

Planning Commission: November 10, 1999 Summary

DRAFT Minutes of Special Planning Commission Meeting

Planning Commissioners Present: Bronstein, Capitelli, Howerton, McCamant, Noguera (7:20), Poschman, Wengraf (left at 9:20), Wrenn (7:15)

Planning Commissioners Absent: Boverhuis

Staff Present: Haney-Owens, Epstein, Thomas, Douglas

PUBLIC COMMENT - None.

ORDER OF AGENDA - The order of the agenda was not changed.

COUNCIL ACTIONS - None.

FUTURE AGENDAS

Commissioner Bronstein asked staff to give a report on the current status of the University Relations Commission. Staff stated that at its November 9th meeting, the City Council approved the Planning Commission's recommendation to establish this Commission, and delayed the Commission appointment process for two months to allow time for the City Manager to present a report to the Council regarding Commission budget implications and staffing requirements. Commissioner Poschman requested that staff provide information regarding these budget and staffing issues to the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Wengraf asked staff for a list of Planning Commission Subcommittees.

Staff Haney-Owens stated that the University has requested an opportunity to meet with the Planning Commission to discuss the New Century Plan as well as other University planning projects. This discussion was scheduled for December 15, 1999 as a special Planning Commission meeting.

Commissioner Bronstein asked staff to check on the status of the legal opinion regarding issues related to the transitional housing Zoning Ordinance amendment.

APPROVAL OF OCTOBER 13, 1999 MINUTES

(M/S/C) to approve the 10/13/99 minutes with corrections (Poschman/McCamant). The motion carried. Ayes: Bronstein, Capitelli, Howerton, McCamant, Noguera, Poschman, Wengraf and Wrenn. Noes: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Boverhuis.

GENERAL PLAN WORKSHOP ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN BERKELEY MUNICIPAL DECISION MAKING

Commissioner Capitelli gave introductory comments and encouraged all in attendance to provide written comments to staff and the Planning Commission regarding the General Plan. He opened the public discussion and suggested that the group initially focus on Item #1 on the workshop agenda, Notification and Information. [Note: The discussion moved between six workshop agenda items: Notification and Information, The Role of the Neighborhood, The 1977 Citizens Participation

Element, The New Technology, City Administration and Staff, and Berkeley Policy-Making Bodies and Other Institutions].

- Paul Frankie requested that the Commission provide more information on topics that affect Berkeley residents.
- Leonard Pitt requested that the Commission provide more notification and a better explanation of the General Plan issues that will be discussed at Commission meetings.
- Norine Smith stated that the notification system is insufficient and suggested that meetings be listed in San Francisco newspapers.
- Doris Willingham stated that citizen participation is difficult when agendas are not available sufficiently in advance of a meeting or workshop. She stated that there is not enough time to review items between the posting of the agendas and the meetings.
- Commissioner Wrenn stated that important issues and staff reports should be posted on the web, citing Santa Monica's website as an example of a successful city website.
- Daniel Coraco stated that the "collapse of the distinction between governors and governed" is beneficial.
- Commissioner McCamant raised the issue of scope of interest, stating that some issues are of interest only to people in a small area and some issues are of interest to people in a broader area.
- GJ Stillson MacDonnell, President of the Thousand Oaks Neighborhood Association, noted that Albany attaches notices to flat boards mounted on light poles, resulting in a better viewing surface. She recommended putting computers dedicated to website information in public libraries. She stated that the Berkeley website has improved and cited the Walnut Creek site as a good example of a successful city website.
- Commissioner Bronstein stated that information on the web has limited value in that many people do not have access to it and some types of information are not easily transacted via the web.
- Jan Whittington recommended website information as a means of increasing student participation.
- Sheila Andres suggested incorporating the voter list from the web into the General Plan notification list.
- Tim Hansen stated the importance of facilitating interaction on the web. He noted that Menlo Park puts people's comments on their city website.
- Commissioner Wengraf noted that Portland posts signs in people's front yards.
- Michael Diehl stated that it is important to keep homeless people involved in planning processes.
- Ria Hutabarat stated her concern that the Plan remain readable and that the discussion process be conducted in small groups.
- Commissioner Bronstein stated that the Commission wants to identify important issues as a first step in the process of updating the General Plan.
- Commissioner Poschman assured those in attendance that the General Plan is still subject to revision.
- Charlotte Shimura recommended installing community bulletin boards at supermarkets.
- Norine Smith suggested that the City of Berkeley's website provide opportunity for public comment.
- Mischa Lorraine stated that the cost of posting information must be considered.
- Eva Bansner of the League of Women Voters stated her concern that the General Plan Update is taking too long.
- Commissioner Bronstein stated that the workshops will focus on fundamental issues independently of the staff draft.
- Martha Nicoloff requested confirmation that staff and Commission have received mail and

email from the public.

- Planning Director Elizabeth Epstein concurred that the public should be informed that their comments have been received.
- Allen Moore requested that a weekly calendar of events be posted on the City's website.
- Commissioner Poschman raised the issue of whether some groups of people have limited access to the web.
- Joseph Arasteh noted that agendas are posted in the Daily Planet.
- Commissioner Poschman referred to an article regarding Portland's website that points to the advantages and disadvantages of web-based information.
- Harold Boyer asked what would be an appropriate forum for citizen's input regarding the General Plan.
- Commissioner Wrenn stated that comments should be directed to Andrew Thomas, the Project Manager. He stated that the Commission will consider citizen feedback in revising the staff draft of the Plan.
- Commissioner Bronstein stated that the structure of the draft is open to revision.
- Tim Hanson stated that it is helpful for citizens to hear each other's comments in this forum.
- Commissioner Wrenn stated that he would like to see a structured mechanism for continuing this forum.
- Mary Clegg stated that the system of citizen participation via three-minute public comment is frustrating and ineffective.
- Commissioner Wrenn stated that www.berkeleyfreepress.com is a forum for posting public comments.
- Commissioner Poschman stated that chat lines are also available.
- Fred Lupkey asked if citizen participation influenced the staff draft.
- Michael Diehl stated his concern regarding a lack of accountability on the part of the City Manager.
- Daniel Caraco stated that citizen participation is messy but necessary. He stated that the City is abandoning its responsibility if it relies on private websites for communication.
- Pat Devito stated that she has had difficulty using the City's phone mail system and requested that it be improved.
- Commissioner Capitelli suggested that a roster could be generated of important City phone numbers.
- Rob Browning stated that people will believe that the City is interested in them if they see evidence of outreach to citizens.
- Eva Bansner stated that she would like to see a neighborhood emergency preparedness map.
- Wendy Weikel stated that neighboring cities do a better job of mapping important sites.
- Commissioner Bronstein asked what role the neighborhood should play in planning decisions.
- Victor Herbert stated that Berkeley should have a permanent Communications Commission instead of just a temporary information-gathering body related to the General Plan.
- Commissioner Capitelli stated that he would like to see the General Plan become an active document that continues to be a medium for ongoing participation.
- Josephine Arasteh stated that neighborhood groups should invite Commissioners to speak.
- Allen Moore stated that it is important to have ongoing community discussion regarding non-violence.
- Doris Willingham stated that neighborhood participation would be improved by using bulletin boards and a website.
- Martha Nicoloff stated that neighborhood notices must have a longer lead-time and be more widely distributed. She stated that neighborhoods need advocates to compete with pro-development lobbyists.
- Tony Falcone stated that he would like to have a General Plan workshop in the Southside that

- would include targeted outreach to students.
- Commissioner Wrenn asked whether the City could communicate more effectively, whether neighborhoods have too much power, and whether City interests are different from neighborhood interests.
 - Commissioner Noguera suggested a neighborhood liaison could service bulletin boards, serve as an ombudsperson between neighborhood groups, channel e-mail, attend neighborhood meetings, and represent neighborhood concerns.
 - Charlette Shimura stated her interest in livable communities and aversion to seeing neighborhoods shaped by businesses to the detriment of quality of life. She stated that residents, rather than institutions, businesses, and government, should be the driving force behind policy decisions. She stated that residents need more power.
 - Daniel Coraco stated that the General Plan lacks the ideal of a just, equitable society and that neighborhoods need help organizing and communicating. He stated that neighborhood liaisons would deter participation by staff members whose job it is to be responsive on specific projects.
 - Norine Smith stated that Berkeley is too small to need liaisons and everyone in Berkeley should be interested in all parts of Berkeley.

 - Commissioner McCamant raised the issue of the definition of a neighborhood. She stated that residents live in neighborhoods but not all have neighborhood groups. She supported the idea of using bulletin boards.

 - Jim Orjala stated that issues should be resolved through interaction among neighbors rather than among Councilmembers. He stated that Councilmembers, Commissioners, and staff should attend neighborhood meetings. He stated that it is important to establish a means for neighbors to reinvent their neighborhoods.

 - Jan Whittington stated that including the campus community could be used as a means to broaden outreach.

 - Michael Diehl stated that a neighborhood liaison would be useful for emergency preparedness.

 - Commissioner Bronstein stated her concern that staff would delegate issues to liaisons if are used.

 - Eva Bansner stated that some issues are larger than individual neighborhoods and are not answered on a local scale.

 - Ted Edlin requested documentation of the cost for the General Plan. He stated that the bulletin boards installed by the Fire Department cost \$1,200 and are not used. He believes it is effective to mail to neighborhood groups.

 - Victor Bull stated that residents have to get involved in policy discussions.

 - David Blake stated that the staff Draft is goal-oriented but lacks specific action plans.

 - Commissioner Bronstein asked whether copies of the 1977 Master Plan are available.

 - Staff Thomas stated that they are available at the planning office and at the library. He also stated that public comments are available on the web.

- David Snippen stated that the evening's discussion had been productive but that many interested people were absent. He stated that the 1977 Master Plan is still a relevant planning document.
- Rosjidah Berger suggested noticing meetings on the radio.
- Victor Bull stated that the proximity of the office of Economic Development to the Planning Department is detrimental to citizen interests.
- Noreen Smith suggested updating the 1977 Plan Citizen Participation Element rather than creating a new element.
- Commissioner Wrenn referred to a neighborhood group near Alta Bates that successfully used the 1977 Master Plan to initiate a quality of life study of their neighborhood.
- Bob Howard stated that people are extremely cynical about neighborhood preservation and believe they can not fight City Hall without money and lawyers.
- Harold Boyer asked how the process will proceed.
- Commissioner Capitelli stated that the Commission will incorporate public comments in its amendments to the staff Draft, produce a Planning Commission Draft Plan, and, after further community discussion, present a revised Draft to Council for adoption.
- Tony Falcone asked about the role of students in the process of the General Plan development.
- Commissioner Capitelli stated that student participation is an issue to be addressed.
- Daniel Coraco raised the issue of how policy-making bodies deal with personal values.
- David Blake stated that citizens need more authority to influence City decision-makers.

COMMITTEE REPORTS - No reports given.

Adjournment at 10:10 p.m.