

City of Mount Vernon
Planning Commission
Minutes from May 20, 2008
Public Hearing for Draft Downtown Waterfront Master Plan

Chairperson **Denny Legro** opened the meeting. Present were Commission members **Tom Twedt, Gary Molenaar, Mark Hulst, Donnie Keltz, Warren Cheney** and **Al Lyon**. Community and Economic Development Director **Jana Hanson**, Finance Director **Alicia Huschka**, and consultants **Andy Bennett, Greg Easton, Jerry Ernst** were also in attendance.

Mr. Legro informed the audience the purpose of the hearing is to garner public input. A workshop involving the Planning Commission and the Citizens Advisory Group was held on April 15th. **Mr. Legro** thanked the members of the Citizen Advisory Group and turned the meeting over to **Jana Hanson**.

Ms. Hanson introduced the consultants working with the City on the Master Plan. **Andy Bennett** is with KPFF Consulting and Engineering. **Mr. Bennett** is the managing consultant for the Master Plan and the flood protection Environmental Impact Statement. **Jerry Ernst** of Ernst and Associates is responsible for developing the designs for the downtown redevelopment and the planning and design principles within the Master Plan. **Greg Easton** of Property Counselors has prepared the economic analysis based on existing and projected development. **Alicia Huschka** will explain the grant known as 'LIFT' the City has applied for. **Ms. Hanson** emphasized the necessity for flood protection, without which development is prohibitive. A parking garage is essential for housing vehicles displaced by the flood protection measure. The garage will be designed to also support county government and parking created from new development. Vision and guiding development principles provided in the Master Plan will ensure development that fits within the historic character of downtown.

Mr. Ernst and **Mr. Bennett** provided a Power Point presentation that gave an overview of the Master Plan process. It outlined background, public involvement process beginning in 2005 and involving Citizens Advisory Group, Planning Commission, City Council in workshops, open houses and public meetings; goals & objectives, existing conditions including demographics and economics; flood protection; and projections for residential and commercial growth.

Mr. Ernst started with the Urban Design Framework plan. It is a graphic representation showing the structure of downtown, arterials into downtown, I-5 and the railroad. Land use and development will include redevelopment of properties purchased for flood control; increased density and mixed use. There are 11 opportunity sites for re-development. There is streetscape improvement proposed for several sites. A riverfront public plaza between Gates and Myrtle is planned. The plan will be to encourage as much pedestrian oriented use as possible. Additional public amenities may include a public dock, market, and museum. Design of newer buildings will be compatible with existing buildings. Floor Area Ratio (FAR) was suggested as a means to control density. The amount of square footage that can be built on a piece of property is determined as a multiplier of the site area. An example of this would be a 10,000 square foot site could develop to 20,000 square feet of usable property. It does not regulate the height of a building. A maximum FAR of 2 is suggested for one half block of both sides of Gates and First Streets; for the remainder of the downtown core area a FAR of 1.5 could be applied. This will require further discussion.

Transportation and Parking: A promenade and improvements will enhance and encourage pedestrian usage. Re-alignment of First and Division Streets will improve pedestrian safety and connections to the downtown core. Added transit service and a parking garage are needed. Locating utilities underground will provide a better streetscape.

Mr. Easton provided an outline for the implementation of economic strategies. This included funding requirements, private development incentives, and economic benefits such as more jobs and additional tax revenue. Local Improvement District (LID) assessments and impact fees may also be utilized. Completing the flood protection will enable the City to provide the improvements that will attract new business and development to downtown as well as making existing businesses more successful.

Ms. Huschka explained the Local Infrastructure Financing Tool (LIFT), a state program provided for developing new properties and related tax revenues. The City is filing for a CERB (Community Economic Revitalization Board) application that will fund \$500,000 for 25 years only if new development occurs. This would make it possible for the City to issue bonds to finance improvements such as the promenade and parking garage.

Ms. Hanson stated if Planning Commission approves recommendation of the Master Plan to City Council a public hearing will be held on June 11th. Staff is currently preparing grant applications for the promenade and trail connections to the north of Division Street. The flood control project should be completed this summer.

Mr. Legro explained the role the Planning Commission, and opened the hearing for public testimony.

Frank Bettendorf, 619 Geneva Alley, Mount Vernon; thanked the Planning Commission for giving the citizens the opportunity to comment. A letter given to Planning Commission members was read. He recommends no buildings higher than the 8 foot flood wall. Two story buildings allowed north of Division. The entrance to the city should be housing and in character with existing businesses; not a jail and industrial area. The core of downtown should be created as a historic district; and be part of a campaign to create historic Mount Vernon. The Mayor and Council should participate with the citizens in neighborhood educational programs to enroll community in achievement of the plan; and volunteer task forces to examine concepts like Main Street, Smart Growth, and to research funding resources to revitalize historic downtown Mount Vernon.

Gilberto Rosales, owner of Chapilita's, 315 Main; is concerned about what happens to tenants after City acquires the building. What will happen to their lease, will tenants be compensated for their business, and what is the timeline for the purchase of the building.

Ms. Hanson stated the City is working with property owners and businesses that lease from them; compensation will be provided to business owners. Purchases of buildings should be complete in 2009.

Paula Johnston, 221 Manito Dr, Mount Vernon; is concerned about the plan and inquired if all the buildings on First will remain; or is Lincoln Theatre the only one. What are the plans for the Moose Lodge? She is concerned the historical nature of downtown Mount Vernon be preserved including the Moose Lodge; and local businesses being forced out. Consideration should be given to local businesses.

Ms. Hanson stated none of the buildings on First Street will be impacted by the project. The only buildings the City will purchase for the flood control project are west of Main Street. This includes the Moose Lodge. The City has been in conversations with Moose Lodge Board members over the past year and is assisting them in locating other property along the river.

Doris Brevoort, 118 S. 5th, Mount Vernon; wishes to recognize the Community Survey of Historic Homes and Buildings, of which she is a member and represents the members as well. She suggested sponsoring additional public hearings in other locations. They have an active interest and consider themselves stakeholders. She stated the City has the potential of a historic district downtown. The Carnation Building is a key building and could be considered to remodel for housing, hotel or other public use. She believes it is pre-mature to pass a plan for re-development before the Army Corps of Engineers has released their flood maps. She believes waiting for results of historic survey before beginning new development. A public meeting space that retains a

valley view in the design should be included. If big development is allowed along the waterfront it will privatize the view and the waterfront.

Joni Gordon, 720 Main Street, Mount Vernon; A letter from Joni and Don Gordon was read for the record. They strongly endorse the Master Plan, and offer two cautions: don't talk it to death, take action; and allow flexibility.

Bruce Springer, as a merchant and building owner does not see any emphasis for the here and now. Merchants downtown need promotion now to survive during construction and after as costs will increase. The City does not have a marketing program for the downtown merchants. If there was concerted effort now he would feel better about the future.

Kirsten Whitener, Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce, 105 E. Kincaid; has been involved and supportive for 3 years. She recounted a conversation she had with the 1960 Chamber director who said they had a very similar plan then. She is excited about the revitalization and looks forward to working with process.

Gerry Douglas, 1320 Quinton; Referenced letter she wrote to Editor wherein she disagrees with parking garage. She believes successful development in downtowns excludes vehicles and public transportation is the future. Provide shuttle service; pedestrian bridge for pedestrians. Dedicate a street only for pedestrians.

Oliver Brentson, 2725 E Fir, member of Moose Lodge; stated the building has existed for more than 85 years; it is a local and national organization with over 700 members. It is the only Moose Lodge in the area and although it operates as a business it is non-profit.

Don Wick, Executive Director EDASC, 204 W. Montgomery; extended his gratitude for inviting public comment. He referenced the Main Street program the City applied for in 1985, but was not selected. He served on the Chamber board in the early to mid 80s, and this was a central theme of discussion. This is the best plan he has seen. He thinks downtown is pedestrian friendly. Mount Vernon can become a destination. He thanked the City for their work on the Downtown Master Plan.

Gary Coleman, 511 E. Lawrence Mount Vernon; stated he is a member of the Moose Lodge; thinks it's strange that Commercial Cold Storage is not included in the property acquisition. He feels this is due to the tax base. The Moose Lodge is non-profit; Commercial Cold Storage pays taxes. He thinks it is all about money. What about the Westside.

Shirley Viscalla, 202 S. 4th, Mount Vernon; would like to see the Main Street program and the historic preservation group written into the proposal. She is also concerned about the privatization of the downtown area. She commented on how many people are represented by Planning Commission members. She opposes any height over 2 stories that would detract from the project and view. She thanked the panel for a good job.

Carol Hayes, 12814 Farm to Market, Mount Vernon, Director Lincoln Theater, and Downtown Mount Vernon Association; and has been working on the Main Street program application. The application has received 50 letters of support from the community. The Downtown Association is committed to the project and hiring a director.

Ron Farrell, Farmers Market; commended the City and the consultants for working with the Farmers Market, and offered support for a successful project.

Mr. Legro called for additional testimony, and then closed the public hearing.

Mr. Twedt inquired of becoming pedestrian friendly. **Mr. Ernst** stated given the current layout parking is difficult but Mount Vernon is pedestrian friendly. More density would be required before a pedestrian island could be obtained and served effectively with public transit. Greater density requires taller buildings and transportation. This is an incremental step to becoming a pedestrian city. A transit system will not work if the density is not there to provide the ridership to support it.

Doris Brevoort asked why not create a plan showing a public transportation system. **Mr. Ernst** stated transportation and land use are closely inter-related. You can't introduce a bus service without increasing the density to provide enough people to make the system work. He further stated this is an appropriate first step.

Mr. Cheney asked the width of the promenade. **Mr. Ernst** stated the current promenade is five feet; the one in the design is 25 feet.

Ron Farrell asked what separates the plaza. **Mr. Ernst** stated removable ballards into which stop blocks are dropped. **Ms. Hanson** stated this is an option being explored as it has yet to be accepted by federal agencies.

Oliver Berentson asked about the plans for the parking lot between the Moose Lodge and Commercial Cold Storage. **Ms. Hanson** stated the City is leasing it for parking.

Kai Ottesen, President of Farmers Market Board; asked if the delivery trucks will be able to use Gates and Myrtle. **Mr. Ernst** stated that is the intent.

Frank Bettendorf questioned the viability of removable ballards as it was reported elsewhere it wasn't reliable. Building two story buildings above an eight foot flood wall shadows other buildings. He suggested the City buy Commercial Cold Storage; move Commercial Cold Storage to the soon to be vacant to Wal Mart; and use Commercial Cold Storage building for condos, and construct a 3 story building down there.

Gerry Douglas, locals don't shop downtown as there is not enough activity. The people that live here would like to have more events and activities.

Mr. Legro closed the public hearing.

Mr. Hulst questioned the concern over privatization of the riverfront and riverfront views. The existing buildings are privately owned; the proposed plan looks like the riverfront, access and views will be enhanced by the re-development. **Mr. Ernst** stated there will be a 25 foot promenade, publicly accessible at every street end; plus a full block between Gates and Myrtle for a public plaza. This will create more open space and more access to the river. **Mr. Legro** asked about building height. **Ms. Hanson** stated this Master Plan provides design guidelines and concepts, the next step is the implementation of those concepts into development regulations. Additionally, the Shoreline Master Plan is being updated; that too will have development regulations within the shoreline area. The stop log method for flood control is not uncommon, it has been used in other states. The key is the logs are located where they can be readily moved in the event of a flood. Warning is given prior to a flood event so sufficient time is allowed for their placement. Federal approval is required for this protection measure. The height of the flood wall will likely be 4 to 6 feet due to modifications to the hydrology since completion of the EIS. The Corps of Engineers model was outdated creating more adjustments. The Master Plan is a comprehensive plan that sets goals, policies and objectives; it is the basis upon which other plans and regulations are built.

Mr. Hulst asked about a foot bridge between Westside and downtown. **Mr. Ernst** stated the intent is to provide a wider sidewalk that provides a convenient and safe connection across the river either on one or both sides of the bridge. **Mr. Cheney** asked why the plan stops at Kincaid Street; why not extend it further south. **Ms. Hanson** stated the focus from the beginning has been the core of downtown, however the flood project

includes Lions Park to the north and the wastewater treatment plant to the south. Downtown is the focus of re-development activity; which will likely continue further south and north.

Mr. Ernst stated density will increase south and north. Kincaid and Division Streets present a slight barrier to extending the pedestrian character. The focus is on the crosswalk improvements at the intersections with First Street, but as it develops you will see east/west development related to that.

Mr. Keltz stated he is pleased that the Master Plan addresses a lot of the concerns that have been brought up tonight; it will only have to be worked out through the process.

Mr. Lyon stated nothing can be done until the flood issue is resolved. If that isn't done it will be difficult to get funding to do anything. As a business owner downtown he sees this as a throttle for Mount Vernon to go forward; to remove the stigma. This is a catalyst, an incentive for other business owners and developers.

He views this as one of the greatest things to happen to Mount Vernon. The flood issue is number one, it will drive the rest.

Mr. Cheney asked for examples of other communities in the Northwest that have invested in projects of this scale, or revitalization. **Mr. Easton** cited Bremerton as an example with its' waterfront and many improvements; also Tacoma. **Ms. Hanson** recalled the City of Renton's downtown revitalization.

Mr. Molenaar stated he has been a downtown business owner for 25 years; the business his Father started in 1958. He has received many comments on the Master plan. He believes the plan is a great move forward.

Mr. Molenaar moved, second by Mr. Hulst, to recommend the Downtown Waterfront Master Plan to City Council. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Legro thanked the audience and reminded them a public hearing on the Master Plan is scheduled before City Council on June 11th.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned.