MEETING MINUTES
PLAN COMMISSION
Wednesday, May 14, 2014
7:00 P.M.
Evanston Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, Council Chambers

Members Present: Scott Peters (Chair), Jim Ford, Colby Lewis, Terri Dubin, Richard Shure

Members Absent: Lenny Asaro, Andrew Pigozzi, Kwesi Steele, Carol Goddard,

Associate Members Present: Stuart Opdycke, David Galloway

Associate Members Absent: Seth Freeman

Staff Present: Damir Latinovic, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
                   Lorrie Pearson, Planning and Zoning Administrator
                   Mario Treto, Assistant City Attorney

Presiding Member: Scott Peters, Chairman

1. CALL TO ORDER / DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chairman Peters called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M and explained the general meeting procedure, schedule, agenda items, time limits on public testimony and opportunities for cross examination of witnesses. Chairman Peters concluded the opening statement by saying that the Plan Commission forwards a recommendation to the City Council which makes the final determination on any matters discussed by the Plan Commission.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: April 9, 2014

Commissioner Ford made a motion to approve the minutes as prepared. Commissioner Lewis seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the minutes were approved by voice call 5-0.

3. OLD BUSINESS
   A. MAIN STREET STATION 14PLND-0021
      TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD) PLAN AND STUDY

Mr. Damir Latinovic, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner for the City, provided an overview of the CTA and Metra Main Street Stations Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Plan. The objectives of the Study included: planning for the future redesign and improvements to the CTA Purple Line Main Street Station and Purple and Red Line modernization plan; strengthening the Metra/CTA customer transfer opportunity; enhancing the multimodal connectivity of the Main Street area, including bicycle,
pedestrian, and bus service to the rail stations; identifying public open space opportunities in the study area that can further enhance the desirability and livability of the neighborhood and studying the feasibility of providing for an elevated multi-purpose bicycle and pedestrian path between the Metra and CTA corridors. Mr. Latinovic noted the last objective is less detailed in the study, as it was determined to be too costly.

The study area is bound by Greenleaf Street on the North, Keeney Street to the South, Michigan Avenue on the East, and Ridge Avenue on the West. Approximately 64% of the study area is residential, with 5,700 residents per the 2012 Census. Public involvement has included three public meetings; one at the beginning, one part way through to share the findings and one at the end to summarize the Study recommendations. Stakeholders were identified (Regional Transportation Authority, CTA, Metra, Union Pacific Railroad, and City Staff), who also made up the Project Advisory Group and Technical Advisory Group to review and analyze drafts and provide comments to consultants. Drafts, updates and reports were shared on a public website created for the project.

Mr. Latinovic continued by showing the existing conditions of the study area and the proposed changes to the stations. Recommended improvements include: a plaza on the north side of service drive between the two stations with landscaping and bike parking; terraced seating on the Northeast corner of Custer and Washington Streets to view the Custer Street fair and a new sidewalk between Main Street and Washington Street, on the east side of Custer Street which requires narrowing of Custer Street. Additional improvements include: St. Paul Park improvements; access through the embankment of the CTA to improve the connection between the CTA and Metra stations; new auxiliary stairs for access to the CTA platform; moving the northbound bus stop from north of Main Street to south of Main Street; a new staircase at the southwest corner of Main and Custer for better commuter access; constructing a new CTA station entrance similar to the Morgan Street West Loop station; and expanding the CTA platform to accommodate eight cars.

Mr. Latinovic identified several potential short term projects for the City of Evanston related to the TOD study. These include: installing new way-finding signage through the station area and street intersections to direct the public and clarify the location of station entrances, bicycle parking, bus stops, short-term (kiss-and-ride) parking and Metra parking; installing curb bump-outs for bus stops in front of the CTA stations on Chicago Avenue; adding crosswalks to Chicago Avenue at the intersection with Washington Street with “yield to pedestrian” signage; relocating the northbound bus stop at Chicago Avenue and Main Street from north of the intersection (far side) to the south side of the intersection (near side); increasing pedestrian signal timing from five to seven seconds at the intersection of Chicago Avenue and Main Street; installing a total of 15 to 22 new bike racks near the station entrances; installing a stop sign and crosswalk at the intersection of Main Street and Custer Avenue (where currently there is not one); implementing TOD parking requirements within the study area; and implementing zoning regulations to encourage retail use on ground floors within the study area. This last recommendation is already in works and is being presented at the Zoning Committee meeting on May 21, 2014.

Long term projects that the City could do include: installing unified streetscape improvements (landscaping, street lighting, banners on light poles) to create a unique identity for the area; constructing St. Paul Park improvements; constructing a new
landscape plaza with bicycle parking on the north side of the service drive between the CTA and Metra Stations—both of which would require coordination with CTA and Metra. Other potential long term City projects are: constructing the sidewalk along the east side of Custer Avenue between Main Street and Chicago Avenue, requiring coordination with Metra’s reconstruction of the retaining wall embankment on the east side of Custer Street; and implementing a parking management plan in the area through public/private partnership, as there is significant parking shortages in the neighborhood.

Implementation techniques outlined in the study include federal grants and bonds. The RTA would apply for these with local matches. Locally, some implementation options include establishment of a special service area (SSA), tax increment financing, naming rights, private sector contributions (such as public benefits from planned developments), and planning and zoning changes. The planning work may include a new Comprehensive Plan, while changes to the zoning regulations could include new TOD area parking requirements and revising the list of permitted uses within the study area to encourage retail establishments along Main Street and Chicago Avenue corridors.

Mr. Latinovic concluded by stating that staff recommends the Plan Commission make a positive recommendation to the City Council regarding the Main Street Station TOD Study.

Questions for the consultant, Tom Coleman, followed the summary. Commissioner Shure asked about the moving of the north side bus stop of Chicago Avenue and Main Street to the south side, wondering if it was originally moved to facilitate right hand turns onto Main Street. Mr. Coleman responded that CTA generally prefers the far side bus stop arrangement, which could be in part to alleviate traffic congestion. Commissioner Shure followed up with a question about Purple Line station washrooms. Mr. Coleman noted that CTA has been phasing out public washrooms due to the large amount of maintenance required. At the moment, the proposed design within the Study only includes the provision for staff restroom facilities. However, the City of Evanston could partner with CTA to provide public restrooms, as there is sufficient space to do so.

Commissioner Ford expressed doubt about the proposed underpass under the CTA embankment and asked for clarification since one has to go to Main Street or Washington Street in order to access the Metra platform after de-boarding from CTA. Furthermore, he asked if this design saves any steps or time when transferring. Mr. Coleman responded that with the new CTA standards, a platform of this size requires exits at both ends of the platform with fare control in the middle. The proposal with the underpass was created to be compliant with ADA requirements as well as to allow for more open space and transparency to Main Street. Mr. Latinovic noted that all three of the initial design proposals were taken to the public and stakeholders (including CTA and Metra) and that this option was preferred.

Chairman Peters brought up comments from the previous meeting about transfers between the two lines at Davis Street. He expressed concern about the cost of the underpass to the City not being worthwhile. Furthermore, he approves the study, public outreach, and several of the recommended improvements. However, he thinks that the underpass tunnel, TOD parking requirements, transfers between the two lines, a new Comprehensive Plan, and changes in retail uses recommendations require more study. These changes perhaps are better suited for a separate study rather than part of this
project. Commissioner Ford followed with a question regarding the list of recommendations requiring further study as being part of the new Comprehensive Plan discussion or a second phase of the TOD study. Chairman Peters responded that some could be a part of the new Comprehensive Plan, some may be part of a second phase of the TOD study, and some could be done by staff. Mr. Latinovic clarified that the Study was done as a vision, and as previously discussed, the Study calls for further more detailed studies for some recommendations. Furthermore, any large-scale improvements to the stations will require separate studies in order to apply for federal funding.

The public in attendance was invited to partake in the discussion with no comments.

Commissioner Opdycke commended features of the plan, but he also expressed concern about the tunnel and elevators and agreed that the study should be recommended to Council noting that several recommendations require more studies. Mr. Coleman reiterated that of the concepts developed by CTA and reviewed by CTA's architect, this vision was preferred. As the Purple and Red Line modernization project progresses, further studies will have to take place regarding the reconstruction of the Main Street Station. Chairman Peters also noted that there is a debate about doing reconstruction in a way to avoid ADA requirements, to which Mr. Coleman confirmed.

There being no further discussion, Chairman Peters invited a motion.

Commissioner Ford stated he is prepared to make a positive recommendation about would prefer if the Chairman Peters could summarize the comments previously made into a motion format.

Chairman Peters noted that the Study was well done and moves in a good direction and recommended that the study be forwarded to City Council with the following suggestions. The provisions related to way-finding signage, curb bump outs, crosswalks, the relocated bus stop, changes to pedestrian signal timing, and bike racks are warranted and consistent with recommendations in the Study. However, further studies are required by either staff or the consultants for the parking requirements in the study area, TOD aspects of the study area, easy access of transfer between Metra and CTA stations, changes in permitted retail uses, and updates to the Comprehensive Plan.

Chairman Ford made a motion to approve the Study with comments from Chairman Peters.

Commissioner Dubin seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken and the motion was approved by voice call 5-0.

4. NEW BUSINESS

A. NONE

5. ADJOURNMENT
There being no further discussion, Commissioner Lewis motioned to adjourn the meeting, and Chairman Peters seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Damir Latinovic
Neighborhood and Land Use Planner
Community Development Department