

MINUTES
I-290/Eisenhower Citizens Committee
Oak Park Conservatory
615 Garfield
April 25, 2002

Present: Lawrence Christmas, Chair; Marion Kessy, Philip J. Rock, Peter Morava, Karen Baldwin, Sandra Kupelian, David Sokol, Mark Johnson, Kevin Kell, Ron Burke, Nancy Rodriguez and Colette Lueck

Also

Present: Joanne E. Trapani, Village President; Pete Dame, Assistant to the Village Manager and Liaison to the Committee

Call to Order

Chairperson Christmas called the meeting to order, noting that all members were present.

Approval of Minutes

The committee approved the minutes of the March 14, 2002 meeting.

Chairperson Comments

Chairperson Christmas stated that he is looking forward to input from members on several of the agenda items, and is pleased with the minutes.

Business

Previously Distributed Background Materials

Mr. Dame commented on the packet of background material issued to members prior to the meeting, and asked if there were any questions on this information, or if there were any other information they would like for him to investigate.

Mr. Sokol expressed concern for determining the environmental impact the project would have on the new Gunderson historic district and historic architecture and buildings adjacent to the Eisenhower. Mr. Christmas responded that if the Village does not request that an environmental impact study be made, a study may not get done. A conversation followed on two levels of impact studies: an EA (Environmental Assessment) and an EIS (Environmental Impact Statement), and

which would be the most appropriate and why. Chairperson Christmas stated that this is a question to be put to our attorney who had discussed the differences at the previous meeting. President Trapani commented that she understands the concerns raised by committee members, and that we must continue to track the progress of the study, and press for an EIS. She and other Village officials will be in Springfield and Washington within the next few weeks for just that purpose.

Mr. Sokol stated that he was not at the first committee meeting, and would like to state his focus on having the broadest strategy possible in reviewing the Eisenhower project. Chair Christmas responded that it will be important to consider the policy/programs of gubernatorial candidates.

Mr. Christmas stated that in reviewing the HOV analysis prepared by the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), he found the data presented in the analysis to be confusing and unconvincing, and questioned how the numbers were derived. He would like to see a presentation by IDOT on how this analysis was prepared. Mr. Dame responded that the Village had previously asked IDOT to make a presentation to the Village Board, but their response was negative. Mr. Dame has three volumes of reports containing data on this project that are available to all who are interested, noting that these reports are very detailed.

The many assumptions and projections made in IDOT's HOV analysis were questioned. When Mr. Christmas requested an orientation for lay persons, Mr. Dame suggested a Village traffic engineer might be able to respond to committee inquiries. Chairperson Christmas concluded that our interest is in more information regarding the distinction between Environmental Assessment and an Environmental Impact Statement, as well as contacting CATS to become informed about traffic modeling and forecasts relating to the Eisenhower Expansion by sending a representative to a committee meeting.

Update of Activities

Mr. Dame explained that the deadline for submission of new 2030 RTP projects to CATS was April 7th, and summarized the Village's submissions. They include:

- Metra's Union Pacific West line capacity upgrade
- CTA's Blue Line Extension from Forest Park to Lisle
- Multi-Modal Corridor Study, whose goal includes not only congestion management and examination of transit options, but also environmental and community enhancement.

Upgrades and track and signal improvements to the Union Pacific West Line were included in Metra's RTA submission, which would relieve bottlenecks and add crossovers. Improvements similar to those already existing on the Burlington Northern line would increase capacity, enabling twice as much usage. President Christmas noted that this project could be significant, and is worthy of support. Both this project and the projected Blue Line extension would make a major difference in transit operations.

Mr. Dame reported that a CTA RTP submission shows an extension of that line to Oak Brook only, rather than to Lisle. He also noted that Metra has proposed a similar upgrade to many of their lines that is being suggested for the Union Pacific West Line.

The PACE submission includes a bus rapid transit plan beginning at the end of the Douglas branch of the Blue Line, down Cermak Road parallel to the I-290 to Oak Brook and then Yorktown. As of yet, there are no details or costs developed.

Mr. Dame stated that the RTP Committee of CATS expects to release a draft 2030 plan by approximately January 2003 for public comment. This plan must be finalized by October of 2003 when the previous plan expires.

A discussion followed on the I-290 serving as a funnel for getting vehicles into Chicago. Parking for these cars is minimal. It might be possible to work with the city on a public transportation solution. Mr. Dame noted that the city opposed HOV lanes on the Stevenson, but does not have a "no HOV" policy. Reviews are made on a case-by-case basis and they appear to be waiting for more information from IDOT about the Eisenhower.

Mr. Dame reported that the RTA director recently addressed the West Central Municipal Conference (WCMC), and at that time suggested that the North West Transit Study currently underway could serve as a model for a multi-modal corridor study of the I-290 through I-88. The North West Municipal Conference (NWMC) is assisting in an effort to study the extension of the Blue Line from O'Hare Airport along the I-90, the Northwest Tollway to Schaumburg, in addition to other transit alternatives such as light rail and rapid bus transport. President Trapani urged the Conference to follow up on that suggestion, and it is hoped the WCMC Transportation Committee will consider this. Mr. Dame explained that this might involve requesting funds from the RTA for that purpose, and noted that the RTA also funded the DuPage County Transit Study currently underway which is investigating transit possibilities, in addition to funding the North West Corridor study.

President Christmas stated that he is pleased that the CTA, Metra and PACE all have submitted transit projects in this corridor.

On a final note, Mr. Dame stated that since the March meeting, an introductory letter has been sent to the U. S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta stating Oak Park's concerns about IDOT's I-290 project. Mr. Mineta was invited to come to Oak Park to meet with Oak Park officials in person, visit the community and to view the impact of the Eisenhower on Oak Park. The letter urges the Secretary to ensure that IDOT follows all the federal rules for the transportation project, including investigation of all alternatives, fully examining environmental impacts and involving the public. This letter has been circulated to the entire Illinois Congressional delegation as well as to the state legislators in Springfield.

I-290 Eisenhower Expressway Project: Contacting Elected Officials

Mr. Dame explained that within the next few weeks, Village officials are planning a trip to Springfield and Washington D.C. in conjunction with our lobbyists to reiterate our concerns and personally convey how seriously we are taking this matter. In advance of this trip, Mr. Dame is urging committee members, friends and neighbors to express their concerns in writing to our elected officials.

Mr. Dame has prepared an informational item for reference that outlines suggested key points. This item can be used for reference in writing to elected officials. He stated that this is not a draft letter, but simply information to be used when referring to the project. Some members disagreed on several of the key points outlined, and discussion followed on the pros and cons of this information. A suggestion was made to modify the Village's position on this project, as some members feel the Village should state their opposition to the project regardless of the outcome of any current or future studies. It was pointed out that the intent of conducting full studies would be to determine the most appropriate transportation improvements. Mr. Dame restated that the Village position of opposition until the environmental studies have been completed, and clarified that does not imply support for the Eisenhower Expansion at that point just because studies are done. No one disputed the point made that the Eisenhower would need to be reconstructed due to its age. It was noted that the committee was not charged to oppose the project.

President Trapani stated that we want to constructively engage IDOT, and not have them "shut the door" on us during this process because of our opposition. President Trapani stated that we need to position ourselves as credible critics so that we do not cut ourselves out of future planning. Chair Christmas concluded by stating Village officials will be in Springfield on May 8th, and that it would be nice to have citizens forward their letters prior to that date. Mr. Dame indicated he would try to put something together to be included in the May issue of *FYI*.

Review Draft IDOT Letter on Regulatory Requirements

Members reviewed a draft letter to IDOT regarding the Phase I Study for the I-290 HOV Project and Alternatives, which urges IDOT to prepare an EIS for the HOV project. Some changes to the letter were suggested.

Discuss Development of Detailed EIS Case

Mr. Dame then stated that we should assume IDOT will respond to this letter, and that we must think of how we want them to address each bullet point outlined in the letter. He referred members to Agenda Item D, a memorandum from Kurt Blase, O'Connor & Hannan, that provides guidance to the committee on the factors to be considered when an agency such as IDOT is deciding whether or not to prepare an EIS. He asked that members, depending on their expertise, select a specific bullet point outlined in the IDOT letter and write a paragraph showing how the Eisenhower project pertains to that point in qualifying for an EIS. Several members volunteered, and Mr. Dame asked that they respond to him with one or two paragraphs within the next two weeks.

Other Business

It was noted that the Historic Preservation Commission will be meeting next week regarding the Gunderson National Register Historic District. Mr. Sokol stated that several addresses have already been identified for possible landmark status along the Eisenhower, and at their May meeting the commission will consider whether to contact those property owners suggesting that they examine landmark status as a possibility for their property.

Chair Christmas and Pete Dame discussed a meeting on May 4th of the Center for Neighborhood Technology. There was further discussion on the possibility of an IDOT representative addressing the community. Village Engineer Jim Budrick suggested that we could request IDOT furnish us with other studies from the past, and look at the most recent ones. Chair Christmas felt that we could begin dialogue with CATS, and offered to contact them.

Public Comment

Fred Brandstrater, 840 S. Clinton requested committee materials be made available to the public. Mr. Dame explained that draft materials are not distributed, but that all documents produced will be available on the Village's web site. Mr. Brandstrater stated further that we need to make the point that it would be

unfortunate to have to live through two years of reconstruction, followed by another five years of HOV construction.

Jody Pacer, 824 S. Scoville suggested that local PTO's could be helpful in disseminating information to parents about writing to elected officials. She further feels the RTA should stress public transportation as an alternative. We need to emphasize that if they can't promote public transportation, then we are opposed.

Rick Kuner, 728 S. Euclid agreed that there may be a some people from CATS who could explain traffic modeling. He stated that it is critical that the Village continue to pressure IDOT for an environmental impact study. He has sent letters to elected officials and asked for their support for IDOT to commit to an EIS. The preparation of an EIS requires public discussion, which would be incorporated into the draft EIS without IDOT's responses. He concluded by emphasizing the critical need for an EIS, and indicating support for a study like RTA is doing on the Northwest Tollway.

Member Nancy Rodriguez asked whether the Village was communicating with realtors regarding potential homebuyers who might be refusing to move along the expressway because of fears they could lose their homes due to highway expansion. Mr. Dame responded that he answers all questions from realtors and property owners regarding this issue. Ms. Rodriguez will investigate this further in looking at the economic impact criteria for an EIS.

Regular Meeting Time

It was the consensus of the committee to meet on the second Thursday of each month beginning June 13, 2002. Meetings will be held in the Community Room 101 at Village Hall beginning at 7 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda K. Fojtik, Recorder