

MINUTES  
I-290/Eisenhower Citizens Committee  
Oak Park Village Hall Council Chambers  
April 8, 2003

Present: Lawrence Christmas, chair; members Karen Baldwin, Ron Burke, Mark Johnson, Kevin Kell, Marion Kessy, Sandra Kupelian, Peter Morava

Also

Present: Peter Dame, VMO Staff Liaison

Absent: Collette Lueck, Phil Rock, Nancy Rodriguez and David Sokol

**Call to Order**

Chair Christmas called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. and declared a quorum present. Chair Christmas welcomed newly elected Village trustee Ray Johnson, present in the audience.

**Approval of Minutes**

A question was raised as to the appropriateness of the word “blighted” found on page 2, final full paragraph in the February 4 minutes. Chair Christmas confirmed that “blighted” was proper in that specific instance, and suggested the word be enclosed in parenthesis. On a motion made by Kevin Kell and seconded by Sandra Kupelian, the minutes of the February 4, 2003 meeting were approved as amended.

**Chairperson Comments**

Chair Christmas asked Peter Morava to report on a public meeting he attended this past Saturday as member of the stakeholder group for the Harrison and South Oak Park Avenue business district character plan study process coordinated by the University of Illinois at Chicago. This group from UIC consists of staff and students from the university, who are making a comprehensive study to help shape the future look of the Harrison Street and Oak Park Avenue/Eisenhower business districts. The meeting was in the form of a charette where citizens were able to voice their opinions about proposed concepts developed over the past several months.

Regarding the proposed Eisenhower expansion, Mr. Morava reported that citizens on the Harrison group liked the idea of a larger bridge in the form of a cap at Lombard Avenue. The cap proposal was popular with citizens who envision a park-like scenario with some development, which would be in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. Dame also indicated that a cap at Oak Park Avenue was also garnering quite a bit of conceptual support by participants.

## **Business**

### **RTA-IDOT Multi-Modal Corridor Study Update**

Mr. Dame reported that the RTA will be going out to bid for potential consultants to begin the elements of this study. The first phase, a market analysis, should take until the end of 2003. Mr. Dame noted that IDOT has told him that they are holding off on design of highway options until the RTA “catches up with them” at least through the first phase of the RTA study that will show the travel demand in the I-290/I-88 corridor.

Chair Christmas explained that the transportation agencies are all in competition for funding. Several draft plans have been submitted to Washington. This region appears to be in competition with itself, which Mr. Christmas believes could be beneficial to us as no one would want to sort through competing plans.

In response to Mr. Burke’s inquiry as to the RTA’s possible timeframe for making recommendations, Mr. Dame stated that they still need to get a handle on the issues by conducting the market analysis and then define the alternatives. Mr. Dame believes it will take at least two years for a review of the study to be completed. Mr. Burke suggested that this schedule will have a bearing on what we do as a committee. Chair Christmas replied that we will be responding to the CATS Regional Transportation Plan adoption process this year, and then look towards the future. Mr. Dame outlined several items to keep the committee busy, emphasizing the RTA draft study plan including comments and public participation on it, and federal surface transportation funding legislation under consideration this year in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Morava asked if any maintenance on the I-290 has been budgeted/scheduled. Mr. Dame replied that none is included in the five year transportation improvement plan. Mr. Johnson noted that the last resurfacing was completed in 1997/98, and that it would likely need to be resurfaced or reconstructed completely in the next six years. Based on information from the Village’s firm in Washington hired for this project, Mr. Dame noted that he sees no signs that funds are being sought for an earmarked for I-290 HOV funds on the current highway bill.

## CATS 2030 Draft Recommendations and Development of Response

Mr. Dame reported that the Chicago Area Transportation Study recently released a draft of the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan that calls for \$60 billion in improvements to area roads and rail lines through 2030. If all items on the list were to be funded, it would cost \$73 billion; consequently, the list will need to be pared down by \$13 billion. Therefore, CATS is seeking comments from the metropolitan area in an effort to whittle down this draft. A final draft from CATS is expected in July or August.

A draft copy of Oak Park's response to CATS was discussed. The draft copy includes six capital projects that would affect the western suburbs in the RTA's study corridor. Included are: an extension of the CTA Blue Line to Lisle; Metra Union Pacific line extension; I-290 HOV highway expansion; I-88 tollway expansion; Ogden Avenue transitway; and Cermak Road bus rapid transit. Mr. Dame stated the recommendations are available on line at <http://www.sp2030.com>.

Upon an inquiry from Chair Christmas, the committee confirmed that no relevant items were overlooked. All our suggested projects and issues have been included in this draft letter, and we are now recommending that all the related potential projects comprising the East-West Multi-Modal Corridor be addressed in one discussion, describing the projected needs of the corridor and how these projects would be coordinated/evaluated to meet these needs.

Several comments were made by committee members. Mr. Kell suggested reducing the length of this document. Chair Christmas asked that the conclusion should be mentioned and summarized at the beginning of the document, followed by the history, and that emphasis be placed on a complete Environmental Impact Study. He also submitted detailed comments to staff for inclusion and invited others to do the same. Committee members were asked to forward their suggestions/changes to Mr. Dame by Monday, April 15<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Dame noted that in general, the North Central of Mayors agrees with transit benefits and these projects, and that the Village would pursue a statement of support coinciding with the Village's comments. Mr. Dame believes it is likely we will get some strong, supporting comments from them. Mr. Burke agreed, stating that we should develop a draft of priorities. Mr. Dame indicated that he did plan to do this. Dame also noted that the RTP is a "wish list" and a long-range plan, and does not relieve each major project in the RTP from undergoing required studies such as environment and alternatives.

Mr. Johnson questioned items #1 and #2, which he felt were at odds with each other. Mr. Dame indicated that this was taken from the original Village comments at the outset of the CATS RTP process, but that he would review how to address this as part of redrafting the letter. Dame explained further that the letter urges all projects in the corridor need to be identified together, and can be looked at as alternatives, from which the best solution has not yet been identified. The letter expresses how the HOV lanes would cause significant problems, it supports transit projects in the corridor instead of HOV lanes to meet fiscal constraints. Chair Christmas agreed, stating our strategy should be that HOV lanes become one alternative for which the most appropriate option or combination of options would be determined by the RTA corridor study. Mr. Kessy agreed with this strategy, and Mr. Burke felt it would make more sense for CATS to study all the alternatives. Dame indicated that the CATS modeling still does not conduct project by project analysis, just more global scenarios from which individual project performance is hard to delineate. Chair Christmas responded that RTA is now looking at these alternative projects in the corridor, and that they obviously cannot build them all. Mr. Dame stated as an example that they must first determine what to do with the Blue Line before making any decision on the HOV lanes.

Mr. Christmas asked that Mr. Dame incorporate members' changes, and recirculate the changed draft to them.

### State and Federal Update

Now that Congress is gearing up for the transportation bill, Mr. Dame reported that O'Connor & Hannan, the Village's legal and technical consultant, recommends Oak Park officials visit Springfield and Washington to personally get our views across to legislators. We will continue to push for an EIS since we have not received a response from Springfield or from IDOT since providing the impacts report. One way to do this is by seeking a two-tiered EIS of all projects in the RTA corridor study. Burke asked that staff seek legal thoughts on how hard we should push for an EIS on transit projects. The Village's initial comments, reviewed by the Committee at the last meeting, on how to conduct the RTA corridor study was sent which has been spelled out in a letter to IDOT and to the Illinois Tollway and the RTA with no formal response yet. In addition, legislators need to be aware that we are opposed to earmarking funds for development of HOV lanes on the I-290, but instead support transit project funding and funding for Phase I engineering of a cap. Our position to the federal legislators will be that we need to insure that any proposed streamlining of the environmental process does not lessen environmental protection; that we support an increase in transit funding as well as increased funding to insure existing systems are maintained;

and that we support a higher share of allocation of overall funding to transportation.

Mr. Dame further reported that since our last meeting, the impact study has been sent to State leaders and newly-elected officials. We will be asking State legislators to support EIS and the RTA study recommendation laid out in the Village's letter as well as funding for Phase I preliminary environmental and engineering of a cap, which is the next step after the Illinois Tomorrow Grant process concludes.

#### Other Miscellaneous Updates

Regarding the UIC project, Mr. Morava reported that information is available to the public on the Village's web site.

Mr. Dame reported that IDOT has approved the proposed scope of the Illinois Tomorrow cap grant, and that they will incorporate this into contract language by July 1<sup>st</sup>. This project cannot begin until a contract is executed; in the meantime, we can begin drafting an RFP for review by the Cap Working Group.

#### Public Comment

Fred Brandstrader reported that two presentations will be held at the Chicago Architectural Foundation: April 10, Proposed Cap on the Kennedy Expressway and April 17, a round table discussion on Chicago area central planning. Both presentations are open to the public; more information is available at their web site.

Dan Fore, 255 S. Marion stated he is serving on an RTA Citizen Advisory Committee on Accessibility, and is attending this meeting to gain more insight on the RTA-IDOT corridor proposals. Chair Christmas asked that Mr. Dame meet with him to outline the work of this committee.

#### Adjournment

There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned until the next scheduled meeting on June 3, 2003.