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Southwest LRT Community Works Steering Committee

Meeting Notes

Thursday, September 15, 2011

1:30 - 3:00 pm

St. Louis Park City Hall

Meeting Attendees

Steering Committee Members & Alternates

Chair Gail Dorfman, Hennepin County Member

Vice-Chair Jim Hovland, City of Edina Member

Jan Callison, Hennepin County Member

Peter McLaughlin, Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority Member

Anne Mavity, City of St. Louis Park Member

Terry Schneider, City of Minnetonka Alternate

Kathy Nelson, City of Eden Prairie Member

Other Attendees

Katie Walker (Hennepin County), Patrick Conroy (Hennepin County), Adele Hall (Hennepin County), Carol Lezotte Anderson (Hennepin County), Chris Weyer (Metro Transit), Kathie Doty (KLD Consulting), Karin Berkholtz (City of Minneapolis), Karen Lyons (Metropolitan Council), Dick Miller (Minnehaha Creek Watershed District), Jeff Casale (Minnehaha Creek Watershed District), Caren Dewar (ULI Minnesota), Kersten Elverum (City of Hopkins), Julie Wischnack (City of Minnetonka), Kevin Locke (City of St. Louis Park), Meg McMonigal (City of St. Louis Park), Scott Brink (City of St. Louis Park), Kerri Pearce Ruch (Hennepin County), Janet Jeremiah (City of Eden Prairie), Randy Newton (City of Eden Prairie), Stacy McMahan (Cedar Lake Park Association), Edward Ferlauto (Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhood Association), Jeff Benson (URS Corporation), Art Higinbotham (Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhood Association), Mark Salzman (HNTB), Martin Green (Interested Resident)

I. Welcome & Introductions

Chair Gail Dorfman (Hennepin County Member) opened the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves. Committee members discussed the lack of members at the meeting and the overlap in members with the Corridor Management Committee, which met last week. Terry Schneider (Minnetonka Alternate) commented that perhaps there are project milestones to which the Steering Committee should match their agenda.

II. August 18, 2011, Meeting Minutes

Chair Dorfman (Hennepin County Member) asked for review and action on the minutes from the August 18, 2011 Steering Committee meeting. Jan Callison (Hennepin County Member) moved to approve the minutes; Jim Hovland (Edina Member) seconded this motion, and the minutes were approved on a voice vote.

III. Technical Implementation Committee Update

Julie Wischnack, City of Minnetonka, updated the Steering Committee on recent Technical Implementation Committee (TIC) items. The TIC has begun to explore a communications strategy, and heard presentations from Robin Caufman in the Central Corridor Project Office and Cara Lee in the Hennepin County Public Affairs office at the September meeting. The next step is to establish a framework that encompasses City and County expectations. This would include ideas for a centralized website. Louis Smith of Smith Partners presented to the TIC at the September meeting, as well, and reviewed his progress on researching and carrying out a strategy for engaging corporate interests in Southwest LRT Community Works. Ms. Wischnack noted that the TIC is excited about Mr. Smith's work, and that he will be presenting to the Steering Committee in October.

The TIC also heard a presentation from Katie Walker, Hennepin County, on the Interchange project, with which many of the suburban city staff were unfamiliar. Peter McLaughlin (HCRRRA Member) added some additional information about the Interchange, noting that it was prompted by the capacity issues due to higher-than-expected use of the LRT for Twins games, and the additional trains that will be in service once Central Corridor LRT opens. The Interchange project's goals are to provide additional platforms and queuing capacity, incite development in the neighborhood, and accommodate future lines, including Southwest LRT. The project is estimated to cost \$67 million, of which \$23 million has been committed. Other options for funding are being pursued; the goal is to be operational by 2014. The environmental review was recently completed, and staff has been working closely with the North Loop Neighborhood to consider bus, train, and bike connections as well. Terry Schneider (Minnetonka Alternate) commented that "The Interchange" does not aptly describe the place and should have a name that means what it is to consumers; interchange is usually a highway term.

Ms. Wischnack continued, noting that the TIC nominated Randy Newton from Eden Prairie as the Community Works representative to the Preliminary Engineering services proposal evaluation team, which will come before the Steering Committee shortly.

Chair Dorfman (Hennepin County Member) asked when the Transitional Station Area Action Plan proposals are due. Patrick Connoy, Hennepin County, answered that they are due on September 26, 2011.

Caren Dewar, ULI-Minnesota, commented that the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) workshop was well attended. Ms. Wischnack added that there were some very valuable pieces. Ms. Dewar noted that since DART has a one cent sales tax they do not have to ask the State for money. She also noted that DART has a Transit Oriented Development specialist on staff, whose job it is to connect with cities and developers. They also have a system for prioritizing development opportunities and noted that this reflects DART's seriousness about development and value capture. Ms. Dewar noted that ULI will follow up with further education on value capture and urged the Steering Committee to think about where and what they want to influence.

IV. Request for Appointment to the Engineering Services Evaluation Committee

Chris Weyer, Metro Transit, provided some information about the evaluation committee. The committee, which will consist of representatives from the Southwest Project Office, Metro Transit Operations, Mn/DOT, Hennepin County, and Community Works, will make a recommendation to the Corridor Management Committee, which will in turn recommend a consultant to the Metropolitan Council. Julie Wischnack, City of Minnetonka, noted that the TIC nominee to the evaluation committee is Randy Newton from Eden Prairie. Chair Dorfman (Hennepin County Member) commented that Mr. Newton is very familiar with the Southwest LRT project and has served the project in a technical capacity for many years. Jim Hovland (Edina Member) moved that Mr. Newton serve on the engineering services evaluation committee as the Community Works representative. Chair Dorfman (Hennepin County) seconded and the nomination was approved on a voice vote.

V. Southwest LRT Corridor Management Committee Report

Jan Callison, Hennepin County Member and Vice-Chair of the Corridor Management Committee (CMC), gave an update on the group. At their meeting September 7 the CMC heard updates on Preliminary Engineering, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and Community Works. There is a strong desire among the group to get the legislature on board with the project, and Metropolitan Council is working on adding Southwest LRT to the bonding tour. Freight rail and community and public involvement were also discussed.

VI. Southwest LRT Preliminary Engineering

Chris Weyer, Metro Transit, noted that now that the Southwest LRT project is in Preliminary Engineering (PE), the Metropolitan Council will begin to post key positions gradually, as needed. Now, staff is focused on upcoming meetings with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). Mr. Weyer commented that he sees FRA's early involvement as a good sign.

The DEIS is still at FTA with nothing new to report. Chair Dorfman (Hennepin County Member) commented that when the DEIS was submitted, freight rail and LRT were considered separate, but now they are together. Mr. Weyer commented that if the DEIS is delayed too long, it will tie up PE. Its release is dependent on what FTA is looking for content-wise. Hennepin County will need to respond to their comments, FTA then would respond to the changes, and after publication there are 45 days of comment. Chair Dorfman asked at what point we begin to have an issue with PE if the DEIS is not published. Mr. Weyer responded that without the DEIS, it would be difficult to wrap up PE, which is expected to take 18 to 24 months. Chair Dorfman commented that the public would not be satisfied with that either.

Jim Hovland (Edina Member) asked if, since freight rail and LRT are now linked, the design of the freight rail will be done during PE. Chair Dorfman noted that a freight design is covered in the Environmental Assessment Worksheet for the freight rail project. Mr. Weyer added that staff is still not certain what FTA meant by including freight rail in the LRT project, and will discuss with them what it means for the PE contract. Mr. Weyer continued, stating that the PE contract will be awarded in first quarter of 2012 and will last for the next five years. Later this year, project office staff will set up regular standing meetings with stakeholders, including Community Works. Peter McLaughlin (HCRRA Member) asked if there is language in the engineering services contract regarding integration with Community Works. Mr. Weyer said that he would check, but was fairly certain there is.

Chair Dorfman asked if the Metropolitan Council will issue a separate contract for the Final Environmental Impact Statement. Mr. Weyer said yes, they will. Chair Dorfman noted that these are very large contracts with much interest and asked how Steering Committee members should respond to calls about the contracts. Mr. Weyer advised avoiding these conversations, as the Metropolitan Council makes every effort to be fair. Metropolitan Council will not give out the names of the people on the evaluation panel, and panel members must sign confidentiality forms. The evaluation team for the FEIS contract will be separate and different.

Anne Mavity (St. Louis Park Member) asked how the MN & S Freight upgrade is going to occur and who will lead it. The City of St. Louis Park is interested in working on this issue and does not want to delay the LRT project. Peter McLaughlin (HCRRA Member) commented that the City of St. Louis Park's legal challenge to the Environmental Assessment Worksheet does not move either project forward. Ms. Mavity responded that the City would like to discuss this further, and added that Hennepin County has said that the EAW is inadequate as well. Chair Dorfman responded that Hennepin County does not think that the EW is inadequate, but does think that there is room for discussion on other improvements. Chair Dorfman added that project partners need to discuss this issue with the FTA and how it fits into the LRT project to understand what they meant in their PE approval letter. Ms. Mavity noted that the City of St. Louis Park would like to begin solving the

freight rail issue and have requested to meet with Hennepin County. Mr. McLaughlin responded that Hennepin County is not interested in discussing under the threat of lawsuit, and the City of St. Louis Park should look at the cause for delay. Ms. Mavity responded that the suit is directed toward Mn/DOT, not Hennepin County. Mr. McLaughlin said that the lawsuit is a challenge to moving forward with a county project, so it is a delay to Hennepin County. Chair Dorfman noted that the reason FTA included freight in their letter is that they're not seeing any movement on the issue. Mr. McLaughlin asked if there is a change in the LRT project schedule. Mr. Weyer said yes, he believes that the FTA's project management oversight committee (PMOC) is recommending a longer timeline. This will be reviewed with them in upcoming meetings and adjusted if necessary. Chair Dorfman commented that FTA says the schedule is aggressive. Mr. Weyer noted that FTA always says that our region's project schedules are aggressive.

VII. Legislative Discussion/Strategy

Chair Dorfman (Hennepin County Member) noted that Bill Schreiber, Messerli and Kramer, was unable to attend today's meeting, but that the Steering Committee needs to devise a strategy for the next legislative session. Peter McLaughlin (HCRRA Member) added that the Steering Committee and other Southwest LRT advocates need to keep language that bans projects from creeping into bills and need to know the cash flow expectations and authorization needs of FTA; do we know this yet? Chris Weyer, Metro Transit, responded that FTA will require all local funds to be lined up before Final Design begins. If the local funds are not committed by 2013, the project will be delayed. Chair Dorfman noted that the state will contribute \$125 million to the project overall, and a \$25 million dollar request will be made in the 2012 session. Jan Callison (Hennepin County Member) asked if Steering Committee members can be part of a broader legislative strategy and asked staff to follow up on who the Steering Committee should coordinate with and how they will proceed. Kathy Nelson (Eden Prairie Member) commented that at a recent lunch in Eden Prairie Governor Dayton was asked about funding for Southwest LRT. The Governor responded that he would have a difficult time doing anything about the funding if the house and senate chairs stay where they are on the issue.

Chair Dorfman asked what the legislative strategy was with Central Corridor. Mr. Weyer responded that he was not as involved with that part of the project and would have to defer to Mark Fuhrmann, Director of New Starts Rail Projects at Metro Transit, who is not in attendance at today's meeting. Mr. McLaughlin said that Metropolitan Council led the legislative strategy and effort, and the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB), sponsor counties, and municipalities advocated. Messerli and Kramer represent all of these entities. In the case of Southwest, the Steering Committee can be used as a source of intelligence and contacts, but should be part of the greater initiative and should not have an independent lobbying role. Ms. Nelson noted that it is important to have a wide range of interests advocating over a long time period. Ms. Callison asked who the contact people are at Metropolitan County and CTIB. Mr. Schneider commented that this seemed to be Messerli and Kramer's role. Ms. Callison requested confirmation of their role at the next Steering Committee meeting. Ms. Nelson noted that the group needs to know what they are asking for, and then Steering Committee members should advocate locally and at face-to-face meetings at the legislature. Chair Dorfman added that there is a lot of value in mayors and council members talking to legislators about the economic development potential in the corridor. Mr. McLaughlin commented that another goal will be to get the Governor to talk about Southwest as part of his economic development plan so that he's talking about it all over the state. This will likely be communicated in the next few weeks by Metropolitan Council Chair Susan Haigh, but if anyone else has the ear of the administration, this message should be echoed.

Jim Hovland (Edina Member) asked if Senator Han was the only member of the Southwest delegation that opposes the project. Ms. Nelson responded that he is the only one in the senate delegation, but that the house has some members that are not in favor, as well.

VIII. Membership

Kathy Nelson (Eden Prairie Member) began the discussion by commenting that the group needs to consider Shakopee as a member. Chair Dorfman (Hennepin County Member) noted that the Steering Committee needs a structured way to discuss the matter. The group needs a close affiliation with business, but needs to figure out how to have them represented. Do we ask all chambers? Do we designate a certain number of seats? We need to start by reviewing options. How do we get input from people in the most optimal way? Do members need to pay? There are differences between members. Caren Dewar, ULI-Minnesota commented that it might be helpful to consider members in three groups: cities, businesses, and other organizations, and manage each group differently. Jan Callison (Hennepin County Member) noted that the group has a vision and that the group should consider potential members' ability to move the vision forward. Anne Mavity (St. Louis Park Member) asked if Shakopee has shown interest. Jim Hovland (Edina Member) commented that their mayor is interested in transit, but he does not know if the city would be interested in Southwest LRT Community Works. Ms. Nelson responded that with the new interchange on Highway 169, Shakopee is closer to the LRT line and they should have an interest. Chair Dorfman asked that the item be on the October Steering Committee agenda and that the Technical Implementation Committee make a recommendation and lay out criteria for membership.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05. The next Southwest LRT Community Works Steering Committee meeting will be held on Thursday, October 20, at 1:30 pm at the St. Louis Park City Hall.