

Borough of Tenafly

MAYOR AND COUNCIL

SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

MINUTES

TUESDAY, JUNE 7, 2012

The meeting was called to order at 7:45 P.M. with the reading of the Open Public Meetings Act statement by Mayor Rustin.

Present: Mayor Peter S. Rustin

Council members: Anthony Barzelatto (arrived at 8:30 p.m.),
Barry Honig (arrived at 8:11 p.m.),
Martha Kerge, Nadia LaMastra, Mark Zinna

Borough Administrator: Jewel Thompson-Chin

Chief of Police: Michael Bruno

BID Board: Norman Dorf, President

Beth Lippmann, Director

Transportation Committee: Howard Seiden, Chair

Joseph McDermott, Member

Chamber of Commerce: Bob Kutik, President

Absent: Council member: Jon Warms

Presentation by Mark W. Gordon of Urbana Consulting, LLC and John M. McCormack, PE, PTOE of Sam Schwartz Engineering.

Mayor Rustin explained that once the Light Rail moved from the front burner to the side burner, the Council decided to use their resources in Mark Gordon and his firm to look at the downtown district while taking into consideration the input of the BID, Police Department, Chamber of Commerce, and Council. He advised that Mark Gordon of Urbana Consulting, LLC and John McCormack of Sam Schwartz Engineering will be presenting on this project this evening.

Mark Gordon advised that John McCormack, his colleague from Sam Schwartz Engineering, had collaborated on the Smith School/Downey Drive Study. He explained that they began with one task element relating to the Northern Branch Line, but as the Borough has opposed the Light Rail, the two tasks have now been separated. He explained that the purpose of this meeting is to receive input from the business community as well as inform the public of the proposed physical improvements to the downtown area.

John McCormack stated that when he came and looked at the downtown to determine the ability to accommodate the Light Rail, he took note of the travel pattern and the fact that secondary roadways such as Highwood and Washington are accommodating high traffic patterns while Jay Street is very lightly traveled. He expressed his opinion that the traffic patterns could be the reason that the downtown feels disjointed and the fact that the crosswalks are very long can be the reason that they are not working. He advised that they are looking to create a different space, with a lot of community and pedestrian-friendly areas to change the character of the downtown. Mr. McCormack advised that this project is to be divided into three phases. He explained that the first phase will focus on the downtown core intersections and the idea will be to calm traffic, create a sense of place, improve the pedestrian experience, and minimize traffic congestion. Phase I will entail creating "Plaza 1" and "Plaza 2" and he explained the steps that they plan to take in order to create each plaza. He then reviewed Phase II which proposes to improve the northern sector intersections by separating "to" traffic from "through" traffic by reducing the traffic at Hillside and Highwood Avenues. He described the steps in Phase III which will improve the southern sector intersections. These steps include realigning the intersection of Clinton Avenue and County Road to make Clinton Avenue a through street, installing traffic signals at the intersections of Clinton Avenue and Dean/New Street and Clinton Avenue and Franklin Street/Railroad Avenue, and coordinating the operation and traffic flow of traffic signals within the downtown area along Clinton Avenue, County Road, and Riveredge Road. Mr. Gordon added that with the implementation of these phases, he believes that it will bring the downtown more together, make it easier for shoppers to reach their destinations, and will strengthen the business district.

Chief Michael Bruno commented that he went on a field visit with Mr. McCormack and Mr. Gordon and looked at the proposed changes. He advised that he opposed some initial ideas strongly, but they managed to work through their disagreements and came up with the plan that is before the Council tonight. He expressed his opinion that the phasing will be the most important aspect to allow for a learning curve. He believes that these changes will make traffic smoother and adding a pedestrian plaza will make the downtown more pedestrian-friendly.

With the increase of signalization, Mayor Rustin questioned whether they will be able to program the lights in such a way so as to improve, rather than impede, the flow of traffic. Mr. McCormack responded that County Road and Jay Street traffic are the lynchpin of this whole plan. He advised that the proximity of the intersections is a good thing as they can time the lights without having long spans in which vehicles can separate themselves. He explained that with certain intersections, the safety aspects simply warrant the traffic signal.

Mayor Rustin expressed his hope that agencies such as CSX or NJ Transit will not be roadblocks that cannot be overcome. He remarked that the rail tracks are in very bad shape and inquired whether Tenafly has the ability to improve the property or can CSX be held responsible for the improvements. Mr. McCormack advised that the benefit of having a narrow rail bed is that treatments can be applied to gloss over it. In terms of NJ Transit, Mr. Gordon commented that their real interest is to be certain that a bus can get around and he advised that they have completed simulations to ensure that buses will be able to make turns. He expressed his belief that because plans are designed to make bus pickup areas a more pleasant place, NJ Transit will be supportive. Chief Bruno stated that these changes will improve the line-of-sight from Jay Street to County Road. He also commented that, many times, buses are stopped on Piermont Road, normally going straight, with traffic lined up next to them. He advised that the proposed plans will eliminate that hazard and the additional lights with improved timing and sensors will help to increase safety.

C. LaMastra expressed her opinion that Central Avenue has some of the most hazardous intersections. Chief Bruno commented that one of the problems is where there is a single lane of traffic, motorists are creating dual lanes. He advised that he was given good ideas by Mr. Gordon and Mr. McCormack on how to narrow it back down to one lane, but the volume of traffic is still of concern. He expressed that he would like to see a traffic light installed there at some point, but is hoping that the improvements presented here this evening will help, especially the East Clinton to West Clinton transition being straightened out, as he believes this change will cause more people to travel that road.

C. Zinna praised Mr. Gordon and Mr. McCormack on their proposed improvements. He then questioned whether there has been contemplation of removing any off-street parking. Mr. McCormack responded that some spaces may be removed, but he advised that there may be two or three parking spaces that can be put into "Plaza 2" to compensate. Mr. Gordon advised that there will be a net increase in parking by closing off both Piermont Roads. C. Zinna then asked the anticipated time frame and cost for this project. Mr. McCormack estimated that it should take between a year and a half to two years to complete and he believes that the cost will be approximately \$3 million for all three phases. Mr. Gordon noted that by phasing the project sequentially, it can help with the capital plan and they will be able to look to the State for grants.

C. Kerge expressed her concern over the loss of parking spaces on Jay Street as some spaces were already lost when 7-11 went in. She also questioned whether there will be an issue with making the proposed changes to Clinton Avenue and Dean Drive as she believes that improvements to that intersection have been discussed in the past, and in order to do so, they would need to take land from property owners in that area. Mr. Gordon advised that the plan does not show the need to take any land. Mayor Rustin added that he has had conversations with the owners of the Clinton Inn and they would be willing to cooperate in order to make the intersection better.

C. Honig questioned how these plans might be impacted by the Light Rail and whether there is a contingency plan should it come into Tenafly. Mr. McCormack advised that the plans do not change and in fact, Phases II and III can actually be mitigation measures for the impact of the Light Rail. Chief Bruno commented that the increase in technology would make the downtown more readily adaptable to any changes in traffic patterns due to the Light Rail and they will have more latitude in mitigating.

C. Honig asked whether ADA compliancy measures have been incorporated into these plans such as curb cuts and audible traffic signals. Mr. McCormack responded that all curb cuts and ADA ramps will be state-of-the-art and the crosswalks will be shortened. He added that the newer traffic signals will have the newest technology and audible notifications can be added.

C. Honig then inquired about the initial plans that were presented to which Chief Bruno did not agree. Mr. McCormack advised that they had planned to close Washington Street as it has the

lowest utilized crossing and it would prevent vehicle traffic from bifurcating that area. He expressed his opinion that it would have created something dramatic in the center of downtown, but believes that the current plan does the same thing. Mr. Gordon commented that by keeping Washington Street open, it allows for direct access and also provides additional positives for the business community. Chief Bruno remarked that by closing the crossing, it would have caused people to have to go a roundabout way to get to Washington Street or would have stopped them from going there altogether.

C. Honig then asked about the ability to apply for grants. As Phase I is very pedestrian-oriented and pedestrian projects are receiving higher priority, Mr. Gordon expressed his belief that the possibility of receiving a grant will be better than if the project involved other types of road improvements. C. Honig then questioned what the next step will be. Mr. Gordon advised that that they would like to complete the study, incorporating everyone's comments and further advised that they have a meeting with the Transportation Committee on June 28, 2012. Mr. McCormack advised that his next step will be to contact NJ Transit about relocating the bus and then it will simply be a matter of choosing the aesthetics and the features.

Howard Seiden, Chair of the Transportation Committee, stated that NJ Transit is starting to look at smart technology for buses and questioned whether funding can be obtained through them if transponders were installed in the traffic lights. Mr. Gordon responded that they can explore that possibility when they meet with NJ Transit.

Norman Dorf, BID Board President, commented that it is a very good idea to reverse the stop sign at the intersection of Jay Street and Highwood Avenue. He asked whether consideration was given to putting in a traffic light or railroad crossing near Prospect Terrace in order to ease the intersection of Central. Chief Bruno responded that he looks at traffic like running water and if you plug one place, it will go somewhere else, but it is something that they can look at in the future.

Beth Lipmann, BID Director, advised that as a newcomer to Tenafly, she found it very confusing and believes that the proposed changes will alleviate a lot of those issues. She expressed her opinion that the bump outs are used very well. C. LaMastra questioned Ms. Lipmann as to whether there may be funding through Main Street for these improvements. Ms. Lipmann responded that she does not believe so, but there may be DOT and federal funding. Bob Kutik, Chamber of Commerce President, stated that one of the advantages of having a BID is there are DOT grants for BIDs to conduct traffic studies or traffic improvements. Mr. Gordon added that when the BID and governing body work together to obtain a grant, it shows solidarity and makes a difference.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Robin Brown, Marcotte Lane, Bergenfield, suggested relocating the leaf mulch piles and converting that area into parking. She recommended putting in a light at Hudson Avenue to allow for much safer access to this parking. She believes that this additional parking can generate long-term funds for Tenafly through parking permits.

Mark Feldman, 133 Lylewood Drive, expressed his opinion that this plan seems to reflect ideas that were presented two years ago when looking at the impact of the rail on downtown traffic and questioned why it is coming back on the agenda at this point in time. He asked that the governing body consider where Tenafly is in relation to the Master Plan and the issue of the BID. He believes that it is premature to place this item on the Borough's spending agenda as the BID still needs to determine what ails the downtown and the country is still in the middle of an economic downturn. He also expressed his opinion that the problem posed by Central Avenue is the more urgent issue to address.

Mayor Rustin responded that although he agrees with a lot of Mr. Feldman's points, he does not believe that anyone is insinuating that this project is imminent. He then stated that they would not do anything that the BID did not find beneficial or was not in compliance with the Master Plan. He advised that their hope was to have NJ Transit fund most of this project and he believes that the Light Rail coming into Tenafly is still possible.

Johanne Gambrill, Ravine Road, remarked that although a major theme of this project seems to be to allow pedestrians to browse, she does not believe that browsing take place all that much anymore. She suggested placing a poll on the website to get opinions and ideas from residents who tend to shop in the downtown.

Chief Bruno addressed Mr. Feldman's comments and advised that his characterization of the situation at Piermont Road and Central Avenue is not factually correct. He agreed that it has dramatically worsened and the Police Department is looking at it. He expressed his opinion that this plan will improve the flow of traffic and the safety of pedestrians and if the decision is to move forward, he believes that it will be a great improvement in people's ability to navigate.

Mr. Seiden expressed his belief that this plan ensures the safety of pedestrians and channels traffic in a different direction, taking those who don't want to be in the downtown out of it.

C. Honig asked whether this plan addresses Tenaflly and Riveredge Roads and if lighting is included in this plan. Mr. McCormack responded that they did not look at Tenaflly and Riveredge Roads. He advised that there are different types of fixtures, such as dual fixtures, with one light on the street and the other considered a pedestrian pole. He commented that the new traffic signals receive new lighting and any additional lighting can be added and would be a benefit. Mr. Gordon remarked that if the decision is to upgrade the lighting, it can be an opportunity to brand the town and a way to change the character.

ADJOURNMENT

As there was no further business to come before the Council, on a motion by C. Kerge, second by C. LaMastra, and unanimously carried, to adjourn this meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Lissette Aportela-Hernandez, MPA, RMC
Borough Clerk