CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Special Workshop Meeting
Thursday, March 12, 2020

The City Commission met in formal session Thursday, March 12, 2020 at 2:00 P.M. in the Alcazar Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Tracy Upchurch, and the following were present:

1. Roll Call: Tracy Upchurch, Mayor/City Commissioner
Leanna S. A. Freeman, Vice Mayor/City Commissioner
Roxanne Horvath, City Commissioner
John Valdes, City Commissioner
Nancy Sikes-Kline, City Commissioner

John Regan, City Manager
Isabelle Lopez, City Attorney
Candice Seymour, Acting City Clerk
Meredith Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager
Reuben Franklin, Director, Public Works
David Birchim, Director, Planning and Building
Xavier Pellicer, Mobility Coordinator
Melissa Wissel, Communications Manager
Barry Fox, Police Chief
Carlos Avilles, Fire Chief
Laura Morse, Recording Secretary

Mr. Regan, City Manager, noted his recent administrative order cancelled the following public events:

- Celtic Festival
- St. Patrick's Day Parade
- Seafood Festival
- Rhythm & Ribs Festival

Mr. Regan stated the following:

- The City was working with these events to re-schedule
- The City was evaluating upcoming events through April 1st
- Governor DeSantis recommended that cities evaluate, and urged the cancellation of mass gatherings
- The purpose was based on the recommendation by the healthcare industry to control social distancing, which was the best practice in controlling the coronavirus COVID-19 transmission rate
- It was very important to control the potential number of sick people, which would compress the healthcare industry
- St. Johns County had one confirmed case
- The entire City staff was briefed on proper responses for incoming phone calls
- The virus situation was a national pandemic, and it was necessary for us all to do our part to assist our nation

The Commission noted their full support for Mr. Regan and the difficult decisions he was required to make during this time.

Mr. Regan stated that he respected each Commissioner's thoughtful points of view and he appreciated their support and responsiveness.

Mr. Reagan advised that the workshop presentations were lengthy, detailed, had a lot of analysis, and the key thing was to listen and discuss. He noted the point of the workshops was not to make decisions, but for City staff to provide the Commission with all the informational pieces that factored into the policy discussions, for a detailed understanding of the topic. He acknowledged the team and the great job they had done.

2. Mobility Discussion

Mobility Program Overview

Reuben Franklin, Director, Public Works, provided an overview of the topic:

- Established in 2015 when the visioning process and plan began
- Mobility was identified as one of the number one key factors to livability in the City
- City put out a Request for Quotation (RFQ) for work on an overall mobility master plan
- S&ME was selected and worked with the City for development of a mobility framework
- Framework that was put together was illustrated with the principles physically applied to one of the City's entry corridors
- A shuttling program started, which was worked on and monitored by Xavier Pellicer, and had shown great growth over the years
- The mobility liaison for residents, Melinda Rakoncay, set up many of the neighborhood mobility walks at the onset
- The 'Bike Share' program had been delayed; however, it was pending, and fully funded through Flagler Health Plus sponsorship

Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Franklin provided an overview of the topic:

- Adopted a mobility plan that was sent to the review agencies
- Plan was approved by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) with zero changes
- The FDOT was complimentary to the City and how the mobility plan was set up
- The Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) had no changes to the plan
- The entire plan was expected to return to the Planning and Zoning Board (PZB) in April
- After PZB, the plan was to go to the Commission for approval and implementation

Complete King Street Master Plan

Mr. Franklin provided an overview of the topic:

- To date, four public workshops had taken place
- The presentation noted the changes heard from the public, specifically for the base of the Bridge of Lions
- Different alternatives for the base of the bridge would be shown; however, one alternative was suggested, and the reasons for it
- King Street was looked at because of the pending FDOT drainage project where they planned to reconstruct the road
- The City could still consider the changes after the FDOT reconstructed the road; however, it was easier, and less expensive to

do prior to the FDOT starting the infrastructure change

Mr. Franklin introduced the S&ME consultants that assisted with the Plan:

- George Kramer, Area Manager, Planning & Design
- Terry McKloski, Senior Transportation Planner
- Jay Hood, Principal Landscape Architect, Planning & Design Services

Mr. Kramer began the presentation with the following:

- The City of St. Augustine was the cultural backbone of the State
- He and S&ME were grateful to work with City staff, the community, and the Commission who all placed an important emphasis on mobility
- Doing the right thing took hard decisions, and change was hard; however, the data he would present showed it was right
- The time was now to decide on the King Street Corridor future, which was arguably the most important City planning decision of the last 100 years, since the 1927 construction of the Bridge of Lions
- It was not just a road, but part of the City's history, character, mobility, livability and sustainability

Mr. Kramer delivered the presentation:[1]

- The progression of St. Augustine's character was shown, from pre-auto to automobiles
- King Street Corridor was an extensive right-of-way (ROW), and measured one mile from the base of the Bridge of Lions to Palmer Street
- Existing King Street conditions were analyzed and divided into three roadway segments: A, B, C
- The three segments were analyzed based on ROW widths, sidewalk widths, curb cuts, existing building and parking, and parking inventory and the issues were noted
- The inefficiency of land was discussed and that it should be more valuable than surface parking
- The FDOT owned and controlled the King Street corridor which was auto centric and auto dependent and designed and maintained to efficiently move automobiles through the City
- If the FDOT held control of King Street, the design would remain the same, and an increase in traffic would be the trend
- The three proposed area projects showed an increase in traffic trips, based on assumption of a continued auto-dependent corridor
- The paradigm needed to change, and two models were discussed: drivable sub-urbanism and walkable urbanism
- Good development enabled the rise of neighborhoods and helped with the quality of life

The Commission discussed:

- The City had a great working relationship with the FDOT
- Problems existed with sidewalks that were beside streets owned by the State
- Existing landscape conflicted with FDOT policies: although trees were allowed, the corridor was narrow
- The horizontal clearance was not met; therefore, palm trees would not be re-planted when a road was re-constructed
- Concern regarding County owned portion of West King, which impeded City options, and the funding would be in question
- Other than beautification, not much could be done to West King Street, but would the City or County fund

[1] Attached to original Commission packet

- The design of King Street encouraged through traffic of three types: tourists, downtown workers, and south end City residents
- The need for a right-hand turn lane made the south end residents the most in jeopardy by the King Street development occurring from US1 to Malaga corridor
- A pedestrian oriented area would be inviting just past Malaga Street
- Orlando street example used by S&ME was not representative of the same 'mix' as what the City dealt with
- Vertically stacked surface parking and height limits had been discussed to address future growth
- Assumption questioned that King Street was the 'entry' to downtown, as opposed to Castillo where the garage was built for the City visitors
- Would the corridor, Cathedral and King Street better serve the community as a walkable destination street, or by remaining auto centric to move car flow
- Challenge was improved mobility for pedestrians, bicyclists, and autos and for people to get places efficiently
- Option for King Street to be the focus of transportation and make other entrances pedestrian focused
- Option for moving traffic up to Malaga, then transform into a more diverse form of transportation, and push the access and egress of tourists and visitors to other points
- Providing options for walkability or bike riding was the goal, and not to insist that daily needs should be placed within one-half mile
- Other than bars or restaurants, destinations for residents like drugstores and grocery stores did not exist; therefore, needs were not met by leaving car at home

Mr. Kramer noted that opportunities existed for destination stores such as produce markets and small pharmacies along the corridor; however, it was the corridor's function, and the underutilization of land that were part of the problem.

Mr. Hood presented the King Street design options and discussed 'Complete streets' with the Commission:

- The definition of 'Complete street' was taking the ROW between buildings and focusing on commerce activities, kid's mobility, bicycles, scooters as well as cars
- St. Augustine was unique because of the small rental vehicles
- Land use and transportation could not be separated, it was about being livable
- Once the infrastructure was in for multi-modes, then behavior changes occurred from citizens and tourists, including better health
- City had good history of being innovative with transportation solutions
- Relocating power lines underground posed many issues; however, the timing was great since FDOT planned improvement of stormwater and resurfacing King Street
- Citizens would be receptive to underground power lines because of power outages with above ground power lines during hurricanes and tropical storms
- Concept existed that when a street was narrowed, it became more inviting for pedestrians
- Two-way streets moved traffic efficiently and helped with safety issues for bikes and pedestrians
- Shared parking was a great option
- The Bridge of Lions intersection was difficult, since the design needed to maintain historic preservation
- 20,000 trips a day traversed the Bridge of Lions

Mr. Regan noted the absence of discussion about why the models were

done and what could be gained from them. He stated the entire idea was to assist with clearing traffic more quickly on the Bridge of Lions and he questioned the options presented by S&ME, what measurements they had, and what the benefits would be.

Mr. McKloski stated that only rough modeling had been done, which determined that only one roundabout lane was needed. He stated that S&ME had not been advised on which model to provide a comparative analysis (existing conditions compared to new conditions) therefore, the analysis had not been done. He noted the options S&ME provided would certainly work better than what existed today.

Mr. Kramer stated that S&ME was under contract with the City to perform two detailed analyses of two intersections and they just needed guidance to advance forward.

Commissioner Valdes stated the following:

- Roundabouts worked well, they provided the most traffic flow, and offered much potential for the interior space
- The Committee needed a solution that worked 25 years from now and should look past the immediate needs
- Citizens would learn to use the roundabouts
- Historic parks could be relocated, as what was in the parks was the historic part
- The Bridge of Lions should have been three lanes
- Travelers made a point to go through the intersection at Bridge of Lions to see historic St. Augustine
- The solution that moved the most traffic was the right one

Commissioner Freeman noted the following:

- First time she had seen the material
- Interested to get public feedback regarding design options
- Many of the measures taken by the City have had significant impacts, but were not perfect
- With the number of City tourists, the age of the population, and her discussions with the community, she did not believe there would be much support for the roundabouts
- Much energy, effort and finances had been placed towards keeping visitors off the streets and to park on the outskirts of the City

Commissioner Sikes-Kline stated the following:

- Preferred the 'Do no harm' option because it preserved the two parks
- Not convinced that roundabouts placed pedestrians on equal footing with cars, which was the entire goal with the 'complete streets'
- More roundabout data was needed and pedestrian consideration
- The original plan, which was a huge fight in the 1950s, was to get four lanes of traffic off the island onto a large bridge; however, the bayfront was widened and the City was dealing with that decision

Mayor Upchurch stated the following:

- Pedestrians crossed traffic anywhere they wanted, despite layout of the street
- The real objective was to eliminate the wall along the City's eastern edge and to integrate and allow the pedestrian flow to the waterfront
- Loved expansion idea to connect the two grossly underused parks, believed it was important they were made accessible, made a destination, and extended for public waterfront access

Commissioner Horvath stated the following:

- The roundabout was an elegant solution
- Although the intent was to keep Cathedral a local street, channeling everyone onto King Street without a direct connection from the circle to Cathedral would lose the second westbound lane and would leave only one direction west at or beyond King Street
- The value was diminished without a direct connection onto Cathedral
- Cathedral could be closed for use as event space, when necessary

3. General Public Comments

The Commission heard from the following members of the public:

Jeffrey Leibovitz
Ed Gomboz
Melinda Rakoncay
Nancy Pellicer

Public comment was closed.

4. Items by Commissioners

Mr. Regan noted the following:

- The designs were solving different problems concurrently
- The traffic circle was about traffic flow and the Bridge of Lions cueing
- King Street was about pedestrian flow within the corridor
- Perhaps we did not need to solve cueing as there were other options
- Key thing was to facilitate discussion; however, the solutions could not be approved by the FDOT
- The question was whether the City took ownership of Cathedral and King Street and control the destiny of the corridor, or was City complacent for the roads to remain part of the State road network

Mr. Franklin noted the State network would be Anastasia Boulevard, crossing the Bridge of Lions, and northbound to Menendez Road and to San Marco Avenue. He stated the discussion would be to take Cathedral and King Street, since Cathedral was owned by the State.

Discussion ensued among the Commission, Mr. Regan, Mr. Franklin and the S&ME speakers:

- Was there an idea that did not require the City to take ownership, such as elimination of street parking or sidewalk extension
- Conceptually, taking ownership involved a negotiated price: FDOT would advance the City the value of the planned construction project with their calculation of long term maintenance, backed into net present dollars, call it a one-time payment and then the City would take over the road
- City would be required to determine all financing and maintenance costs, which were unknown for any of the options presented
- FDOT was in mode of pushing 'complete streets' and the options presented did not provide opportunity for removing City liability to the FDOT road
- Issues such as pedestrian scale lighting and landscaping conflicted with the FDOT policies
- FDOT had made absolutely clear they would not allow any design that did not include the left-hand turn lane system on King Street; therefore, everything from Malaga to Cordova with the middle turning system was absolutely a FDOT standard
- Sidewalk expansion would be difficult, as it would be tough to re-allocate more road, unless parts of the ROW could be re-allocated
- The analogy was the FDOT was handing the City a re-modeled house; however, the City had no choice of what could be done to the exterior

- City control of it's destiny with the ability to create the environment was the best
- Many discussions had occurred with the FDOT and the City taking ownership of King Street, which always ended with the City taking control of the road

Mr. Kramer noted the biggest barrier to a design was the will of the Commission, which was ultimately the will of the community, and there were multiple funding sources to assist with the project.

Mayor Upchurch stated that he would welcome taking over King Street and Cathedral, so long as it was not ridiculously expensive, which was supported by Commissioners Valdes and Horvath.

Mr. Regan stated that for the City to take over King Street, the FDOT would provide a lump sum payment and the design, construction and long-term ownership would be the City's responsibility. He suggested a future workshop for discussion on the analysis, projected cost, maintenance, and financing scheme that would be required.

Mr. Regan also suggested a workshop to address the current downtown traffic and parking Community Re-development Agency (CRA) and area, which was a topic large enough for a workshop. He noted that things could be done to extend the CRA's life, change the dimensions and mission. He stated that it was this system that would bring the financial power to build and operate King Street with a reserve fund for maintenance.

There was Commission consensus for a deeper analysis on the figures.

Isabelle Lopez, City Attorney, advised that once the City took control of a State road, that included any sea level rise or other road issues. She noted her understanding of the enthusiasm for controlling the City's destiny, but wanted Commission understanding of the consequences involved.

Mayor Upchurch stated the following:

- Flagler College created a unique presence on the downtown roadways, with 2,500 students and 300-400 staff, which generated a significant number of trips
- Any long-term solution should look at participating with the College in controlling, directing and understanding their transportation needs
- Flagler was like the City tourists, with a greater opportunity to direct them than other groups
- Ideas involved walkability, biking, and crossing US1, which was attractive for students residing in West Augustine
- The Flagler group was large enough to justify the time to understand how that subset of demographic used the City roads
- The Commission would need to decide the importance and the impact

Mayor Upchurch noted his personal appreciation for the creativity and enthusiasm of all involved, and specifically Mr. Franklin's leadership and wisdom.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:34 P.M.[2]

T.D. Upchurch

Tracy Upchurch, MAYOR

Darlene Galambos

Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK

[2] Transcribed by Laura Morse