

CPC Minutes of July 19, 2011

A regular meeting of the City Plan Commission (CPC) was held on Tuesday, July 19, 2011 at 4:45 p.m. in the Department of the Planning and Development (DPD) 4th Floor Auditorium, 400 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

Opening Session

Call to order: Chairman Durkee called the meeting to order at 4:48 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Stephen Durkee, Vice Chairman Harrison Bilodeau, Andrew Cortes, Meredyth Church, Ina Anderson, JoAnn Ryan and Luis Torrado

Staff Present: Robert Azar, Melanie Army and Choyon Manjrekar

Approval of meeting minutes from June 21st, 2011: Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Mr. Bilodeau to approve the minutes. All voted in favor.

Mr. Azar said the Director's report would be delivered after Item 1.

PROVIDENCE TOMORROW

1. Comprehensive Plan Update - Presentation updates to Providence Tomorrow: The Interim Comprehensive Plan based on the results of neighborhood charrettes and public input – for discussion

The changes discussed in the section are available for review and comment at www.providenceplanning.org

Ms. Army presented changes to chapters on People and Public Spaces and Community Facilities. Most changes to the People and Public Spaces chapter were in the changes, challenges and opportunities section. Changes included updated information about street tree inventory and tree preservation, lighting at Donigian park, Providence being a terminus for bike paths with the Blackstone Bike Path being restriped, information about the zoo and park renovations. Challenges included limited resources, the need for public private partnerships and cross agency management. Opportunities included programming, the I-195 relocation and historic preservation. Changes to objectives included using neighborhood plans for streetscape and pedestrian improvements, amend regulations for off leash dog parks, add an additional 20 acres of park space and a new section on community gardening.

Changes to the chapter on Community Services and Facilities include referencing the Providence Public Safety Complex, information on the status of the lead program, the Narragansett Bay wastewater program, the recycling initiative, locations for wind turbines and library services besides other grammatical and formatting changes.

Ms. Army said she would present changes to chapters on the Waterfront and Land Use at the August meeting.

Directors Report

Mr. Thomas Deller delivered the Director's report and spoke about the transition of the Department of Planning and Development's Offices to their new location at 444 Westminster Street. He spoke about the relationship between the City and the I-195 Commission. He said the City had reservations about the bill in the state legislature, which would give the I-195 Commission full power to approve and review projects and issue variances for land obtained from the I-195 relocation. However, the Commission would need to adhere to the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Ordinance. The Knowledge District study by Perkins and Will was in progress. A review of parcels on the east side and in Fox Point from the relocation would need to be completed. He said the department would revise the zoning ordinance based on the study.

Mr. Durkee asked when the Commission would get to see the study. Mr. Deller said it would possibly be before the CPC in January. Mr. Deller said the environmental phase of the streetcar study was in progress and the department was continuing to seek federal funding from the government. The streetcar route is not finalized and the route requires more analysis as federal criteria impacted on costs. The cost of the project was estimated to be 80 million but expected to be as high as 100 million. Mr. Deller said that the department would analyze parking patterns and reduce parking in areas that the streetcar served. He said that the public forum for the Knowledge District Study would be on the 21st of July and the department would hire a planner to study transportation issues as part of the challenge grant.

INSTITUTIONAL MASTER PLAN

2. Presentation of Brown University's Five Year Institutional Master Plan - Adoption of five year Institutional Master Plan for Brown University outlining 5 to 10 year plans for development, circulation around campus, capital improvements, operations and expansion beyond the east side. – for action

Mr. Mike McCormick, Assistant Vice President for Planning, Design and Construction from Brown University introduced the plan, which continued the trajectory from the previous 5 years. He said the university owned over 7 million SF of property and had made acquisitions at 198 Dyer Street, 60 Clifford and 43 Elm Street. There would be more development in the Jewelry District and the University was growing every year. Underutilized properties like those on North and South Main Street were being sold. He said the plan revolved around three principles, namely developing circulation infrastructure, consolidating the core and moving beyond College Hill. He said the University was working to improve circulation infrastructure, conducting traffic studies and demand management, working with RIPTA, increasing parking fees and offering fewer student parking spaces.

For the main campus, Mr. McCormick said there was a focus on campus renovations, adding library space, increasing the capacity of residence halls, developing the walk, pulling the environmental science building renovations together and redeveloping the athletic complex. The fitness and aquatic center will be redeveloped with improvements to the field stadium and the incorporation of a parking garage. He said the university would address issues with the glare of stadium lights and has plans to replace the bleachers. Mr. McCormick said that the plan intended to increase dormitory bed space but not build new dormitories. The plan would be amended if new dormitories were required. He spoke about the Brown-to-Brown home ownership program which gives faculty and graduate students the option to own houses that the university rehabilitates and uses as rental housing. He said the house at 89 Benevolent Street would be demolished as it was too expensive to rehabilitate. The lot would remain open as it wasn't a buildable lot.

Mr. McCormick spoke about Brown's initiatives beyond College Hill including the Big Rhody computer project, greening the Knowledge District, the smarter cities challenge and leasing space to start up projects.

Ms. Anderson asked if the University had plans to expand beyond the Jewelry District. Mr. McCormick said there would be a focus on the Jewelry District as infrastructure and buildings were available. Mr. Deller said the plan laid out what would happen in the Jewelry District and development is subject to payment in lieu of taxes. Mr. Bilodeau said he approved of the plan, but cautioned about small businesses being affected by the University's expansion. For example, restaurants affected by the university cafeteria. Ms. Church asked if houses that were part of the Brown-to-Brown home ownership program would go off the tax rolls. Mr. McCormick said that houses owned by the University followed the 15 year tax reduction plan where taxes were gradually reduced for university property before going off the tax rolls. Houses sold under the program would be subject to the normal tax rate.

Ms. Anderson asked for a clarification of the IMP approval process. Mr. Deller explained that it did not have the same level of detail as a master plan and is used to disclose the activity of an institution to the public. A discussion ensued on the Master Plan process. Ms. Ryan asked for more information on the Brown-to-Brown program. Mr. McCormick said that the proceeds would be used renovate houses.

Mr. Sean Buckler of Moses Brown School said he objected to the aesthetic of the parking garage and the traffic it would generate. Mr. Peter Gallant inquired about the Ethan Allen building. Mr. McCormick said the building would be sold and did not have any intentions for the site. Mr. Azar said the site would go through the land development project review process due to its size when a development plan was announced.

Mr. Durkee read out letters received in response to the plan. The Providence Preservation Society and Providence Foundation supported the plan. Ms. Anderson asked about job creation and first source hiring practices. Mr. Deller said that first source wasn't required as Brown is not part of the City. Mr. McCormick said that the University would use labor from the Building Futures Organization. Mr. Torrado asked if Rhode Island firms would be employed. Mr. McCormick said that was the decision of the purchasing office.

Mr. Deller read out the findings of fact and recommendations in the staff report, which recommended approval per the condition that Brown hold public meetings to discuss any amendments or new construction projects.

Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Ms. Ryan to approve the plan. All voted in favor.

Major Land Development Project

3. Parking Lot at 85 South Street – Master Plan Approval - Consideration of proposal to use the former Regal Plating site as a 74 space parking lot during remediation, which requires installation of an asphalt cap over the surface – for action. (Downtown, AP 21 Lots 101, 175, 181 and 182)

Note: A stenographer's transcript is part of the record.

Mr. Azar introduced the project, a proposal for a parking lot on the former Regal Plating site building, which was demolished. The project triggered the Land Development Project Review process because the lot had over 50 spaces. He said the applicant required zoning relief because a five foot planting strip could not be accommodated on site. Mr. Stephen Andrus of GZA Geoenvironmental presented the plan. He said there was contaminated soil and groundwater for which remediation is required. The Department of Environmental Management required that an asphalt cap be installed over the site for implementation of a soil vapor decontamination system. He said the process could take 3 to 5 years and wanted to operate a parking lot on site during the remediation period. A total of 71 spaces were requested. He said that the lot was expected to be developed after remediation was complete. There are opportunities to plant trees around the vicinity. He said the DPD was concerned about the proximity of spaces to the street and said there would be a combination of metal fencing and plantings around the site.

Ms. Anderson said she liked the concept of bioremediation. A discussion on remediation techniques ensued. Mr. Ed Summerly of GZA said that there were two public notices for remediation in October and November.

Mr. Cortes said the parking lot seemed like a profitable form of land banking. Mr. Andrus said that federal regulations discouraged moving contaminated soil offsite. The environmental impact from tearing down the building was positive. A discussion on sound environmental practices ensued.

Mr. Torrado asked if the applicant could conform to landscaping standards. Mr. Andrus said that DEM wanted the site capped. Mr. Summerly said there was space for a five foot strip, but it could not be installed due to the requirement that the site be capped. He said DEM would monitor the soil samples from the site before closing the file on the site. There would be planters and an effort to have more of a landscaped area.

Mr. Robert Rodio asked if the applicant was aware of hazardous waste on site. Mr. Andrus said he had been involved since he was contracted by the owner. Mr. Rodio said he had never received notice that the site was contaminated and had received notices before. He said contaminated stormwater could back up into his property. Mr. Andrus said the water would flow in another direction and would not back up. A discussion ensued on noticing and DEM's role.

Mr. Durkee said the DEM noticing issue was not something that the CPC was involved in and asked the applicant to contact DEM about the issue.

Mr. Azar read out the staff report which recommended that the CPC make a positive recommendation to the Zoning Board, with the conditions that the applicant meet with the City Forester to refine the landscaping plan and provide more information on the operation of the lot including lighting, hours of operation and potential clients.

Mr. Cortes made a motion, seconded by Ms. Church to make a positive recommendation to the Zoning Board per the recommendations by DPD staff. All voted in favor.

Ms. Church made a motion seconded by Mr. Bilodeau to adjourn the meeting. All voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 6:41 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C. Manjrekar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Choyon Manjrekar,
Recording Secretary