

WEST ASHLEY REVITALIZATION COMMISSION

July 10, 2019

A meeting of the West Ashley Revitalization Commission was held this date at the West Ashley Theater Center, Ashley Landing Plaza, 1404 Sam Rittenberg Boulevard, Suite 11.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

PRESENT

City Councilmember Peter Shahid, Chair, John deStephano, St. Andrews PSD, Justin Ferira, Harry Gregorie, Krisalyn Gleaton, Trudie Krawcheck, County Councilman Brantley Moody, Jimmy Palassis, Charles Smith, Mayor John Tecklenburg, Theresa Tidestrom, City Councilmember Marvin Wagner.

STAFF: Jacob Lindsay, Director, Department of Planning, Preservation and Sustainability, Christopher Morgan, Planning Director, and Eric Pohlman, West Ashley Project Coordinator.

Approval of May 8, 2019 Minutes - Deferred

North Bridge - Old Towne Gateway Redevelopment Process - Information Session - Mr. Lindsay

Mr. Lindsay said the site they were talking about today was the Sumar Street site. They had done a lot of work and a lot of study, and they thought this position could move forward. He introduced Allan Davis of the Design Division, Department of Planning, Preservation and Sustainability, and Amy Barrett of the Urban Land Institute.

Mr. Lindsay reviewed the timeline the City had done regarding this site. In 2016 the work was created and the Commission's work began. The City ended up purchasing the site. Plan West Ashley was adopted. The City cleared the site getting it prepared for development. Today, after much study, public involvement and an interesting look at this by the city's partners in the Urban Land Institute, the City was ready to move forward with the next steps on this property.

Mr. Lindsay said the Design Division just provided urban design study and urban design thinking about how they could best improve the City.

Mr. Davis spoke about the site design process. He commented since everyone knew where the site was located and its relationship to the street and the intersections he wouldn't spend that much time on it. The site design happened in four phases:

1. *Preliminary Phase* - They didn't know what the intersection was going to be like but they began to study it anyway. This was around the time they were reviewing Plan West Ashley.
2. *Second Phase* - The County arrived at four separate intersection alternatives. Just before that, they launched the open studio and online phase process. They began thinking about how to use small retail, restaurant and office buildings as a result of the open studio.
3. *Third Phase* - The County went from four intersection alternatives to two intersection alternatives. That significantly changed the configuration of the site and led them to thinking about other commercial uses that would need to be on the site that it would better accommodate. Mr. Davis said they will talk about that step at the end of the presentation, which was the Fourth Phase.

In reference to the Second Phase, Mr. Davis said many of the audience members participated in the two-day long open studio process at which the same time they launched about a month and half of online public comment. They heard from about 1000 people online. They developed conceptual master plans over two days for about seventy people. They weren't able to draw everyone's plans that came before them so they had yellow tags that were incorporated into the online survey. They heard many things out of those two days but they distilled it down to three general ideas.

The first thing they heard a lot about was having some passive outdoor open space. He said they weren't talking about something large like Marion Square or Brittlebank Park but something that was small and

intimate that could handle a small gathering of people. Realizing there would be a lot of activity around the intersection itself, the site didn't lend itself to having a very large park.

Mr. Davis said the second thing they heard was there needed to be some cultural or civic community facility that could be a building and could also be an open space, and also could be hybrid of both, meaning there would be activities inside and outside of the building at the same time.

They also heard a lot about commercial development. That was a very broad term but generally what that meant was its not very good for residential. They heard many ideas from things like Cheesecake Factory to Dave & Busters to a collection of mixed-use buildings like fresh food facilities where people could gather and shop.

Mr. Davis noted they tried to create diagrams to help them better understand the spatial configurations of the site and there were four diagrams that were important. In reference to the first diagram, since the site was triangularly shape it needed to have buildings on all three corners of that triangle to appear to be beautiful from all its approaches. The buildings hold the corner.

The second diagram indicated it needed to have a strong north-south connection, specifically for pedestrians and bicyclists getting from neighborhood to neighborhood, and the shopping center. They envisioned using Sumar Street as that north-south connection.

The third diagram indicated that with the intersection improvements they had the opportunity to work with SCDOT to acquire additional land and thus realizing the possibility increasing the size of the site accommodating more of the uses and ideas they heard from the community. The site needed to have a strong gateway effect and it had to be beautiful as you arrived. It had to have a sense of a gateway to celebrate not only its position but also its surroundings.

Mr. Davis said a really important concept that wasn't necessarily related to the design was that the site had to be a productive use. It had to be an income generating use that they could feed the adjacent tax increment financing (TIF) district. That meant the overlaying district of this portion of West Ashley where the tax value generated from a site could be retained and used for infrastructure and drainage improvements in that location. Having a site being entirely c a park didn't give any money to make additional improvements in other parts of West Ashley.

Mr. Davis commented they looked at actual buildings that they could actually allocate to the site based on uses and configurations. They looked at smaller buildings that were generally 1 ½ and 2 stories composed of restaurants and retail. They looked at small, intimate open spaces and using service parking, not a structured parking garage for the site. They allocated these building types and these uses to the triangle itself in conjunction with the County's four intersection alternatives. He added he was only talking about the second phase of the design. They went out to the County in December to present these ideas along with their four intersection design alternatives so they could demonstrate how the site revitalized along with their configurations.

During the second phase, three major things changes occurred on the site when the County went from four intersections to two intersections:

1. Staff understood the actual size of the site so it wasn't necessarily that it would be bisected by the roadway. They got to retain the entire site.
2. The amount of land the City acquired from SCDOT could grow the size of the site and accommodate all of the uses they wanted.
3. The third thing that changed was the number of access points related to the site and the types of accesses that were given to them by the intersection configuration. That explained the shift from a retail and restaurant focused development program to one that was based on something where people needed to be able to access the site who knew how to get there.

Retailers didn't want to be on a site where one would have to make a lot difficult turns to get to the location. This was what helped staff shift from a different commercial use. Mr. Davis added they weren't talking residential.

Mr. Davis said he wouldn't spend a lot of time talking about the two intersection design alternatives other than this was what he was describing as access to the site became very limited. In addition to a right in/right out driveway configuration (no left turns into the site), they also had a one-way street that they were dealing with, which wasn't necessarily for being a public access to the site mainly as you don't know where you're going. If you were an office user who worked there every day you know how to get to the site. If you're a client visiting the office you could generally navigate your way. However, if you were someone trying to find a restaurant or somewhere to eat, it's a little harder to get there. Retailers don't like that.

Mr. Davis said they looked at different kinds of building types. Each had different tradeoffs associated with them. What they ended up with was a civic building at the front of the site that presented itself well to oncoming traffic (the gateway effect). The civic building didn't necessarily have to be large. He noted when they said civic building they were talking about something that could accommodate an event similar to this meeting right now, a wedding or something that had an indoor/outdoor component. They were talking about city offices, such as a police substation or a place where city staff can work. A small civic building, something that grounded the site, had a more of a public component to it.

They also spoke about greenspace. In one of the configurations, greenspace was somewhat limited but they were able to find more greenspace in the other configurations. They were also working on a building that had structured parking that might be on the ground floor of the building or may have it close to it. What was really important to the design staff was the parking garage design appeared to look obnoxious. It was a hulking mass that didn't look good. It had to be wrapped by a building and had to include powerful shapes. The parking garage at the Gaillard Center was wrapped with offices.

Mr. Davis said one of the reasons they wanted to leave this drawing up was if you thought about the way the site was configured today, they could do any of the other uses and configurations on the site as it existed today without intersection improvement. They were currently positioned to revitalize the site using all of the three goals they obtained from the community at the office studio and the input survey. They were able to accommodate three main goals he talked about on the site as it was configured currently.

In reference to one of the configurations, Mr. Davis said it was what he wanted it to look like but it didn't have to look like that. The entire site had to go through an intensive design development review. Amy Barrett, executive director of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), South Carolina, said they were a mission driven membership, non-profit organization. Their mission was to provide leadership in the responsible use of land, and creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. Their members come from a wide, broad cross section of developers, architects, and planners. Anyone who works within those environments and had been shaping communities could be a member of ULI and participate and engage in the work that they do. The way they put that mission into action was furthering education and resources, and they do many publications on relevant topics. Most of these were available free to download. She encouraged the Commission members and anyone who were interested to look at some of those development topics, case studies and best practices for development.

Ms. Barrett said part of the work they do was Advisory Services that came in a variety of formats. At the end of the day, the objective of their Advisory Services was to help communities gain fresh insight, think new thoughts, innovative solutions to whatever challenges they might be facing. A very important part of the membership of the ULI organization was to be able use developer expertise and experience to bring those resources to various local communities and work through some of the challenges there.

When Mr. Davis and Mr. Lindsey first contacted her about how to be able to use some of those Advisory Services and bring them to bear West Ashley, it became obvious they didn't have a big budget and not a whole lot of time. Therefore, they worked toward a one-day forum. They did a kind of P3 Forum (Public, Private, Partnership) Forum. They crafted a clear effective statement about what they wanted to get out of that day, which was to really utilize the person who had expertise and create these sets of partnerships to really help the City development an effective strategy for engaging a private sector partner who would be able to bring the development they envisioned at the site to life. The City staff was working to train persons from City staff that could be in the room that day and she would work trying to find the right people she worked with that had some development expertise and they could share with their open community.

They ended up with two people from the local community, Miller Harper, who worked with East West Partners, who had done a lot of work in the city, and Chappy McKay, who worked with Trident Construction. Both of them worked in the city, knew the city staff and understood city processes, which was important local knowledge they brought to the conversation. Ms. Barrett said they then recruited two developers from the upstate, Phil Hughes, whose company, Hughes Investments, had done many beautiful public pleasing work in downtown Greenville, and Russ Davis with Homes Urban, Inc., who was primarily a residential developer but also specializes on physical fields, working with the public sector trying to make a project work through challenges of awkward sites or development challenges.

At the end of the day (10:00 a.m. through 3:00 p.m.), they had a lot of robust conversation and got a lot out of the meeting. There was a lot of conversation about how do they move the project forward and how to engage the right public sector partner in this. At the end of the day they came up with five key takeaways.

The first recommendation was the best path to find the right partner for this project. The development team utilizing the city's team gave a strong recommendation for using a request for qualification versus a request for approval. It helped the City be successful in finding the right partner rather than looking for a vendor to build a building. They're talking about more of a complex project that's really about building a relationship with the right development partner that's sharing a vision of what the public would like to see there.

The second recommendation was it became fairly obvious that building a commercial office anchor probably was the best commercial use for this site paired with a really strong civic component. They had a lot of conversation and ideas about what that civic use could be including if the building ended up having some sort of height to it, maybe there was an opportunity for a rooftop garden or a public park with some observation where you could see all of West Ashley.

The third recommendation was a little more difficult. The panel felt strongly that really structured parking would be the best way to utilize this small site if you made it feel like something different from what was in West Ashley today recognizing there were costs to making that happen. The development team felt through the RFP process of finding the right development partner, that partner would bring some creativity as to how they went about integrating those costs into a development parcel to get structured parking.

Ms. Barrett said the last two recommendations had to do with honoring the work that's already been done and making sure who that private partner would continue to honor that by continuing to be direct and open to the public process through celebrating the future of the site in an approach that was transparent and open and really celebrated the future for West Ashley.

The final recommendation was utilizing the body of work that had already been completed; the work that the Commission had done, the Plan West Ashley, and the serious knowledge and talent City staff had to bring this project to fruition. It was a partnership and real contribution to the development team that would ultimately help this project flourish.

Ms. Barrett said these were the key recommendations that came out this day.

Mr. Lindsay said thanked the Charleston County, the Commission and staff. He said they looked forward to working with the County for the follow up in the design that everyone was happy with. The City was prepared to move forward with the revitalization of this site regardless of how the transportation eventually lands. He said they knew they were going to have improvements. They were going to move forward to improve this part of West Ashley.

Mr. Lindsey said he forgot to mention City owned this land but the City of Charleston won't be building the buildings here. The private sector would do that. The next steps were to begin to look for qualified teams of developers, architects, and engineers to help the City to do just that. A team of really qualified people, along with the City, along with the great input and work from the public and the County, would be how they would achieve the revitalization of this site.

Chair Shahid asked if the Commission members had any questions or comments.

Councilman Moody asked Mr. Lindsey if he said that site was able to work with the traffic patterns as is.

Mr. Lindsey said they were prepared to move forward with the development that would accommodate the traffic patterns as is. They worked with the residents and they were going to try to improve the way the traffic moved through the intersection for the safety for pedestrians. They realized that the intersection as designed wasn't perfect. They haven't gotten it there yet. They could move forward as is but they did have to work with the County to make things work better overall.

Chair Shahid asked Mr. Davis to expand on his comments regarding the ingress/egress as to how the existing ingress/egress affected what could and couldn't be developed there.

Mr. Davis said there were many more access points to the site today than there were in the two intersection alternatives of the County's design. All of the offices or office development Ms. Bennett described were still relevant as was the original types of buildings they were looking at before they shifted over to an office product. All that meant was everything he showed them today could be built on the site. When they engaged a qualified development team they were going to use the market studies to tell them the best ways to configure the site. He reiterated the answer to the question was there were currently more access to the site now. As you drove by you see a variety of open driveways and deceleration lanes on all sides of the triangle. The two intersection designs they ended up with did introduce access limitations.

Mr. Ferira said it seemed like exciting concept of office and civic space. He had two comments. He felt this was the right direction but you also had to factor in how they take the concept to fruition. It was easy to say that structured parking looked better and the reason there was surface parking was because it was cheaper and with grants in West Ashley they had to justify building structured parking, which cost about \$20,000 per space. To build a 100,000 square foot office building at four spaces per thousand that was \$8 million in extra cost to the developer that they would have to spend. That was fine but the public/private partnership have to come, not just a RFP, where we say what can you do? He said they needed to woo people and woo them through density instead of bonuses that offset that \$8 million so that they come and be net neutral. So, before the RFP occurred, they needed to look at how much FARs (floor area ratio) were worth, he thought they were \$30 or \$40, and figure out how much extra FAR you could give so someone could afford to build.

Mr. Ferira commented the second most important thing was when an office building gave you 50% pre-leased you got in debt. He noted how they talked about how 86% people who live in West Ashley left for jobs elsewhere. Mr. Ferira said they couldn't force companies to come here but one thing that could occur was public/private partnership. He felt the City should take a long hard look at what uses and services could they commit to a long term lease to help commit and trying to bond to get 50%. City Hall was beautiful and so was the County Office Building but that was the center of the city in 1700. 75% of the people live in West Ashley. There was a lot of congestion. That was the main thing people complained about 2 years ago. He noted there were two mayoral candidates present. He said if he was mayor he would be committing to how he was going to move jobs from the city from downtown to West Ashley for everyone's benefit, especially for the majority of citizens of Charleston who reside in West Ashley.

Mr. Gregorie asked Mr. Lindsey, in reference to the public/private partnership, could he give any other examples of where this was instituted either currently or in recent years.

Mr. Lindsey said this was the same kind of redevelopment process that cities all across the country go through when they own land that they seek to have revitalize. The City had done the same with Waterfront Park, Gadsdenborough Park (the area close to the Aquarium), and the future home of the Afro-American Museum, where the entire thing was a similar public/private partnership that had a great public space. It's a wonderful park with great private sector redevelopment on both sides. The West Edge medical district area was done same way. It was a commonly accepted method of revitalizing sites like this the City had done many years in the past.

Mr. Gregorie asked if in those areas did the City retained the fee simple ownership of properties, was it a ground lease, or what sort of mechanism it was.

Mr. Lindsey said every project was different. These weren't simple things to do. The economics of each part of a city were different. This was what they did going forward when they seek the advice of professional developers, architects and others to help them track the exact terms around how development would happen.

Councilmember Wagner asked what the sizes of the buildings were. Were they going to be one story or ten story high? Were they going to be 100,000 square feet?

Mr. Lindsey said this site had to represent the best that they could possibly do for the City of Charleston and West Ashley. Their goal was to make sure it was beautiful, useful, good for the economy and improved the quality of life for the people who lived nearby. The design of the buildings and what they look liked specifically would be determined as they moved forward. This site was subject to the Design Review Board process where the citizens could come and ask about the design of the buildings themselves. There was a long way to go before they had a design and could see the architecture.

In response to the question about the size of the buildings, Mr. Lindsey said that was still to be determined. It was going to go through the same public process that all of those revitalization redevelopments go through West Ashley. Everything goes before the Board of Architectural Review or the Design Review Board to achieve excellence.

Councilman Wagner asked what the wording on the RFQ was. He said apparently it was some type of a design build but he wasn't seeing what they were building yet. He didn't have a general idea of the size of it and he thought some of the people present at the meeting wanted to know that as well.

Mr. Lindsey said a number of the designs they presented were a number of things that could work there. They recently noticed somethings that won't work there. They can't all be a park or can't all be a parking lot. This would be something that helped to meet the goals of the public and had work places, had great retail, public space and a great park space. The actual look of it, the way it was zoned and functions would happen as you go forward.

Councilmember Wagner noted Mr. Lindsey stated the current traffic pattern would be the same. That still was four lanes going into three at the merge. He still wasn't seeing how that wasn't an integral part of this. They were back to where they started, which was dealing with the traffic.

Mr. Lindsey said a lot more work had to be done. The County did some great work with alternatives. They weren't there yet but they were going to work with the County and they were going to get it there. The traffic pattern there and the safety was a challenge. The County had done a phenomenal job and they would keep working at it.

Mayor Tecklenburg thanked City staff who worked on this and the ULI for their contributions. He thanked the public because it was their input a year ago that led to the concept of what they could do with the site, which was some civic use, such as small offices West Ashley from the city, and some open space that he thought could complement the building space, and some commercial development so it had some economic driver behind it.

Mayor Tecklenburg noted most of the ULI discussion to that primary office use was one of those County alternatives would be coming forward, which limited the access to the site. Therefore, it seemed clear at this point, even though they would work with the County for intersection and improvements in the general area, they might not have a major remake of the intersection. One of the reasons why they waited until that process played itself out was they didn't know whether they would get a bigger piece of property or a smaller piece of property. They didn't know exactly what they would end up working with and now it was clear to everyone they got what they got, and it was time to move on to the next step of the development of the site that would be a benefit to everyone.

This kind of partnership was important because they happen to have a private partner with the City. What the City had done in the past at Gadsdenborough Park. Initially it was one big piece of City owned property and they ended up subdividing those parcels off that eventually became a private tax paying parcel. The City maintained ownership of the large section that was the public use of the site. He envisioned using that scenario again that as the site became more defined with buildings and where the public spaces were going to be. There could be a subdivision to consider the economic benefit of it as well.

Mayor Tecklenburg thought the fact that the access could remain more like it was today than with one of the County's proposals that the City's options were open. There should be commercial use. He thought everyone agreed it shouldn't be townhouses or some residential use. It should be commercial use. There could be a smaller mix of office along with some retail and fine restaurant accommodation to go along

with the public space. The next step was for the City to put in a request for qualification so they get the very best team in terms of private partners, both architect, developer, and landscape architect.

County Councilman Moody said the reason he asked the question was through round one and round two of the public input studies, they heard loudly from Sandhurst in round one and Northbridge in round two that they didn't like any of the options that were out there. He thought planning for something that didn't include the existing setup as it would be a bad move. He noted there were only a few good things that came out of the survey:

1. The agreement that the intersection of Orange Grove Road and Highway 7 needed work.
2. Connect a way between the BI-LO and Orange Grove Road. A bike and pedestrian path seemed to gain some traction.
3. They had some discussion with some property owners about improving their properties in the Northbridge area. There were some comments that came out of that area

He said it was clear to him that these residents in this area maybe didn't like things the way they were but they didn't want things to change either. Therefore, County Council have heard their opinions loud and clear. 86% per cent was not 51 or 49. That was a mandate. He urged them, and he would be in this discussion with the County staff, that they needed to listen to these residents. He commented in an editorial in the Post and Courier about education where it stated when you're leading you don't necessarily have to listen to the public. You needed the input. He didn't subscribe to that. He said they needed to listen to these residents and what they had in mind.

Chair Shahid asked Mr. Lindsay if the total acreage on this property was about 3 acres.

Mr. Lindsay said it was 2.8 acres.

Chair Shahid noted Mayor Tecklenberg touched on the request for qualifications. He asked Mr. Lindsay to expand more and explain what the next step would entail.

Mr. Lindsay said they were going to submit a request for qualifications (RFQ), which meant they put out a call to qualified teams to state why they should be chosen to redevelop this site. The City would chose a group of them and qualify them. City staff would then talk to them about if they would be able to deliver something great at this location. Once they get those who were qualified and onboard they would proceed to program the design and the design phase.

Chair Shahid said the City owned the property therefore they had the ability to control to a certain extent but they got the economic factors on the property to make this feasible and workable. Therefore, when they designed something it was practical, beautiful and complied with the overall character of the neighborhoods. He reiterated County Councilman Moody's comment when he said they went through a long process with the West Ashley Plan with Dover Kohl. They opened the doors for the residents to comment and they did so well. The residents also did that with their comments with the County's proposed redesign of the intersection. The residents' input was critically important. Even as this process develops along the way, they will have the Design Review Board. When the project was contemplated and someone wants to build a structure, their input would be heard on that as well. This was going to be a lengthy process but they would listen to the steps as they follow through with this.

Chair Shahid added he had a monthly meeting called Coffee and Conversation with Peter. The next meeting with his constituents would be held 10:00 a.m., Saturday, July 20 at Charles Towne Landing. He encouraged them to attend. He thanked the City staff and Ms. Barrett for their presentations.

West Ashley Updates

Identity and Positioning

Mr. Pohlman said there was a request from the Commission members last time to receive an update regarding identity positioning or the branding project they were implementing through the Planning department. Staff have reached out several marketing firms and requested they send their budgets to them to view an identity positioning strategy. He had hoped to receive all of them but wasn't the case. Staff had to send it out and would be receiving all those quotes by the middle of the next week. After that, staff would be keeping this within a minimal budget to do this unfortunately, but that also allowed staff to

do this quickly at the staff level process. Staff would be able to get back to the people they were going to be selecting for that and their objective would be to give staff an accurate quote. Staff was looking first for a document that would provide copy, provide written statements that would then move the rest of the branding forward along with some phrase books regarding what could they do for the City in future, so they could build this into a more city budget process.

Implementation Matrix

At the meeting last year in August, they had final meeting regarding the top 10 implementation elements out of the 50 or 60 for West Ashley. Mr. Pohlman said since they were coming off the one year prior to working on that, this took each one of them and it dictated what City staff, County staff, private citizens and nonprofits had been doing in order to get all of these implementation elements either started, get them under way or get them completed. This was to allow the public to see they were doing exactly what plan West Ashley said. He asked the Commission members how they wanted him to present it.

Chair Shahid asked Mr. Pohlman to highlight the top 10.

Mr. Pohlman said out of the 50+ there were only about three where they really had not invested too much effort into them because there were elements that were not quite ready yet to start. One example was the West Ashley Water Taxi. They weren't really vested into researching a water taxi as far as being a good alternative mode of transportation. They needed to have Ashleyville support having a docking and berthing facility, and having a use for it to connect into somewhere else. They will look into that later on when it was looking like they could do something else on the water but the investment would not give anything.

Mr. Ferira said a year and half ago, they asked and Mr. Lindsay, Mr. Martin and Ms. Herring made and put out some great signs on the City's dime. They did what they could but many signs you see around there are not all for here. The DOT had what we think of as the big signs. He said back then that if you come from I-26 over, you see a big sign that said you're entering North Charleston. The green sign actually pointed you to Savannah. As you're leaving the James Island Connector coming to West Ashley, the green sign said Summerville. What he was trying to say was West Ashley was invisible to the DOT. He knew staff wasn't the DOT but they did have connections with them. He said he would volunteer his time along with others to go advocate and perhaps their message, and if not their message, their annoyance could move them. He thought they could come up with a brand but the visibility and presence was the first part of identity. This was a zero budget mandate. The best thing they had were ideas and coming up with an identity but the only thing that was going to drive this was investment.

Wooing investment was part of the purpose of coming up with a brand and identity. The one thing they could do was #83 (Establish a new incentivized redevelopment zone designation to encourage the revitalization of underutilized sites). He knew the City was putting effort with regarding to limiting hotels downtown right now. He would love to see the City also prioritize wooing business and job creation in West Ashley, and doing that through incentivized redevelopment zones on one of the dead corridors on Sam Rittenberg and certain places on Highway 17 and St. Andrews. We had a ripe opportunity. Downtown was too expensive. Mount Pleasant said they don't want you. West Ashley's competitors were North Charleston and Nexton. He said it's time to play ball. He thought wooing those jobs and wooing that ear was right. He said the mixed use workforce housing zoning downtown was over simplified but it replaced all in a right siding of the numbers. He thought there were three things they could do but unfortunately they were on a budget.

Chair Shahid thanked the neighborhood association presidents for their commitment to the community and for attending the meeting. He said they were the unsung heroes of the community. They listened to the residents.

Public Comment

Susan Nile, an attorney, said she has lived in West Ashley for over 20 years. She said we're not a deteriorated urban zone. While there might be areas in West Ashley that had that problem, that wasn't the Northbridge area. As a result, the purchase of this property to provide what's been called a catalytic redevelopment effect seemed to be a bit over the top. If the area residents said no to a building in reference to the restructuring of the roads in this area, she suggested you should keep that in mind. From

her experience, public/private partnerships usually meant the public paid the cost and the private got the profits.

Rick Faring thanked the Chair for the opportunity to comment on this project in their neighborhood. He said his concern was process. He noted these meetings seemed to be built around question and answer, and not just public comments. He said given what happened with the merge it was clear that a consensus was necessary to move forward. The talk of taking land for a development project being run by the City was worrisome. The City had this piece of property but the City wasn't a development company. It shouldn't use its power to take additional property unless for traffic concerns and then only if it was absolutely necessary. He asked that access to the neighborhoods and local business not be restricted to facilitate the development project. It wouldn't benefit the residents.

Christy Becky, a resident of Northbridge and then Lenevar, speaking reference to the "suicide merge", said she had been driving Old Towne Road going towards Northbridge and she always get in the right hand lane when she gets by Charles Towne Landing. She said a simple solution would be to have a big "Prepare Merge Ahead" sign one block from Publix and paint it on the lanes. She added there were too many people coming straight on without knowing there are people merging on the left hand side were not seeing them come.

Skip Farkes said he heard gateway mentioned a few times. Next year, 350 years ago, the settlers landed at Charles Towne Landing. He was glad at the 1970 opening of Charles Towne Landing. Since then it had dwindled down to one of the best kept secrets of Charleston. Somebody could come in from out of state and have no idea this was the third landing settlement in North America by European settlers. He suggested they incorporate the historical significance of Charles Towne Landing into the gateway.

Christine Murphane (?), a resident of Northbridge Terrace, said everyone she spoke to who they handed out flyers didn't want anything done. They wanted the no build because they loved their neighborhood. She was sure Sandhurst and everyone in the area felt the same way because it was a little piece of heaven. When she heard the Commission talking, she only heard references to money. Their little piece of heaven was more than money to them. They loved their area and that was why people wanted to come to their area to live. She noted downtown Charleston was changing so much you couldn't recognize it. West Ashley was the only place people could live. When you start to change it, you're taking away the charm of West Ashley.

Cynthia Nolen of Citadel Woods said that not too long ago the Mayor and other people went to the Netherlands to study drainage and how water was handled there. She thought it should be required that any new development in City of Charleston adopt those ideas to prevent drainage issues and new development should have to absorb any water that could potentially drain off that land and keep it there and not go into stormwater.

Michael Miller of Northbridge Terrace was concerned about the shopping center across the street that was also abandoned and looked terrible. He noted the design of the shopping center on the other side, where T-Bones was located, was probably older than many. He asked if the Captain D's side was going to be a part of revitalization of the surrounding area.

Louie Morris of Avondale noted in regards to the site, assuming it didn't get any larger, and since it was about 2 ½ acres, in looking at it in terms of scale, this was essentially a city block downtown. He thought the plans were great but he suggested more exploration to the City possibly selling off the majority of it. It could be parceled into six parcels of 1/8 of an acre. It was more than big enough for a commercial property that could be incrementally developed, which should be more able to withstand economic swings, or City could still keep an acre out for civic uses or a gateway. That way they could avoid massive buildings but still have the density requirement in order to sustain the site.

Amelia Spade of Northbridge Terrace was a strong proponent of the no build. She asked if there was more transparency about how the decisions were made to whittle down the traffic alternatives from four to two. Many people had suggestions for putting in a traffic light to even out the traffic flow there instead of making one big road. In reference to the development of the triangle, she felt scale was going to be huge because they were in a unique area of one-story homes. If they didn't consider scale and made it too large, it would set a precedence with this piece of property. It was going to open it up to extensive larger buildings right next to their neighborhoods. It was going to bleed out as it was in downtown Charleston

and get too large. She thought the scale was extremely important as they went forward in developing the triangle.

Chis Bluemel of Northbridge thanked Councilman Moody for his comments regarding Northbridge as it expressed how the Northbridge residents' felt. The Commission was given plans for a potential fine arts center two years ago. That was planned on the existing building that was there. He noted it sounded like they were back to having the full property as it was configured now. He said he would appreciate it if they would put that back on the table as an opportunity to serve the citizens of West Ashley because right now 75% of the citizens were in West Ashley but every single performance venue they had was downtown. He said he meant no offense when he pointed out the Theater Center was not a performance venue. It was a 125 seat auditorium, it wasn't 1/5 of the size of a typical high school auditorium. He asked the Commission to consider putting a professional fine arts center on the table that would service this community both as a civic purpose and as a professional purpose.

Sherry Irwin said the Commission didn't really talk about no build even though the residents voted no build. In reference to a comment made regarding parking lots being a the detriment to West Ashley, she noted Victor Dover of Dover Kohl talked at the West Ashley Revitalization meetings about building more parking lots. In reference to public/private partnership, Ms. Irwin said those partnerships were taxpayer funded. The City shouldn't be building restaurants and private sector buildings. The City should be working on flooding issues. Some of the things they might pass through West Ashley Revitalization were things they talked about: a) building 10,000 apartments in West Ashley, b) building retention ponds, c) changing the zoning laws to put apartments in single-family neighborhoods and calling it diversity of land use, c) turn right lanes on Highway 17 to bus lane right-of-way, d) too many people that live in West Ashley don't work in West Ashley and if you build it out, you're going to eliminate a lot of jobs in West Ashley and e) protection of private property rights. She said it was upsetting to see people going after our private property rights. They were going after where she lived and they were being bombarded with people trying to get them out. She asked them to please stop it.

Katie Zimmerman, resident of West Ashley and executive director of Charleston Moves, reminded the Commission that with both the gateway redevelopment and whatever happened with the intersection improvement, if people can't walk, bike or get to the bus stops safely and enjoyably, all this redevelopment would not do what we all wanted it to do. She said we had to have transportation choices, affordable options, and pleasurable options. We are surrounded by parks in this area and schools, shopping, running errands, commuting, all of the transportation options that were in front of us needed to be included in this planning. Another reminder was Northbridge connected to Cosgrove Avenue. There was a food desert on the North Charleston side and there was an abundance of grocery stores on this side. She wanted to make sure when they were thinking about the gateway they were also thinking about multimodal access to Northbridge.

Trey Bennett, a resident of Northbridge Terrace on and off for 30 years, said he knew the Commission members were trying to do something that generated money and were trying to please the citizens of the surrounding areas. He knew many of the residents came there because they were upset about the traffic patterns that they were given. He knew the Commissioners had a hard job trying to please everyone. He said they listened to all their comments, and he commended them for hearing them, and making decisions that included what they said over and over about what they wanted. He said they were doing the best that they could. They heard the residents and that was all the residents' could ask for.

Steve Cadel, a resident of Northbridge and the chairperson of the Old Charleston District Neighborhood Task Force, an entity created by the City of Charleston, said they required in their charter a sitting City Councilman (Chair Shahid) and their neighborhood County Councilman (Councilman Moody) on their board. They had a past chairperson, Aubrey Alexander. They are a liaison for all of the neighborhoods: Northbridge, Parkshore, Lenevar, Wespanee and Sandhurst. He asked the City to use them as liaison between those neighborhoods.

Vick Rudolph lived in West Ashley except for a short period he was in Atlanta. He liked the middle class tech jobs that were coming here. In reference to no build, he said no build or build with the intersection was fine but there were kids who were going to be driving in a few years and he thought they could still make it safer.

OTHER BUSINESS

Chair Shahid said the next meeting was September 11.

Chair Shahid noted one citizen who spoke during referred to West Ashley as a “piece of heaven”. It was true of what we have in here in West Ashley. One of the guiding principles of Plan West Ashley was protect the unique character of the neighborhoods. The driving force of whatever the Commission did was to preserve what we have with our neighbors and neighborhoods.

Chair Shahid commented the City of Charleston 350th Commission was preparing for the 350th anniversary of the English settlers coming to Charleston. Their next meeting would be held next Wednesday, July 17, at 5:30 p.m., at Charles Towne Landing. He encouraged those who wanted to find out more information about what they were planning to attend. Mr. Pohlman said one specific event of the Dutch Dialogues will be held West Ashley. It would be a public meeting with the design team 6:30 p.m. through 8:00 p.m., Monday, July 15 at Crosstowne Church. They had one round of comments from some of the large stakeholders as to what were the concerns about flooding in the area that the Dutch team had heard about. This meeting was about them coming back to get broad public input on if they heard the right things and were they suggesting the right things to come out of this. This was an opportunity for the public to help make sure this dialogue was complete between the Dutch team that was coming in, the stakeholders and the residents of the area.

The Amsterdam Rainproof Presentation would be held 5:30 p.m. through 8:00 p.m., Wednesday, July 17, at the Clemson Design Center. This would be to show the citizens how they could help in preventing flooding.

There being no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Marcia L. Grant
Administrative Assistant II