



Downtown Revitalization Built Environment/Housing meeting October 24, 2012

Attending: James Bibb, Joanne Witta, Evelyn Russo, Chris Mertl, John McConnichie, Sally Smith, Brian Holst, Margo Waring, guest speaker Heather Marlowe

James explained that this meeting was a follow up to the walks we had taken in the Willoughby District. We wanted Heather back to learn more about how CBJ is looking at the area. Some things have changed since the Willoughby District plan (e.g., changes to AMHTA approaches, parking impacts of development). On our walks, we walked along the Gold Creek corridor, over to Foodland, the Village, the SLAM project area and then to the SOB. Heather is asked to tell us what is happening now and what the vision is for the future.

Heather Marlowe: she had been looking at the Bullwinkle's area and what the design standards for the future. We see them there: sidewalks on both sides, parking along the sidewalks. She also looked at the DOT late 90s "as built" for Willoughby and saw that the buildings are 10 feet from the right of way on Willoughby. This means that wider sidewalks are possible, as are bike lanes. The places where design is further from what we want are the area at Central Duplicating and the Salvation Army Church where there is back out parking and crumbling sidewalks. She is hoping within the year to propose a new code requirement for a "build to" line or within 10 feet of that. The SOB is 10-20 feet set back, but the green space is an interface with the sidewalk. Canopies could then be required at the "build to" line. New rules will set street standards and start possible land acquisition on the south side of Willoughby and in the District through incentives or condemnation. This is a powerful zoning tool to effect change in the area.

Already there are code changes in the Willoughby District: reduction of the parking requirement by 60%. The SLAM project benefitted from this change by using "in lieu" fee for a parking variance. Slam met the 60% standard. Changes were also made to the building heights allowed by 10 feet with development bonuses, incentives for another 10, so that 65 feet is possible if there is underground parking, parking behind structures, public space, art and so forth. SLAM breaks ground this winter and has leased the subport lots as a staging area, in addition to the loss of the Willoughby lot itself.

This means there will be a parking crunch. The state needs to address this especially if they decide to build more offices. Redevelopment of the CBJ lots at Centennial Hall must wait until the State can handle more of the parking. The North parking garage might be expanded, although the current plan is just for renovation. The SLAM is slated to open April 2016. The SOB parking garage refurbished would still be open to public use in the evenings. Lights will be by motion detection. An extension of the downtown parking garage phase 2 with more parking can help with the parking problem but only when there is no longer a need for the existing Archives Building.

Whittier Street is in subpar condition and will be nominated for redevelopment [DOT will be working on Egan from Whittier to Main using marine fees] so this would be a good time to work on Whittier and develop it with parking on the street, bike lane and wider sidewalks, perhaps with pavers like those on Seward Street.

The fire code required a back fire access for the SLAM and they worked to get an easement from Central Duplicating and Foodland, paving the way for a possible future road, a necessary connection. With more housing, offices the traffic grid must be improved to avoid the current congestion and back up at Gold Creek by having more access points to Egan. The Foodland owner is interested in this. To be a full street the street would need to include the end of the Central Duplicating lot, the Foodland loading bays and owner's boat storage area. CBJ would like first right of refusal to secure this area and make a street possible there.

In discussion group members agreed that we could get the ball rolling by bringing forth the idea of CBJ buying up land in the Willoughby District and urging that CBJ find a partner at Gold Creek to get funding and be an advocate for a park with reconfigured creek banks. This would mean redevelopment of the bank so it is less steep but would not require a change in the roadway there. In addition, it would be good to have 13 foot sidewalks between where JEDC is and Central Duplicating.

Heather said that "parking management (the 2 free hours and then expensive extra time) will be applied to the Willoughby District in the next 2 years. GSA is very concerned that they don't have enough parking at their lot and the neighborhood spaces they use and the current Coast Guard uses. GSA will make a proposal for a parking garage and also want a transportation plan that will address car pooling and moving the transit stop. Perhaps use of the space across from the Bill Ray Center in addition to the current lot?

Housing: THRHA and CCTH are looking at something for the Village. The area is being cleaned up, parking may be provided and existing housing upgraded and new built. Partnerships are possible. A plan may be needed for the area.

Traffic: the afternoon peak traffic for exiting from Foodland is the problem in developing more at the Foodland site. Attendees agreed that we should urge DOT to create another exit into Egan. Egan is not really a "limited access highway" as seen at the other end at the docks. James noted that the Kittleson traffic study says the super blocks need to be broken up. Chris noted that DOT Statewide Design is willing to have a two tier system but the push must come if they are to do it—perhaps from our legislative delegation? Having these streets designated as arterials rather than neighborhood streets means that there are no trees and limited pedestrian access. We need more and safer sidewalks and access along Egan. SE DOT is agrees that Willoughby's four blocks should be treated the same as the pieces further downtown.

Brian noted the possible interest the AMHTA would have in a land swap which could move a Performing Arts building on to the waterfront. Does CBJ support this?

Heather: In the mid to long term, they are looking at the idea of a central heating district in the Willoughby area. Bob Deering at the Forest Service and Sealaska are looking for a large consumer to create a Southeast biomass industry. If Whittier is ripped up, this may be a good time to lay pipe for heat. There was a discussion of feasibility, ground source geothermal, etc. Chris pointed out the desirability of using heat for plazas, public spaces and streets. It saves maintenance costs. Brian pointed out that Bob Deering and Dan Parent are working on a "wood to energy" biomass project with JEDC. They are having a meeting at the end of November in



Juneau to develop a roadmap for the industry. Institutional partners are needed for feasibility. Could CBJ be such a partner in the Willoughby District? Heather noted that GSA might be another partner. If GSA built a parking garage, this might be a good spot for the central plant.

The circulator is an idea with CBJ conceptual support. Money is needed and the marine passenger fees can subsidize a lot of the cost. Chris noted that the parking problems can be solved with parking outside the district, such as the area across from the Bill Ray center, and the circulator used. Has any analysis of this happened?

There was a discussion of expansion of the North garage and whether earthquake standards inhibit expansion.

Heather: the next phase of the Seawalk is from the park under the bridge to Gold Creek. It will be a pile supported structure with two access points. The whale sculpture will also be at the park. Development of a park along Gold Creek (from the bridge to Egan) will increase pedestrian crossing. They foresee educational and directional signage along this section of the Seawalk. This will happen in the next 2-3 years.

Brian and Heather talked about informing land owners in the District about changes in code and plans for the future. JEDC can host this meeting.

Also discussed was the need for a Redevelopment Authority and tax incentive financing and other tools. Chapter 7 of the Willoughby District Plan discusses these tools and they should be explored with developers and owners.

James referred to a discussion we had on the walk that we need to create a marketing agency to identify opportunities in the district, discuss the planned for amenities like the heating district for local and outside investors. Chris noted that in such a marketing plan, we should have a design identity and rebranding. Vacant and underdeveloped properties need outside investors who have the money. Market through a brochure and a website. Brian noted that the Anchorage EDC markets this way. The JEDC Board wants to market Juneau and is looking at the tools Anchorage uses that are web based that relocation people use. This effort would require good data from CBJ and local realtors. JEDC would like to go this route.

Joanne asked if there had been an exploration of housing above existing structures. Heather noted that this and other things are next –implementation of the Willoughby District Plan beyond the SLAM.

Evelyn discussed the need for champions to move this vision forward. Our group should develop a list of things we want to see happen and advocate for the list and offer to help it happen. Everyone agreed.