



City of Palo Alto

(ID # 5229)

Planning & Transportation Commission Staff Report

Report Type:

Meeting Date: 10/29/2014

Summary Title: City Council and Planning and Transportation Commission Study Session Debrief

Title: Study Session to Debrief on the October 20, 2014 Joint Meeting of the City Council and Planning & Transportation Commission

From: Hillary Gitelman, Director of Planning & Community Environment

Lead Department: Planning and Community Environment

Recommendation

This is a study session and no action is recommended. The study session will provide the Planning and Transportation Commission with an opportunity to discuss their joint meeting with the City Council on October 20, 2014 and explore options, as appropriate, to address comments received during the discussion.

Background

On October 20, 2014, the City Council and the Planning & Transportation Commission held a joint meeting to review the Chair's annual report and related matters. In addition to documenting the work completed over the past year, the annual report also identified several discussion topics that the Commission sought further guidance on, including:

- The PTC process for making recommendations to the City Council
- PTC response to land use, development and transportation trends
- PTC role in completing the Comprehensive Plan Update
- Opportunities to better engage the public

Some of the key themes that emerged from the discussion were an interest in receiving an executive summary documenting the Commission's deliberation, findings and final action, and proactive analyses of emerging land use trends. Individual councilmembers offered other comments and encouraged the Commission to explore opportunities to enhance public participation and review best management practices from other communities.

Commissioner Eric Rosenblum prepared notes from that meeting, which were reviewed by Chair Michael, who also requested this matter be scheduled for a discussion. Commissioner

Rosenblum's notes are attached to this report and are intended to serve as a starting place for the Commission's discussion.

Attachments:

(PDF)

- Attachment A: PTC City Council Study Session notes October 20, 2014

October 20, 2014 Joint Study Session of City Council and PTC

Summary

The Commission and Council met in a study session format, with time constraints, so not every member of the Council was able to comment on every issue. If other speakers mentioned something, it may have been “seconded,” or attention may have shifted to other comments. Nonetheless, numerous issues drew multiple comments.

There was a general acknowledgement that the PTC plays an important role advising Council on planning, land use and transportation issues. Many comments explored the potential for improving analysis of relevant data and documenting emerging issues or trends, and reference was made to the need for benchmarking and metrics related to growth, development, traffic, parking, cumulative impacts, etc. There appeared to be agreement that the PTC, together with staff, can and should identify important issues early and alert Council, as well as a genuine interest in how the PTC can develop expertise regarding emerging issues. Also there appeared to be agreement that Palo Alto would benefit from understanding best practices of other communities and that the PTC should develop an understanding of such practices that might be adopted here.

Public engagement was discussed, and several Councilmembers talked about the PTC educating the public about important issues. Members also referred positively to the practice of having a PTC representative speak at Council meetings. Some of the issues that warranted multiple mentions included the following:

- *Providing an executive summary of Commission discussions*
- *Proactive analysis of emerging issues on planning or transportation*
- *Potential for joint meetings with ARB, HRB, etc.*
- *Identifying best practices from other communities*
- *Improve public engagement*
- *Promote data driven analysis of issues*
- *Only some small PTC recommendations might be appropriate for the Council's consent calendar*
- *Outreach to public/public education*

Comments from Council Members:

Burt

1. executive summary for CC: supportive [“try it and see what works”]
2. unanimous agreement by PTC = consent calendar; makes Burt uncomfortable
 - a. maybe differentiate different kinds of decisions, and some could make it to consent calendar
 - b. focus on “types of matters” (e.g., subdivision map approvals)
3. can there be a process whereby we look at more comprehensive impacts of planning and transportation (e.g., what happens if we add to # of employees... what will

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Draft For Discussion Purposes*

impact to traffic be). We have been too siloed in our approach. We have a mega comp plan/ EIR update, but in between we are not very systematic [cumulative impacts]

4. curious about “adherence to certain types of codes/standards

Schmid

loves verbatim minutes of PTC meetings

- allows him to raise questions with staff from a variety of perspectives
 - adding exec summary is good, but don't take away verbatim minutes

code = most important role for PTC is the Comp Plan

- PTC can be helpful now. Nov 3 Staff should return w/ quant measures for how fast we should grow.
- draft existing conditions report includes growth of non-residential growth. In monitored areas between 1989 and 2007 average # of sqft added to 38k/year; from 2007-2014 growth was tripled to >100k/year
 - what is the “monitored area” vs. “non-monitored area”
- 2nd important map = downtown was zoned for 1.0 FAR (? is this true?); however, actual FAR closer to 3.0

4 things that would be helpful for PTC to do for CC

- give our assessment on measures of growth; what past # is accurate? how much should we plan for in the future [identify the boundary conditions]
- how should we think about development caps? we've been averaging 112k/year. DTN cap was 350k. Where did the rest go? where should it go? [should this apply to other neighborhoods] [also ... development caps v. specific/precise plans???
- who benefits from commercial growth, and who pays the cost of it
- how can we get regular monitoring that makes sense on the above questions? Do we have to wait 10 years? isn't there a way to get annual assessments? can the PTC drive a leading indicator for these reports?

Holman:

- executive summary: yes/helpful
- unanimous PTC? depends on what it is [i.e., not PC zoning]
- big advocate of meetings with other commissions (e.g., joint meetings w/ ARB)
- spotting emerging issues -- memos welcome that write up emerging issues and alert Council to trends
- staff support may be required for PTC generation of memos???
- work on outreach... how can we get more people to come out?
 - is there something else that the commission can do to help? “here is a project that is coming up, etc”
- The community makes broad assumptions about what we see. There are some large projects that don't come to the PTC. Should we adjust the threshold for what level of project should come to PTC?

Price:

- supports exec summary
- appreciates colleague memo approach
- cautions that engagement with public is always tough for commission
- did ad hoc committees require staff attendance? we should be careful about what resources we use from staff

Klein:

- supports exec summary
- dubious about consent calendar; there may be some innocuous items where that makes sense, but would prefer to err on the side of caution

What *should* we be doing:

- lots of discussions about traffic. Commonly held view is that it's all due to office workers in PA. Is that true?
 - we should figure out the composition of traffic (how much pass-through? how much office worker? etc)?
 - how much traffic is completely internal (people dropping kids at school, etc.)
- should have more meetings/ contact with adjacent communities to understand what they are doing that will impact us. eg. MTV San Antonio development
- public involvement/ public education: it would be useful for PTC to think about how to get our citizenry better informed about what we can do and can't do.
 - maybe we solicit invitations from neighborhood associations to educate public about general process (not just a single project)
- investigate assumption about sq.ft. per employee (e.g., 250' v. 200'?)

Kniss:

- Precedent: in other cities, PTC has a lot more responsibility. We are hesitating whether or not certain items could go on consent. PCs could not go on consent.
- Best practices? Other cities? County?
- Emerging issues MTV + RWC are both growing quickly... they are not looking for limits to growth; traffic is coming in from both sides of us.

Scharff:

- highly supportive of exec summary. Would also like to know the next steps, what the process is, etc. Would create "tickler file". Great to have expedited notice of PTC actions (immediately following meeting)
- as a council member it is difficult for him to know where things are.
- eg., traffic impact study... where is it? who will drive? committee chair or staff?
- Consent calendar: everything we send to them is a public hearing... how could this work when by definition public hearings are not consent calendars.
- at the end of the day, CC members are held responsible, so it doesn't feel right to abdicate their responsibility
- for highly controversial items, maybe add a step to come to CC earlier for guidance

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- data is really important. We have to be more “data driven” as a community.
- we should be pushing hard to make traffic better... this should be the place that PTC should be focused
- PTC should do more work regarding Transportation (monitoring traffic problems, bottlenecks, etc.) and do proactive oversight on improving traffic conditions

Berman

- encourages us to benchmark other communities (eg., look at 250 sqft/employee benchmark)
- how do we get more people to come to meetings?
- doesn't think that “putting things on consent cal” would work

Shepherd:

- some places should be pre-identified for extra scrutiny from an early stage
- exec summaries: maybe we could vote them on case-by-case basis
- mentioned East Palo Alto general plan and temporary moratorium on west side development ... potential impact on Palo Alto when this is removed
- encourages joint meetings of PTC/ARB/HRB
- favors PTC representative at Council meeting participating in discussion