

NASHUA CITY PLANNING BOARD
May 20, 2004

A public hearing of the Nashua City Planning Board was held on Thursday, April 20, 2004 at 6:00 PM in the Auditorium at City Hall for the presentation of the East Hollis Street Area Plan.

Bette Lasky, Chair conducted the meeting.

Members present were: Bette Lasky, Chair
 Mike Lowe, Mayor's Representative
 Ald. Richard Larose
 Ald. Kathryn Vitale
 Steve Farkas
 Hugh Moran

Also present: Kathy Hersh, Community Dev. Director
 Roger Houston, Planning Director
 Mike Yeomans, Deputy Planning Manager
 Karen Berchtold, Long Range Planner

Mrs. Lasky said they are here for the public hearing for review of the East Hollis Street Area Plan to be approved as an element of the City of Nashua Master Plan.

She said the East Hollis Street Area Plan shall serve to set the overall goals, policies, programs and implementation strategy for development of the area. These include land use, transportation, public improvements, community facilities, and economic development.

She said the boundaries of the East Hollis Street area are defined as that land area west to east from Spruce Street to the Merrimack River and north to south from the Nashua River to Bowers Street.

Mrs. Lasky said this plan is the culmination of a seven-month planning process that took place from April 2003 through October 2003. The process included monthly steering committee meetings and three public meetings with area residents and business owners. The first public hearing for this plan was held on February 5, 2004. Twelve people spoke in opposition to the plan. The Planning Board members noted particular concern regarding the long-term vision proposal. The Planning Board directed the staff to compile, review, and address all comments.

She said on March 4 the Planning Board conducted a workshop to review the comments and staff proposed changes. All proposed changes have been incorporated into the plan that is before them tonight.

She said the major change proposed is to move the "Vision for Tomorrow" section out of Volume 1 and into the Appendix. This means that those concepts are documented as alternatives that were considered in the process, but they are not planned recommendations. She said other changes included correction of factual errors, clarification of planned recommendations, and corrections to transportation recommendations diagram.

She turned the hearing over to Karen Berchtold, the Project Manager for the plan.

Mrs. Berchtold said she had one clarification to make in response to some questions that she has received about why there are two volumes to the report. Basically Volume #1 is the planned recommendations step by step of what is required to do the plan with an implementation plan as a guide. Volume #2 is basically supporting information. It has some of the research and data. It has a transportation diagram that they would use to implement those recommendations. It has guidelines for developing a mixed-use district and other basic material. It has some of the more major proposals that were reviewed basically recorded as alternatives that the committee reviewed and that were presented at workshops. She said they needed to break it up in order to have a more streamlined document because it is in color and has diagrams.

Mrs. Lasky said they will now go to comments. She said first they will hear for those wishing to speak in opposition or with concern to this plan. They should come to the microphone and state their name and address for the record. This would also be the time to ask any questions they may still have regarding the plan. She will then ask for testimony for anyone wishing to speak in favor of the plan or if there are any general comments to make.

SPEAKING IN OPPOSITION OR WITH CONCERN

Thomas Levesque, Thomas Barbershop, 144 East Hollis Street. Mr. Levesque said he still has some concerns. One of them is the traffic pattern that is proposed with multiple lanes on East Hollis Street towards the Hudson Bridge. He said until something is implemented in Hudson it would be foolish to make any changes in the traffic flow on East Hollis Street. He said he is within hundreds of feet of the bridge and nothing flows across the bridge no matter how many cars there are when the traffic is jammed up in the late afternoon.

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He said the parking is a major issue for a lot of them. He has a small parking lot with his business and he is constantly fighting with people who are using his parking lot when he needs it for his customers. If they take away the parking requirements for additional apartments or additional businesses he can see his problem escalating as every other business would have the same problem.

Vic Dossi 39 Bridge Street. Mr. Dossi said the last time they came to a meeting on this issue the Board recommended another public meeting and they are not having it.

Mrs. Lasky said this is the public meeting. The comments and concerns that were made at the last meeting were gone over and they have tried to incorporate them into the plan. This is now the public hearing for people to comment on this plan.

Mr. Dossi said he had a problem with the appendix. The document shows the appendix is part of the document. In the appendix are things he never saw before and things that are wrong. One of the things is the process that was used to choose a railroad station site. He said there is a point system that he has never seen before.

He said as far as he is concerned as long as the appendix is part of the document he cannot accept it because the "Vision of Tomorrow" is in there and everybody else has objected to it, including himself. He feels that once the Board accepts the document, it is going to become the law and be used for future plans of the City.

Mrs. Lasky said the appendix is part of the record as to what was done by the committee. It does not mean that it is going to be voted on as part of the Master Plan for the East Hollis Street Area. She asked Mr. Houston if she was correct in making this statement.

Roger Houston. Mr. Houston said he believes she is correct. He said an appendix is where you put back-up data and technical information. That is where you normally put information that is not usually adopted as a part of the official plan. The plan with its goals, objectives, and recommendations do that for the Board.

Mr. Dossi said the appendix is on the same page as the other item. It's part of the document. If the document is being approved, the appendix is being approved. That is the way he sees it.

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Mrs. Lasky said more than likely when the motion is made they will make it clear that the appendix is not part of the plan that is being approved, but is being kept in the document so as to be a record for future planners.

Mr. Dossi said he guesses that one of the main reasons for the plan is to beautify the area. For anyone who has been through the area and through Nashua in general, they have probably seen graffiti all over the place on brand new buildings. He said this is something that should be taken into consideration to protect what has been done. Otherwise, it defeats the purpose. He has called the Police four times this year for graffiti on his building.

Nancy Gorsica, Corriveau Routhier. Ms. Gorsica said on Page 47, which is not the appendix, it still shows what is supposed to be in the appendix. Until this is removed she will object to the plan.

Mrs. Berchtold had some comments, but they could not be heard as she was away from a microphone.

Mrs. Lasky said that if it is intended to be in the appendix that is where it will end up. Whatever the part is that is not consistent with what is in the plan should be in the appendix.

Ms. Gorsica said one of the criteria for the neighborhood train station is visibility. If it's supposed to be a neighborhood train station, isn't it better to have it visible where more traffic is encouraged. She said their business will still be open for after hours parking if that solves anybody's problems.

She said she would really like to see this get going if the appendix is as it's supposed to be.

SPEAKING IN FAVOR

Christopher Eckler. Mr. Eckler said he owns numerous properties in the area of the plan. He said he thinks it's a beautiful plan and he is glad the City is going to improve the area. He found some small conflicts in the plan that he is sure can be cleared up during the implementation of the plan.

He said he had some comments about what Victor and Nancy mentioned. Concerning the streets on Page 47 it says "potential." It doesn't say that is going to happen. There are a lot of potential streets that could happen.

He said he is in favor of the train station. There are two or three good places for the train station and Triangle Pacific is as good as any. Hopefully it can be implemented there without knocking out the existing business if the building can be shared.

He said anything that lined up with Temple Street or a new street with Denton Street would help traveling into the train station. A new street connecting Bridge Street & Temple Street or Bridge Street & East Hollis Street will help a lot. He referred the Board to Appendix I "Vision for Tomorrow" on Page 7. He said it states the following plan alternatives were reviewed by the steering committee and the proposals involved more substantial infrastructure investment and/or land use change. The one on Page 7 would require the least investment and least infrastructure. It may not be quite as pretty as some of the other plans, but it should get a little bit more attention other than shown as a plan alternative.

Steve Bonnette. Mr. Bonnette said he owns some property on Marshall Street, Kehoe Avenue, and also on Bridge Street where the two rivers come together in the corner.

He said the plan talks about a mixed-use overlay. He asked how this affects property owners and if it happens in conjunction with the passage of the plan or if it is something for the future. If it isn't done right away it puts them in limbo. He has industrial zoning and it might possibly be residential zoning. He asked where he is in between. They won't let him do anything industrial and they won't let him do anything residential. He needs to know the status of his property and what he can do with it at any given time.

He said he thinks the whole idea of the rail station is a wonderful idea in theory. He thinks if he was a private entrepreneur and he came to the Board with a piece of property that's going to generate this many people and tell them that he wasn't going to furnish any parking he'd be laughed right out of the room. That's the issue with this. To say that you are going to make it pedestrian friendly does not mean that only pedestrians are going to use it. Along this same line, in another part of the plan they want to start developing on street parking because of the parking problems. If there is on street parking overnight they are going to end up with cars that are unregistered and "whatever" parked there 24/7. This is going to cause more problems and they are already congested in this area. Some of the problems haven't been well thought out

as to what they are going to do when this all happens. He said they can't have all the cars parked on the street and not furnish any parking for the railroad station. On a February morning when it's ten below zero people are going to drive their cars to that railroad station. It's not that the railroad station is pedestrian friendly, it's that New England is not.

Gene Harrington, Nashua Farmer's Exchange, Bridge Street. Mr. Harrington said he has been here for a few years. He said in general he is in favor of the plan. For years he has looked at the area and said it didn't fit with many planning concepts because it developed slowly over the years before Planning really existed. There is a co-mingling of things like residential, commercial, and industrial. When cars came in and they put roads through it jammed everything up. There are a couple of problems with the plan. As everybody else has said, parking is one. On Page 27 of the plan it recommends maximum number of parking spaces. This may be a concept that should be looked at, but not at the numbers that are in the plan. About 3/4 of the way down the page it says no more than one space per residential unit. If it's a two-bedroom unit and there are two single people in it, they are probably both going to have a car, but there will only be one parking space for it. It continues on and states 3 spaces per 1,000 square feet of retail. He said their facility has only 1,800 square feet of retail space and they have six employees. If they dedicate a space for handicap parking, they are down to 5 spaces. Anybody who tries to come to their facility at this time of year knows how tight their parking is now, even though they have many more spaces than that available. He believes these numbers are rather low if they are going to be maximums.

He said as an overlay district, what happens with building setbacks and buffer spaces. He said he isn't familiar with the zoning ordinance to know whether buffer spaces are required when there is residential abutting commercial property or residential abutting an industrial property. When there is going to be more co-mingling of residential with industrial and commercial he can see that this could be a problem.

Mrs. Lasky said the ordinance does not require a buffer.

Mr. Harrington said on Page 34 they talk about trying to come up with a unique identity for the area and they are trying to figure out a name for it. He said years ago he found some old railroad paperwork from the 1870s in their building that referred to it as

Nashua Junction. At that time there was something like five railroads meeting in that area. It's also the junction of two rivers, and a couple of major streets.

Chris Eckler. Mr. Eckler said with reference to the drawing in Appendix I, Page 7, one advantage he saw in having the street as close to the railroad tracks as possible will help reduce any traffic jams. The farther the connecting streets get away from the railroad track, it's going to be that many cars in line every time the trains go by.

Thomas Levesque. Mr. Levesque said that Victor made a point about Belknap Street and that being utilized as a cross over. That was done once before with a traffic light being installed on the corner of E. Hollis and Belknap. It didn't work. He said Mr. Larose may remember this.

He said he thinks the best place for the train station is still at the Ingersoll-Rand plant. When Walter Barker ran that plant many years ago he had over 1200 employees and they were running 24 hours a day - three shifts. Arlington Street as well as Burke Street were major arterial roads in and out of the plant and he still thinks this is the best location for a train station. Parking is more than adequate and there are plenty of streets to get to it. He thinks the City would be better served with the one station in that one location.

Mrs. Berchtold said regarding the concerns for traffic in Hudson, they completely agree that's where some major problems lie. They have to defer to NRPC (Nashua Regional Planning Commission) which is taking the lead in this regard.

Ald. Larose asked what happened to the project DOT was going to do in Hudson from Highland Street. They were supposed to fix that area up.

Mrs. Berchtold said she doesn't know, but they can follow up on this information.

She said regarding the parking, the staff has agreed that a great deal of work would have to be done on this issue at the implementation stage when they are looking at the zoning. You would have the zoning overlay with the parking requirements. They know it would operate very differently from the overlay district in the downtown because they don't have the parking resources that are

in the downtown. Any reduction in the requirements would have to be phased and would go in association with parking improvements if there was on-street parking or other changes that were made or if there was a transit station. She said they recognize they function very differently from some of the model communities the consultant held up. She said they don't want to fail. She said they need to do their own parking study to start this off.

She addressed Mr. Dossi's comments about the appendix. She said there is a piece that was handed out to the steering committee members. It took the members through a process of looking at station sites and how to rank them. It was handed out so it would help committee members look at the different station sites. That is why it is included. There is probably much more detail there than they actually used on the steering committee.

She said the comment made by Nancy Gorsica about the visibility of the station as a criteria was emphasized by several different **unintelligible**, particularly the Police Department.

She said in terms of how a mixed overlay would work and property owner's need to know how they can develop their property, a mixed use zone would go through a public hearing process with the Planning Board and with the Alderman. It would be a policy decision. They would need to work with the property owners to understand how the process would work for them. Clearly until that happened, they can still develop industrial.

She said the comment about whether buffers should be required in a mixed-use district is a good one. They addressed how they create a mixed-use district where you could have new residential in proximity to existing industrial land. She said the consultant dealt with that by actually creating some base mixed use zones where you would not have industrial. That would help to stabilize those properties for non-industrial uses.

She commented that she liked the name "Nashua Junction."

Nancy Gorsica. Ms. Gorsica said when this study started there was something going on in the courts on whether or not they could use gasoline tax to fund this project. The truckers won and the railroad station lost. She asked Ald. Larose if this was going to slow down the process drastically or if the funds are available from other sources.

Ald. Larose said he couldn't answer this question. He said he knows the Mayor is working on trying to get some type of funding.

Kathy Hersh, Community Development Director. Mrs. Hersh said she can't answer this any better than Ald. Larose. She said both the Board of Alderman, the Mayor, and the citizens have clearly stated their support for commuter rail. She said they are working very diligently to find other ways to fund it. She said they have some creative ideas that they are looking at and are pursuing. They are meeting with DOT tomorrow on several issues, this being one of them. It's a high priority from her standpoint and from the City's standpoint.

Mr. Farkas said this should be made clear that this is as it relates to the commuter rail station, not the overall plan.

Mrs. Hersh agreed. Commuter rail itself obviously has to start in Lowell and come up to New Hampshire before it gets to the East Hollis Street area. There is probably a good amount of time before they see it in this area.

She thanked everyone who worked on this plan. There was a tremendous amount of participation by the people that live and work and own businesses in this area. Everyone on the staff has found it very rewarding. She looks forward in continuing to work with them to implement this plan.

She said one of the things they talked about is that because this is an area that is changing and things are going to happen in this area that they may not have predicted, they believe it's important to go back and look at the area again, working with the people that live and work and own businesses in this area in about five years and then do this again. Some plans, like the Downtown Master Plan, can be a ten-year plan because the area is pretty stable and consistent and you have a pretty good idea of where it's going to go. This area is a dynamic area and may need another look in five years time.

Mrs. Lasky said in general that is what a Master Plan is. It is the vision as it is at this moment. It does not mean that anything that is in it has to be. It's a guideline and hopefully will be used. She believes most of the ideas in the plan are viable and good for the area.

Ald. Larose said overall the plan is a good one. He said the first time he read it the first thing that jumped out at him was the emphasis on the railroad station. He said he thought there was too much emphasis on a neighborhood railroad station. If you look at the area that it would serve as a neighborhood railroad station, those people do not work in Boston. It's not that kind of a neighborhood. That's one of the problems with commuter rail; it's only geared for people who work in Boston. He said a railroad station makes some sense here, but they have to realize that there has to be a lot more parking than what the consultant wanted. The emphasis is on very little parking and people are going to walk there. There should be a little more emphasis on parking because if someone lives in Hudson or Litchfield or in the north end of Nashua and work in Boston they will much rather go to the Crown Street area to take a train than go all the way down to south Nashua.

He said the parking requirements that are being asked for implementation of developments is much too small. This is not the 1950s when people started to buy cars. He was brought up in the Crown Hill area and on their street all the houses were duplexes and every one of them had a two-car garage. If you walk throughout that area he thinks they will find that if it's a single-family home there will be a one-car garage and if it's a duplex there will be a two-car garage. In those days the people who lived in the Crown Hill area either took the bus to work or walked to work. He said when he was young there were very few cars parked in those areas. He referred to Henry Hanger and said there is no place to park.

His third area of observation is ADA compliance. He said they have to make their sidewalks ADA compliant. When you are at the corner of Main & Allds Street where the Hunt Community is, the traffic pole is right in the middle of the sidewalk. There is a bollard right at the edge, he assumes so that if a vehicle should come in that direction it would hit the bollard first. If you are an elderly person in a wheelchair or using a walker, or a young mother pushing a carriage, you have to go out into the street. The same thing happens in front of Henry Hanger. The light pole is right in the middle of the sidewalk and the equipment that is needed to make it work are also right in the middle of the sidewalk. You have to walk around it. This makes no sense.

He said he hopes that the people who look at the plans and the people who are constructing these things take a good look and make sure that it is ADA compliant.

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He said he likes some of the ideas about the drawings on the Henry Hanger building and the J.F. McElwan on Temple Street. With the St. Casimir project that looks like its going to come to fruition will be one of the catalysts for something to happen and the new project on Harbor Avenue (Meridian) could also be another catalyst to make things happen.

Mr. Houston said there were a lot of very good comments tonight. It has been a good process. He said this plan would help not only the private sector, but also the public sector with the vision in the future and the short term to help improve this neighborhood.

He said one of the things the Board needs to do is to adjourn the public hearing and then the Board can take this up under "Other Business" to adopt it if they want to.

Ald. Larose said he's not sure that he wants to vote on this tonight. He said he made some statements tonight about the parking.

Mrs. Lasky said they could work this out later. She thanked everyone, including the neighbors in the neighborhood, for their participation.

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Lasky called the public hearing closed at 7:05PM.

APPROVED: _____
Bette Lasky, Chair - Nashua City Planning Board

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Taped Hearing
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