

D-R-A-F-T

**Mill Plaza Study Committee Minutes
Wednesday, June 6, 2007
Durham Town Hall – Council Chambers
4:30 PM**

Members Present: Deborah Hirsch Mayer, Crawford Mills, Douglas Bencks, Julian Smith (Vice Chair), Dave Howland (Chair), Chuck Cressy, Ed Valena (Secretary), Lorne Parnell, Warren Daniel, Perry Bryant

Members Absent: Michael Davis, Edgar Ramos, Thomas Newkirk,

Also Present: Patricia Sherman, Patrick Field, George Pellettieri, John Merkle, Walter Staples (Representatives of AIA); Members of the public: Ed Garcia, Robin Mower, Bill Schoonmaker

I. Call to Order

Chair Howland called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM.

II. Welcome from the Chair

Chair Howland reported that the meeting would be videotaped for DCAT for the first time. He noted that this would be the first working meeting with representatives of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and introduced Patricia Sherman, Patrick Field, and George Pellettieri, all of whom were seated at the table. A fourth representative of AIA, John Merkle, was seated in the audience. Chair Howland spoke to the meeting's agenda which would include 1) a discussion of the new work plan with AIA participation, and 2) a discussion of gathering hard data on which decisions down the road would be based. He also spoke to the written guidelines concerning the collaborative process with AIA.

Chair Howland recognized Ed Valena, representative of the Durham Public Library, who wished to make a special announcement. Mr. Valena reported that Margery Milne, a revered resident of the town (and also a noted conservationist and author) had passed away and bequeathed to the Library \$475,000, which the Board of Trustees has placed in their building fund.

III. Approval of the Agenda

Julian Smith moved that the agenda should be approved as presented which was seconded by Warren Daniel. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Approval of the Minutes

Warren Daniel made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 23 meeting as presented and was seconded by Julian Smith. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Comments from the Public

There were no comments from the public at this time.

VI. Presentation, Discussion, and Approval of Committee/AIA 150 Work Plan and Collaborative Principles

Chair Howland spoke to the tentative Work Plan and the inclusion of five Public Forums. These were comprised of:

- Public Forum 1: presentation of data report;
- Public Forum 2: design teams present draft work for public feedback;
- Public Forum 3: design teams present revised designs and begin conversation with the public concerning merging best elements of the different designs with an eye towards creating a hybrid scheme;
- Public Forum 4: hybrid design scheme is presented for public feedback; and
- Public Forum 5: final consideration of the plan for the committee's formal approval for future presentation to the Town Council.

Patricia Sherman spoke to the data-gathering aspect of the project. She noted that the Vision Statement had already been completed by the Committee. She talked about the importance of site analysis and elements which included opportunities (e.g., the brook) and constraints (e.g., property lines). She said major topics included the topography of the site, historical criteria (specifically, the Grange), zoning, and the architectural setting of the surrounding neighborhoods (residential, Main Street, University). She spoke of an infrastructure analysis which would include utilities (power, water, sewer), parking, and traffic (a "huge nut").

Ms. Sherman spoke further on traffic and parking. She noted the potential for creating a traffic model (a possible collaboration between the Town and the University) and said she believed this would be very helpful. She also commented on parking and the unique downtown setting. She wondered how people traveled to the Plaza (drive, bike, walk) and noted the importance of a bus stop on the redeveloped property. She also wondered if parking on the site would be specifically for users of the Plaza or would also accommodate others.

Chuck Cressy said that he owes the committee facts as well as opinions. He mentioned that it might be possible to provide customer source data based on sales in his store as analyzed by a wholesale provider. Warren Daniel remarked that he might be able to provide a similar service.

Patrick Field requested that this be discussed later in the meeting.

Patricia Sherman reported that she would be working with Craig Seymour of RKG Associates in order to create a pro forma for a hypothetical build-out of the property. She said data would include rent rates and area of tenant space. She noted that this scenario would be based on some major assumptions but was meant to only judge the economic viability of the project.

Ms. Sherman spoke of the plan for three design teams to create different visions for the redevelopment and take the best aspects of the three schemes and blend them. She mentioned the importance of the public knowing the basis of the various plans.

Patrick Field asked if there were any questions.

Chuck Cressy noted that rents were confidential and would have to gotten from John Pinto, the property owner. Ms. Sherman responded that would be likely that Mr. Seymour could sign a confidentiality statement regarding this information. Perry Bryant added that the actual rent rates was important data to have. Ms. Sherman said it was very important for the property owner to be squarely behind the process.

Crawford Mills noted that no regular meetings were scheduled for August. He thought it might be helpful to do so for vacation planning. Patrick Field said there would be a lot of design work done during this time. Chair Howland though first and third Wednesdays should be bookmarked.

There was general discussion concerning the role of the steering committee, renamed the coordinating committee, and the way it would work with the committee and AIA. It was agreed that the entire Mill Plaza Committee is the group that will formally make recommendations to the Council.

Crawford Mills thought some of the items under economic data gathering (specifically TIF districts) represented decision making rather than simple data gathering. Patricia Sherman answered that general discussion would be made on such topics only and hypothetical scenarios would be constructed.

Lorne Parnell wondered about estimated costs of town buildings that might be incorporated in the redevelopment. Ms. Sherman responded that generic costs based on estimated space needs would be utilized.

Crawford Mills noted that the local architect group is tentatively scheduled to all work on the same team. He wondered if it might be better to spread them out so that they might be able to share their knowledge about the town. There was a general discussion. Bill Schoonmaker remarked that each team would be working with the same essential information about the site. He said the local architects work well as a group and didn't think it made a difference if each team had a local representative or not. Ms. Sherman also noted that the AIA group were volunteers and she was trying to team people with some eye to convenience and efficiency.

Chair Howland noted a number of amended meeting dates that had been proposed and agreed to over the course of the meeting. The group agreed to switch:
1) July 6 to July 11, 2) September 22 to September 29, 3) October 7 to October 3, 4) October 21 to October 17, and 5) October 27 to November 3. It was also noted that

meetings for September 8 and December 8, originally planned for the morning, would be put off to the afternoon in respect to traditional town events that would occur on those days.

Chair Howland spoke to the collaboration guidelines for the Mill Plaza Study Committee and the AIA 150 group. He added that AIA planned to hire a public relations firm to distribute newsworthy press releases, when necessary, and that the committee and AIA 150 would work together to review those materials.

Ed Valena wanted clarification on the use of the term “RFP” in the verbage under *Final Report*. He believed this terminology was typically used for municipal projects and wondered if it was appropriate when applied to this project. Patricia Sherman thought this represented only one option. There was general discussion and Patrick Field recommended more generic terminology and which was agreed to by the group.

Crawford Mills moved that the calendar, work plan, and guidelines be approved as presented and amended, which was seconded by Julian Smith. The motion passed unanimously.

VII. Discussion about Data Report and Challenging Issues

Patrick Field returned the conversation to a customer study. Chuck Cressy thought it would possible to do only one study, either in the summer or in the fall following the return of the students. Doug Bencks thought it was far better to include as much of the population as possible, even if the data would be less timely to the committee. He believed it could always be incorporated at a later date. Mr. Cressy believed the last week of September might be the ideal time to conduct such a study. Patricia Sherman wondered if Mr. Cressy could share the methodology for a study with other Plaza retailers. He responded that he would work on a questionnaire.

Ed Garcia, a financial officer with the credit union located in the Plaza, noted that he could conduct a survey manually which he was willing to do. He reported that approximately 40% of his business was conducted with university students and staff. He also noted that over half of his business is conducted over the Internet.

Ed Valena wondered about traffic issues and how this would be studied. Doug Bencks reported that traffic counts in and out of the Plaza (as well as elsewhere in town) were conducted in late April. He said there was some good basic data and spoke to the added impact of a redeveloped Plaza. George Pellettieri noted that college communities are unique and more passengers might occupy vehicles than typical. Deborah Hirsch Mayer spoke to the effect of the seasons and weather on traffic.

There was general discussion on traffic studies and models. It was noted that the Town Council rejected a \$50,000 traffic study item in the most recent budget cycle.

There was talk concerning a collaboration between the Town and the University on some form of traffic study or model. Patrick Field wondered what some of the pro bono experts from AIA might be able to provide. Chuck Cressy wondered if the Plaza property owner might be willing to participate in a study local to the Plaza's vicinity as this information might benefit him even if the current process never came to fruition. Doug Bencks reported that the Town/UNH study was going to encompass traffic along the state highways out to and including Route 4.

The conversation returned to the customer survey. Crawford Mills wondered if a UNH marketing class might be able to play a role. He said that he could make a contact with the department and see what he could do. Patrick Field suggested that Mr. Mills, Mr. Cressy and Warren Daniel form a committee and develop a draft plan for a survey. Patricia Sherman stated she was also excited by the prospect of a survey conducted by one of Mr. Cressy's wholesale providers. Mr. Cressy responded that he would discover how confidential such data would be and report back.

Ms. Sherman brought up environmental and historic concerns for the project and wondered who the contact people for these topics might be. It was generally agreed that Robin Mower (present at the meeting) would be best to discuss environmental concerns given her interest and proximity. Crawford Mills responded that he was the representative of the Historic District Commission.

Ed Valena wondered about the status of some abutting properties and how they might play in a redevelopment of the Plaza. It had been rumored that the town had made overtures to an abutting property owner with the interest of purchasing a vacant parcel to the rear of the Plaza. Julian Smith remarked that a number of people have expressed interest in some of these properties as it has become known that some of them might be available for purchase. Chair Howland suggested that abutters be contacted again concerning the activity of the committee.

The conversation turned to the topic of the neighborhood. Deborah Hirsch Mayer thought a distinction should be made between abutters and the general neighborhood and that this general neighborhood should be drawn into the process. Patrick Field agreed and thought it would be a good idea to sit down in small groups with various interest groups, especially the neighborhood groups. Doug Bencks thought it would be beneficial to arrange for these meetings when the AIA people were in town for regular meetings. Mr. Field thought it would be a good idea to come up with a general stakeholders' list with individuals' names attached.

It was agreed, given the hour, that time would be made for public comments. The *Other Business* agenda item was passed over.

IX. Public Comment

Robin Mower commented on her family's history with the original planning of the Plaza. She mentioned the poor aesthetics of the property, but, on the plus side,

noted that it has a low profile. She reported that existing crosswalks don't reflect pedestrian patterns and wondered how increased development would impact traffic along Faculty Road. She thought that to delineate the land that would comprise the redevelopment area was an important consideration. She wondered if "best practices" would apply to a redevelopment project or if older environmental regulations would be grandfathered.

There were no other public comments.

Chair Howland brought up the last area of the previous agenda item which was "potentially challenging issues". However, it was generally agreed that the hour was too late to begin such a demanding topic. Patrick Field suggested that the list of stakeholders (previously mentioned) be quickly drawn up. The list included: the property owner, conservationists, leaseholders, the greater business community (DBA), direct abutters, the library, customers, town government (Town Council, Planning Board, Economic Development Committee, Housing Task Force), the community, the University (students, the institution, faculty & staff, the transportation system), potential developers, landlord association, schools & children, and seniors.

There was general talk about housing. Doug Bencks noted that UNH has a goal to house 60% of the student body, up from 50% four years ago. Patricia Sherman wondered how more information on housing patterns in the town could be uncovered.

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:36 PM.

Ed Valena, Secretary