we just went through this with Eckerds and trying to tie it into Santini and it didn't work. Mr. Spikowski said it was not an adopted plan at that time, so it was more a question of trying to persuade them. That does not mean it is inevitable. Mr. Dover said it will take a real strong vertebra to put this into place. Ms. Cereceda said that the problem with Eckerds did not come down to the business, it came down to the council who ultimately backed off of the vision. Their role as a council is to carve a clear vision and to stick to it no matter how much flack they get. Mr. Van Duzer said that is an important point because many people have said it wasn't their vision to build to the street. We need a vision and we need to stick with it. Mr. Hughes said a vision is fine but it has to have the support of the community. You can't ram it down their throat.

Mr. Spikowski said they looked at the pedestrian crossing on Estero. In the course of trying to keep the pedestrian dream but acknowledging that traffic has to flow, they played with some other ideas. They are trying to keep Estero fairly porous. This town is unique in that people on the bayside get to cross the road and enjoy the gulf. They want to make it easier to cross while obstructing traffic less. You can make people use the overpass by providing barriers, but that works against the concept of keeping Estero porous. If you use guardrails, they either can't cross, or they try to cross and don't make it. If you put the

barrier in the middle, they are climbing over it in the middle of traffic. The traffic light is a problem because they press the button, then they see an opening and cross, then when the light turns red, there are no pedestrians there and the cars fume. Their suggestion is that if you have a wide (approximately 12') median, it can be an aid to crossing, because you are really making two crossings. That makes it safer because if you see an opening, you don't have to make it all the way across in one swoop. They suggest keeping the left turn on to Fifth and the median would have openings for the motels. A wide median would also signal that this is a pedestrian zone and would give a cue to drivers that this is not an area to be speeding past. It would be a zone where slower speeds would be required. There would still be a crosswalk and they would encourage putting a human there at times to let the pedestrians across. (You can dress up the crossing guard as a marketing tool, such as in bermudas and gloves as the CRA suggested.) There would be signs that say to stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk. This is a lower-tech solution. Elevated crosswalks have a lot of negatives. You don't do it unless you really have to. They tried the idea of roundabouts, but it seemed like simpler was better. You remove the light, let traffic flow, let pedestrians flow, and don't spend a lot of money. This solution does not foreclose the possibility of coming back later and doing the overpass.

Mr. Mulholland thanked them for their presentation. Mr. Spikowski said they need to see if they are going in the right direction or if they have gone too far. Mr. Mulholland asked what would make a pedestrian overpass needed in the future but not now? Mr. Spikowski said it is possible their plan has some negative side effects that they don't know. Maybe it will impede fire trucks, maybe it will cut off certain businesses. Maybe the public doesn't like it. Mr. Dover said he does not think we will ever need or want the bridge over the street, but if you do the at-grade improvements it doesn't close off the possibility. You won't have to undo everything you have already done. Ms. Simpson asked to clarify whether there would be no traffic light. Mr. Spikowski said that you would perhaps keep the flashing light, but not stop-and-go. She asked if it would be wide enough for emergency vehicles. Mr. Spikowski said the median needs to be wide enough for pedestrians to feel safe, but they may have to make it low enough for the trucks to go over. They have drawn it so it only goes down to about Crescent Street. If it goes down further, you will have trouble with some of the hotels who only have single access. The median could be done without changing much, and could be done in stages on a trial basis. Mr. Hughes asked about the fact that this part of Estero is under the jurisdiction of the county. Mr. Spikowski said we would have to have the approval of Lee County and the state. If we take over Estero, we would still have to have the approval of the state. They have not reviewed this and may have objections. He said the state has already indicated that the light is probably not essential. Mr. Dover said step one is to see if the town is interested first. Mr. Reynolds asked if they have investigated whether the road is really wide enough to put a 12' median in. Mr. Spikowski said that probably right in front of Seafarers they might be a little short of right of way and would have to look into someone giving the land or the town acquiring it.

The council and LPA took a break at 8:20 PM and reconvened at 8:33 PM.

V PUBLIC COMMENT

A BILL WHITAKER

Mr. Whitaker said they discussed at the workshop some alteration of the Lynn Hall parking and that wasn't addressed. Also public transportation and trolley stops haven't been discussed. That needs to be considered. He commented that the development of street and sidewalk needs to be first.

B KEENAN JOHNSON

Mr. Johnson said one of the concepts is that time is needed to work out some of the issues. The last holiday weekend is an indication of how well cooperation can work. When his parking lot was full, he would direct traffic down to the other properties. They would call him when they were full and he would direct them to the next lot. Once all the options were full they could tell them. An informed person is happy. They don't mind waiting as long as they know where they are going. It stops the circular traffic. That would give the town time to work out the rest. He said that parking is not a windfall business. They are a service-oriented business, but it is a secondary business. They can't advertise. They are susceptible to the quality of service and products that are offered on this island. Once they are full, there is nothing else they can do to make more cash. If they go to an hourly rate, people still stay the same basic amount of time, so they would make the same amount of money during high season. But in the off season, they would be out of business.

C JOHANNA CAMPBELL

Ms. Campbell said the CRA had free trolleys from Summerlin and amazing statistics. She would like to see them push for that again. She would recommend the moderate infill and the free trolleys and also the free shuttle. Ms. Cereceda said she agrees, but the council has voted against subsidizing the trolleys. They said we did not need to pay people to come to our beach or give them a free ride. But the plan did work. The trolleys were overflowing. Mr. Hughes asked how much it cost. Ms. Cereceda said it was not astronomical. Ms. Smith said the idea caught on almost immediately and there were about 500,000 riders.

D JEAN MATTHEW

Ms. Matthew has a concern with the wholeness of the island. She would ask when they are considering the grand plan, to consider it with the north end and south end in mind. There are aspects which might potentially further divide the north end of the island from the south. Don't consider a vision that will impact the psychology of an intact island. Ms. Smith asked if the concern was that we are creating a more desirable area which then makes the other areas less desirable? Ms. Matthew said that was part of it. This will be something that will be wonderful but it will divide the island in some way. Mr. Spikowski said the plan, from the town's point of view, is that it has to be economically self-supporting. Financing will be from TIFs and grant funding and special assessments, but it must be self-supporting. In an early workshop they looked at the entire island. In the Comp Plan they identified areas where they intend to seek change and others where the goal is to keep the status quo. The north end is one of those areas for the status quo. The residents don't want to be part of Times Square and they don't want that noise and activity. It is like the Quiet Center. Mr. Dover said that there is a need for more sensitivity to the edges as it faces the residential neighborhoods. Crescent is a less intense area because of the residents on the other side of the canal. Similarly on the other side of San Carlos Blvd. they did not want to put parking on the water side to impact the neighbors across the water. Eventually you will want that area to be more green. Ms. Cereceda said it is a good point about the splintering or separating of the community. Someone will say, there goes the town again spending money in Times Square. If we adjust our attitude on the island and look at all these things as positive moves for the whole community, we wouldn't have that fractious feeling. Each part of the island can get better at what they are best at. Ms. Smith said she lived on the north end for 40 years and they looked at themselves as the exclusive and quiet end. She is not sure the north end would care much. She does not think they would feel what is being done here would be detrimental.

E EILEEN HUBER

Mrs. Huber said she likes the idea of the wide sidewalks, and maybe they could get rid of some of the towing signs, which would be wonderful. The south end is delighted to get their sidewalk, but a decent bike path the whole way would help, and then the whole island would really be connected.

The Council and LPA discussed the scenario of the moderate infill with surface parking. Mr. Huber asked if they had changed the McDonalds drive-thru. Mr. Spikowski said yes-- there were new buildings all the way around with removal of the part where Darlene's was. Generally you don't want drive-thru facilities in a pedestrian zone, but they don't want to put them out of business either, if that is essential to their business. Mr. Hughes noted that a parking garage could be used as a hurricane shelter, which would be a plus to the community. Mr. Van Duzer said it appears this is just an elaboration on the CRA plan, just a little prettier now. He hopes they won't be limited. We should not plan for 5 years down the road when we should be planning for 50 years down the road. He thinks we need the plan to become mandatory. You can stay exactly like you are, but if you want to make any improvements, you must be in the program. Mr. Reynolds said people should be strongly encouraged to go in the plan, but they should have an option. Most cities start with a five-year plan, then go to a 10 year plan, then 25 years. But you start with a 5-year plan. Mrs. Kaestner said she looks at it as a more user-friendly downtown area. If she goes to Pizza Hut, she has a parking place. If she goes to Winds, she can park. But if she wants to go to Winds then go to the Dairy Queen then go to Pizza Hut, she cannot. She would go down there more often if she knew she could park. In off-season there is not often that cooperation that Mr. Johnson was talking about. The downtown should be available to those of us that live here.

Mr. Mulholland recapped that Mr. Spikowski and Mr. Dover recommended the moderate infill with on-grade parking and the LPA and Council like that idea. The public suggested cooperation on parking, free trolley service, and bike paths. He felt that mandatory participation was the key word. If there is no objection from the LPA and Council, he would like to give those as directions to the planners.

Mr. Hughes said he thinks it should be stated that this does not include the overpass—they would like to try less costly solutions before considering the overpass.

Ms. Cereceda asked how the council would feel about looking into claiming the right of way now in order to promote shared parking in that area. The town would say that you can't use our right of way unless you share. Her second question is if it conflicts with our current overlay. Mr. Spikowski said that to go forward we need to make some changes to the overlay. One is making it mandatory, but also some technical changes particularly as to parking. There are some reduced parking requirements, but it still seems to say that it should be on your site and for your customers. That needs to be changed and coupled with a plan to create some of the public spaces. We need to meter the spaces. The places on Old San Carlos should be for high turnover (1-2 hour stay.) We need to do that in 1999. There is a problem with several spaces. Some parking spaces may be 80 or 90% public right of way, and the rest on private land. So you can't do something right away. Either you need to move the spaces totally on public property or you need to work out some cooperation. Ms. Smith said they have used the public right of way for years. Isn't there an adverse possession? Mr. Roosa said you have no problem claiming public property even if a private owner has been using it. They don't create any right by using it. The council makes a policy then must uniformly enforce it, or allow for a transition that is uniformly enforced. Some property owners are benefiting by the exclusive use of public property. That is unfair. But you don't want to close down the businesses overnight. You have to allow adjustment because they have been relying on it for years. Mr. Dover said the idea of transition is good. Don't jump into a policy change now while they are in the middle of a project. You are trying to build consensus. Start doing the sidewalk and landscaping and lighting so it makes sense to the public. Focus on getting the plan like you want it, approve it, then start implementing it. Look at the big picture now.

Mr. Spikowski talked about Lynn Hall improvements. Their plan does show more facilities in place of some of the parking, but that would take place at the same time that more parking is available somewhere else so there is no net loss. He also said that emergency operations people hate the plan of using a parking garage as a hurricane shelter. They do not want people to count on staying in it and face the possibility of being without water and services for days at a time.

VI ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Salfen
Recording secretary