

**GRAND JUNCTION PLANNING COMMISSION
JULY 26, 2011 MINUTES
6:00 p.m. to 8:09 p.m.**

The regularly scheduled Planning Commission hearing was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairman Wall. The public hearing was held in the City Hall Auditorium.

In attendance, representing the City Planning Commission, were Reggie Wall (Chair), Lynn Pavelka (Vice Chair), Pat Carlow, Ebe Eslami, Rob Burnett, Lyn Benoit, and Keith Leonard (Alternate). Commissioner Mark Abbott was absent.

In attendance, representing the City's Public Works and Planning Department – Planning Division, were Lisa Cox (Planning Manager) and Dave Thornton (Principal Planner).

Also present was Jamie Beard (Assistant City Attorney).

Lynn Singer was present to record the minutes.

There were 9 interested citizens present during the course of the hearing.

Announcements, Presentations, and/or Prescheduled Visitors

None.

Consent Agenda

1. Minutes of Previous Meetings

None available at this time.

Public Hearing Items

2. North Avenue West Corridor Plan – Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Request a recommendation of approval to City Council of a Comprehensive Plan Amendment to adopt the North Avenue West Corridor Plan as an element of the Comprehensive Plan.

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| FILE #: | CPA-2011-966 |
| PETITIONER: | City of Grand Junction |
| LOCATION: | North Avenue from 12th Street west to I-70 Business Loop |
| STAFF: | Dave Thornton |

Dave Thornton, Principal Planner, Public Works and Planning Department, made a PowerPoint presentation in support of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment for the North Avenue West Corridor Plan. He identified the planning project that staff had been

working on for a little over one year and was now before the Commission for a recommendation to City Council for adoption as an element to the Comprehensive Plan.

He provided some background and stated that this could be considered the second step of a three step process for the planning of North Avenue. In 2007 the North Avenue Corridor Plan, which started at 12th Street and headed east to the I-70 Business Loop, was a plan that was conducted and adopted. Mr. Thornton said that the area of North Avenue west of 12th Street was not included in that plan.

He pointed out that the third step was for an overlay zoning district that would implement the entire four-mile corridor. In order to implement the ideas, concepts and elements found in both the North Avenue Corridor Plan and the North Avenue West Corridor Plan, they needed to be followed up with an overlay zone to implement those plans and to help the community see what they could expect along the corridor.

Mr. Thornton stated that Mesa State played a big role in the corridor between Cannell Street and 12th Street. He went on to say that much of the subject area had been identified in the Comprehensive Plan as a Mixed Use Neighborhood Center. The Comprehensive Plan placed a lot of emphasis on creating more growth in the City Center area. That 10-square mile area went from 25 Road on the west to 29 Road on the east and from the Colorado River up to Patterson Road. He stated that it was an area identified for more growth, more intensity, more density and creating building heights downtown that would allow for more intensity and Mixed Use along North Avenue. It also emphasized the employment side of our community with St. Mary's Hospital, the Veteran's Hospital and the continued growth of the college.

Mr. Thornton advised that the planning process was extensive and included things such as focus group meetings with residents and business owners, Mesa State College representatives, some public open houses, a questionnaire which was available on the City's website as well as at the focus groups, other meetings and also at City Hall. At the end of the planning process, an online survey was conducted for approximately 30 days. Throughout the process, there was a Technical Advisory Committee made up of professional engineers, planners, representatives from CDOT, and Grand Valley Transit. In addition four Planning Commission workshops were held in addition to the public meeting this evening. A public hearing before City Council would follow the Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Thornton identified the vision of the Comprehensive Plan was to "Become the most livable community west of the Rockies." The vision of the corridor was an important part of the planning process. That vision would help the City become more livable by creating a place, or a corridor, which would provide access to important areas of the community – such as the City Center. The college facilities, medical facilities, the linkage to downtown, sports facilities, historic neighborhoods as well as the existing and future residential neighborhoods and regional retail employment opportunities that are and will be located in the City Center and on North Avenue.

At the beginning the planning process, there were four guiding principles identified that were important to the community. He said the principles framed what the plan talked about – safety was a huge consideration; aesthetics; place making; and neighborhood impacts. He added that the area between 1st Street and 12th Street had been identified as a Neighborhood Center. The need for revitalization of North Avenue was apparent with the number of businesses that had either moved to other parts of the town or had closed. A community survey was conducted that looked at vacancy rates for existing commercial buildings. That survey showed an overall community vacancy rate for Commercial properties of 6.4% and at the same time the North Avenue Corridor (4 miles) showed an 11.4% vacancy rate. Mr. Thornton noted that there was a wide range of sidewalk widths and noted that the pedestrian experience at certain times of the day overwhelms the existing facilities due to the student population from the college and high school.

Mr. Thornton identified the elements of the plan such as creating a more unified street edge, streetscape, the need to build adjacent to the street, to consolidate curb cuts to help traffic flow, establish commercial/retail land uses, transit and signage. He emphasized that the goal was to try to improve the character of the corridor by consolidating existing curb cuts and trying to encourage shared parking areas between businesses, adding sidewalks and landscaping, adding pedestrian amenities such as benches and street lighting and bike racks to help define that as a public space.

When looking at designing street intersections, Mr. Thornton stated that a number of things go into it such as making sure that there was clarity and predictability for drivers, visibility, adequate crossing time for pedestrians, and reduction of conflict points and elimination of barriers to assure accessibility for all users. Tools that can be utilized may include things such as street furniture, art sculptures, planters, bus shelters and defined crosswalks. He cited the concept of building adjacent to the street, noting that many buildings were already built up to, or near, the street which added a different feel. The overall character of the corridor could be improved by defining street entrances, relocating parking between or behind buildings and constructing generous sidewalks with spaces for outdoor seating and active open spaces.

Mr. Thornton stated that there were 5 existing signalized and striped pedestrian crossings that had been identified located at 1st Street, 5th Street, 7th Street, 10th Street and 12th Street which all had existing crosswalks that were identified as pedestrian crossings. There was one additional crossing that was both unsignalized and unstriped at the 3rd Street intersection. Although there was no signal or striping, staff believes there is enough of a break in traffic that allows the intersection to work at the present.

In looking at the data from the Grand Valley Transit, North Avenue was the highest transit use area on their system. At present there is only one bus pullout in the GVT study area with the remainder being of bus stops having only a shelter. The North Avenue West Corridor Plan recommends off-street pullouts at appropriate locations.

With regard to signage, Mr. Thornton stated that the Plan would call for minimizing pole signs by encouraging monument signs which would help to create a walking environment. In some instances, by placing the building closer to the street, the building would serve as business signage without the need for a free-standing sign.

Mr. Thornton stated that plazas in multi-family development was encouraged and believed it was important to provide transition between nonresidential and residential uses through berming.

The Plan area is been divided into three separate sections called Districts. The three Districts include Automotive Sales and Services District; the Sherwood Park Mixed Use District; and an Educational Student Commercial and Entertainment District.

An online survey conducted between mid-May and mid-June focused on seeking input from the public regarding dedicated bike lanes, on-street parking, how wide travel lanes needed to be on North Avenue, and pedestrian areas along the corridor. The results of the surveys showed that 74% of those 351 completed surveys said that bike lanes should be incorporated into the future design of North Avenue; 92% didn't like the idea of adding parallel parking. In questions that looked at various concepts, safety, traffic flow and convenience were very important; aesthetics and creating a pleasant place to work was selected as either "Very Important" or "Somewhat Important" by 75% of respondents and street cross section Options #3 and #4 saw the most support – both of which introduced bike lanes on North Avenue. Of the various options, Option #3 would cost less to implement. After review of all comments and input, the preferred option for the street cross section was determined to be Option #3. This option would require restriping of existing pavement on North Avenue. He added that Option #3 provided for a 5-foot striped bike lane while Option #4 provided for a 6-foot striped bike lane. Option #3 reduced the width of existing travel into the traffic lanes for cars and trucks from the existing 13-1/2' wide lane to 11' while Option #4 reduced it from 13-1/2' to 12'. Mr. Thornton reiterated that Option #3 was less expensive because existing infrastructure (curb and gutter) would not have to be removed or replaced. In Option #3 there would be 11' travel lanes and a 5' bike lane, with a detached sidewalk within an 8' area to allow bus pullouts without compromising the sidewalks. He next discussed whether the 11' travel lanes would be sufficient and compared the proposed width to other streets in the City with and without bike lanes and concluded that it would be sufficient.

Mr. Thornton stated the importance of an overlay district which would encompass both phases of the North Avenue plans. Mr. Thornton concluded by stating that this Plan was an element of the Comprehensive Plan and in accordance with the Zoning and Development Code staff was required to make sure that the North Avenue West Corridor Plan was consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. He felt that the proposed Plan met the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that the Plan was found to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and met all applicable review criteria of the Grand Junction Municipal Code.

QUESTIONS

Commissioner Leonard asked if the Plan would take into account the building orientation and also wanted some clarification pertaining to the landscaping. Mr. Thornton stated that they were concerns that would be addressed as part of the upcoming overlay zone district.

Commissioner Eslami sought clarification regarding Options #3 and #4 and whether or not they each needed additional right-of-way. Mr. Thornton said they would both require an additional 10' right-of-way for pedestrian amenities. He stated that Option #3 did not require any of the 10' right-of-way for restriping to create a bike lane. On the other hand, Option #4 would require a portion of the 10' right-of-way on each side of the street to expand the curb 3 feet to make the travel and bike lanes wider.

Commissioner Eslami said that one of the general public comments was that there could not be a bike lane nor parking along North Avenue. Mr. Thornton said the City would have to obtain permission from CDOT for a bike lane for all options except Option #2. However, neither Options #3 nor #4 supported parking lanes. Studies have shown that narrow lanes help calm traffic and that bike lanes provide safety for bicyclists. Mr. Thornton felt confident that CDOT would support the Plan and allow the proposed changes. He also stated that according to CDOT's Six-Year Plan, there weren't any chip seal improvements scheduled for North Avenue in the next six years.

Commissioner Benoit asked Mr. Thornton to confirm whether or not CDOT was familiar with the proposed options. Mr. Thornton said that a CDOT representative was a member of the Technical Advisory Committee that proposed the recommendations.

Commissioner Benoit asked if there would there be any statutory requirement for CDOT to help with the funding since North Avenue was a State Highway. Mr. Thornton said CDOT would only be responsible for improvements between the curbs and that anything beyond the curbs was the responsibility of the local jurisdiction.

Commissioner Benoit asked if that would stay the same even if the curb locations were changed by way of easements. Mr. Thornton confirmed that the only permission they needed from CDOT pertained to the restriping of the corridor if Option #3 were chosen.

Commissioner Benoit said that he believed there would be significant changes to the medians and he wanted to know what CDOT's position was on that point. Mr. Thornton said that if landscaping was added to the medians, the City would work with CDOT on each of those blocks.

Commissioner Benoit next asked for clarification of the 3 districts wanting to know if they would be their own entities or was it one district with three different names. He stated that he did not understand the concept. Mr. Thornton said that the districts were sub-areas. He said they would each have their own identity and went into a little more detail describing each of the three.

Commissioner Benoit asked if a taxing district was created would the three sub-areas be included within the taxing district. Mr. Thornton said that it could but it didn't have to be. He gave the example that if a district of property owners wanted to form a taxing district, they could and it would not have to include every property.

Commissioner Carlow asked how the Plan would accommodate a property that physically could not provide either the side building parking or behind the building parking as was encouraged by the Plan. Mr. Thornton said that there were a lot of existing businesses that did not have an abundance of on-site parking. How and when the parking needs were changed in the future would likely be more up to the individual businesses and how they worked with surrounding businesses. There could potentially be some shared parking arrangements. When looking at new development or redevelopment, the goal of the Plan would be to try to keep the same image that had already been established with buildings being closer to the street. Lisa Cox, Planning Manager, mentioned that type of issue was something that would be addressed in the overlay zone district and she clarified that the Plan was a vision for the corridor and a guide of how to develop. The specifics of how to accommodate those kind of issues would be more appropriately discussed in the overlay. She said that flexible tools would be provided in the overlay district to provide options that would work for everyone. Mr. Thornton added that the Comprehensive Plan was a 25-year plan and this Plan was an element of the Comprehensive Plan. The vision that they were trying to create for the corridor was not something that would happen immediately, but rather something that would transpire over the next 25 years.

Commissioner Leonard asked if the DDA had been approached. Lisa Cox, Planning Manager, stated that the Downtown Development Authority boundary did not extend that far north so this was not an area that they would be involved in.

A brief recess was taken from 7:16 p.m. to 7:23 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Brian Bauer, 2813 Bookcliff Avenue, said that he ran a business along North Avenue. He believed his business was one that may be impacted by the developments. He said the online survey seemed difficult to express what he wanted to express. If the survey was not completed in its entirety and at least one of the selections was not selected, it wouldn't accept the survey. He said that it seemed to him to be annoying that you could only select one of the options on the survey. He gave an example that while the website said one of the options would be to "do nothing", that was not an available option on the survey. Mr. Bauer went on to say that he felt that if the City simply maintained the islands and cleaned up some of the areas, it would look better and he did not believe that the improvements were necessary.

Jason Farrington, 1110 Main Street, said that he was representing three or four property owners along North Avenue. He did not think the majority of North Avenue was conducive to pedestrian and/or bike traffic. He said the vast majority of those traveling along North Avenue were in automobiles and there was not that much pedestrian traffic

in the area. He was concerned with curb cuts and easements affecting existing businesses as well as future uses. He believed that any kind of development would take away the curb cuts and require landscaping and other obstacles to the business. Mr. Farmington said that North Avenue was a transportation corridor much like Patterson and taking away curb cuts and business access would impact the future.

Nancy Bauer, 2288 East Piazza Place, Grand Junction, said that she owned a commercial building on North Avenue and the whole store front of that building was only approximately six feet back from the curb. She wondered if landscaping was supposed to be from the curb to 10' back, what would happen with her building.

STAFF'S REBUTTAL

Mr. Thornton addressed some of the concerns raised. With regard to the last issue regarding the building's close proximity to the curb he stated that the 10' was the ideal and if an existing building sat within that 10', the building would remain as it was. As the Plan is implemented over time, improvements would transition with new development and redevelopment. He was aware that there were concerns regarding access points and reduction in curb cuts. Those changes would be considered with new development as it occurred over time. It was hoped that the business community along the corridor would form groups of businesses that would like to join together to implement this Plan and create something that would improve their business opportunities or properties. With regards to the survey, Mr. Thornton said there had been a very good response that provided comments and feedback. Overall, the majority of those who took the survey were supportive of a bike lane on North Avenue, and doing something different than the status quo. He stated that each person who took the survey could add their individual comments in a special field at the end of the survey. There were 356 people who started the survey and 351 who completed it. Many people took the time to provide written comments at the end of the survey.

QUESTIONS

Chairman Wall questioned if the Plan was to be implemented and one of the owners wanted to remodel his building, was there a percentage that would have to be remodeled before this was to kick in. Mr. Thornton said that generally speaking there currently was a 65% rule whereas if the cost of the remodel was more than 65% of the value of the building then 100% of upgrade would be required; if less than 65%, then a corresponding percentage of improvements would be required. They hoped that through the overlay there could be a menu of choices. The hope for North Avenue would be to move away from the traditional C-1 type of landscaping requirements by providing more options with the overlay zone.

Commissioner Benoit asked what the criteria for setting the boundaries for the 3 Districts were. Mr. Thornton identified the boundaries and how they arrived at them stating that each District had a unique character to it.

Commissioner Benoit asked if the criteria for the North Avenue East Plan was similar to this plan. Mr. Thornton said that they were and that many of the graphics from the

original Plan were also similar. Graphics were used in both plans to show various plan elements such as consolidating curb cuts where it made sense and creating new development close to the street. He added that the East Corridor study suggested Mixed Use which would provide more density and intensity.

Chairman Wall stated that he did not understand the point of the Plan and was confused with the number of options contained therein. Mr. Thornton confirmed that Option #3 was the recommended street section and that all of the options were included as part of the history of the planning process for this Plan. The various elements of the Plan were setting the stage for the overlay zone that staff hoped to bring forward as an implementation tool. There would be a lot more emphasis on design standards with the overlay which would be done for the entire four-mile corridor. Ms. Cox interjected that they wanted to be sure that they provided as much information as possible about how the Plan was created and what the public process and involvement was. Chairman Wall stated that he felt that there was too much information included in the Plan. He felt that there was too much emphasis on the three subsections versus just a vision of what the corridor should look like.

Chairman Wall asked if he was a new business and knocked down a building today, what changes would be required of him today versus the requirement under this Plan. Mr. Thornton said that if part of a block was redeveloped, the building would be constructed as close to the street as possible without encroachment into the 10' pedestrian area. Driveways might be combined based on circulation and safety for the corridor. Other changes might include landscaping, benches, or a bus pullout. Mr. Thornton envisioned using a points system with the overlay zone that would have a menu of options that could be used to achieve the vision for the corridor.

Ms. Cox directed the Commissioners to a photograph in the Plan document of an area in front of Mesa State's property at North Avenue and 10th Street that showed a detached sidewalk. Other properties in this area had existing buildings that were built very close to the street with an attached sidewalk. The development on the Mesa State property showed how new development would blend with existing development to achieve the overall vision of the Plan for the North Avenue corridor. The newer development would have detached sidewalks with a wider pedestrian area and older development would remain as it is until it was ready for redevelopment.

Ms. Cox was concerned that the Plan was not as clear to the Commission as staff would have wanted. Staff tried to make a clear statement of the vision for development and redevelopment of the corridor to be followed up by an overlay zone district that would actually implement the Plan. She explained that implementation tools would be found in such the Zoning regulations and overlay zone district development standards. The Plan hoped to convey the vision for the redevelopment and revitalization of the corridor, recognizing that there are different characteristics or personalities of areas along the corridor. The Plan tried to be responsive to those differences knowing that what would work in one area or District would not necessarily work in an adjacent area.

The Plan tried to present a flexible vision and respect those differences in the character of the corridor.

Chairman Wall stated that to him the Plan contained a lot of ideas. Ms. Cox said that there were a lot of ideas and input from business and property owners expressed in the Plan. The Plan contained the vision for the corridor, but the actual tools for implementation and the standards would be found in the overlay district. The Plan contained a lot of background or information about the public process and how those ideas came to be through the survey and the feedback from the Open House and public comments.

DISCUSSION

Commissioner Carlow stated that as a planning tool he was in favor of this Plan; however, he believed there were specifics in the Plan that may cause some problems such as giving up right-of-ways and parking. He thought there were a lot of voluntary things that may or may not get done such as the formation of an association and he was a little concerned about the specificity of the whole document. He made reference to the 24 Road Plan. Commissioner Carlow said that generally as part of the Comprehensive Plan he was in favor of having something out there.

Commissioner Eslami said that he believed that in order to do something there had to be plans and this Plan, albeit not perfect, was a starting point and was in favor of making a recommendation to City Council.

Commissioner Pavelka stated that she believed the Plan summarized the process and provided guiding elements for redevelopment, enhancement, or revitalization of the west end of North Avenue. She thought it would provide a skeleton for the overlay which would get into the details needed for actual implementation and concluded that she would be in favor of the plan.

Commissioner Leonard also thought the Plan was good. He viewed this as a guide and the overlay district would be where the details would be worked out. He thought enough flexibility was built into the Plan and this in his mind was setting the stage.

Commissioner Burnett said that he too was in favor of the Plan.

Commissioner Benoit said that there was a clear need for revitalization of the entire length of North Avenue. He believed that improvements through Option #3 were badly needed. The Plan as submitted contained a lot of detail but he was concerned about the District boundaries and methodology that went into deciding the boundaries. Without a taxing district, there would be no mechanism to make this happen, which would result in a patchwork. The project was a big project which would require a lot of commitment by a lot of business owners. He stated that he was unsure of what he was voting on. Commissioner Benoit said that if an overlay district was the starting point, then he would ask the staff for a proposed overlay with the specifics that could be looked at. He liked the Plan, but was not prepared at this time to vote.

Chairman Wall said that he had a hard time voting on something he could not see. For this particular project, since he could not relate this to anything specific, while understanding it to be groundwork, he could not vote for this Plan.

MOTION: (Commissioner Eslami) “Mr. Chairman, I make a motion that we recommend CPA-2011-966 to City Council for recommendation of approval.”

Commissioner Pavelka seconded the motion. A vote was called and the motion passed by a vote of 5 – 2 with Chairman Wall and Commissioner Benoit opposed.

General Discussion/Other Business

None.

Nonscheduled Citizens and/or Visitors

None.

Adjournment

With no objection and no further business, the Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 8:09 p.m.