



**BENICIA PLANNING COMMISSION**

**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**Thursday, February 11, 2010**

**7:00 P.M.**

**I. OPENING OF MEETING**

- A. Pledge of Allegiance**
- B. Roll Call of Commissioners**

Present: Commissioners Richard Bortolazzo, Don Dean, Rick Ernst, Rod Sherry, Lee Syracuse, Brad Thomas and Chair Healy

Absent: None

Staff Present: Lisa Porras, Senior Planner  
Heather McLaughlin, City Attorney  
Gina Eleccion, Management Analyst  
Raquel Walsh, Recording Secretary

- C. Reference to Fundamental Rights of Public** - A plaque stating the Fundamental Rights of each member of the public is posted at the entrance to this meeting room per Section 4.04.030 of the City of Benicia's Open Government Ordinance.

**II. AGENDA CHANGES AND DISCUSSION**

None.

**III. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

- A. WRITTEN**  
None.

- B. PUBLIC COMMENT**  
None.

**IV. PRESENTATION**

**A. OPEN GOVERNMENT PRINCIPLES**

The City Attorney gave an annually required overview of the Open Government Ordinance, including the Brown Act, Conflict of Interest, Ethics, Public Records and Ex-Parte Communication. She covered specific items including closed sessions, quorums, emails regarding Planning Commission business, turning over records quickly, Code of Conduct and Standards of Behavior review.

Commissioner Syracuse asked City Attorney McLaughlin to elaborate on item 13 of the Code of Conduct document. She explained that when any individual from the Commission goes before the City Council to speak about a project in their neighborhood for example, it is important to clarify whether a Commissioner is speaking as a neighbor/private person or as a Planning Commission member.

Commissioner Ernst inquired if this is the same training that Commissioners take every year. City Attorney McLaughlin indicated that it is the same training. Commissioner Ernst also asked if the dollar amount of gifts has changed. City Attorney McLaughlin responded that they had not changed and the amount for every two years is \$420. She continued that if the Commissioners receive gifts of over \$50, they need to report it on Form 700 and over \$420 is disqualifying. She added that there is a new handout on gifts that she will send to the Commissioners.

**V. CONSENT CALENDAR**

On motion of Commissioner Sherry, seconded by Commissioner Ernst, the Consent Calendar was approved by the following vote:

Ayes: Commissioners Bortolazzo, Dean, Ernst, Sherry, Syracuse, Thomas, and Chair Healy

Noes: None

Absent: None

Abstain: None

**A. Approval of Agenda**

**B. Approval of Minutes of December 10, 2009**

**VI. REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS**

**A. COMMISSION DISCUSSION ITEMS PRIORITY NUMBER 4- Commission Discussion.**

Senior Planner Lisa Porras gave a PowerPoint presentation, including the General Plan definition of gateways, how gateways are identified in the General Plan, policies and related projects.

Using the General Plan definition, Senior Planner Porras explained that gateways are essentially entrance points that are located off of a roadway. She pointed out that the General Plan has five such gateways listed. In addition to those five, she noted that there are policies that address the Pine Lake Area as a location to be developed as a gateway. She identified the five gateways currently designated using maps, as well as aerial and freeway photographs. Those five gateways are: The I-680 south corridor gateway approaching Lake Herman Road, the Lake Herman gateway east of Sky Valley Road, the southern entries from the Benicia/ Martinez Bridge, the Marina gateway off of the Carquinez Strait, and the western entrance gateway to the City on I-780.

Also covered by Lisa Porras was the language contained in the General Plan listed in Chapter three, Section C- Visual Character, which focuses on the look, feel and sense of place that is Benicia and begins to translate those expressions into goals, policies and program language. Additionally, she noted the General Plan goals and programs with that included urban plan design, and preparation of design guidelines that would begin to identify and direct the formation of the cities five gateways. The requirements for any development plans for the Pine Lake area were also highlighted.

Lisa Porras discussed the newly adopted study by the Board of the Solano Transportation Authority titled the "Solano Highways Operation Study". Within the study, design guidelines were prepared to establish a consistent and cohesive theme along the corridors. She indicated that the visual design guidelines contained in the study are intended to serve as a guide for cities to further establish what their own gateways might look like.

Lisa Porras noted one of the goals of the study was to create unique gateways that express the identity of each city but also strengthen the relationships between the corridors and surrounding areas by establishing common denominator features. The three themes that arose in the study were nautical, agricultural and natural and included examples of signage (with logo and color), hard-scape and landscape features. Lisa Porras also indicated that another goal of the study is the use sustainable and environmentally friendly plants and materials in the development of the gateways.

The presentation concluded with examples of existing signage located on the freeway corridors, as well as the signage that is considered internal (off freeway) and for directional use within the City.

Commissioner Bortolazzo inquired as to who is in charge of the large Benicia Nationwide freeway sign. City Attorney McLaughlin indicated that the city is not currently in control of that sign but has a sent letter to the company that claims to have a security interest in the sign asking them to take it down or let the City take it down. Additionally, he asked if the City could use the sign to promote events. City Attorney McLaughlin stated that the sign needs to be fixed.

Commissioner Bortolazzo noted that there are gateways located on private property and asked how the private property rights are affected by decisions made by the Commission. Senior Planner Porras noted that Fairfield and Vacaville have really focused plans that

deal with the issue, and that staff could look into and bring back information to further enhance the discussion. Commissioner Bortolazzo asked if there were any monies allocated to implement ideas from the Solano Highways Operation Study. Lisa Porras explained that it would need to be funded by local jurisdictions; however, if signage is located in a priority development area it could be eligible for funding.

Commissioner Dean inquired if any thought was given to the East Second Street exit or if there were any other internal gateways noted in staff's report. Senior Planner Porras noted that there have been efforts made by the City to establish internal gateways. She indicated that looking at the directives of the General Plan, internal gateways are not included and the focus is on the freeway, as well as the Lake Herman and Carquinez waterway corridors.

Chair Healy asked staff to define the "naturalized" theme in the study. Senior Planner Porras noted the naturalistic theme is described in the study as un-incorporated areas using native landscape in a neutral palate of native plants. Chair Healy also inquired as to whether the City has reconciled the competing interests, with one side wishing to plant many trees within the City, and the other wanting to keep the landscape of rolling hills with no obstructions as it was 100 years ago. Senior Planner Porras explained that she did not have the background information on that topic and is unsure of the context of the discussion when staff worked with STA on the item.

Chair Healy opened up the discussion to public comment.

Steve Goetz, 347 Goldenslopes - He appreciated the background that staff gave the Commission, especially the implementation language that talked about the city developing an urban design plan that would address the issues and hoped that the Commission would consider this a priority that the City should undertake soon. He noted that the gateways need more public outreach and that the Commission would get a lot of feedback on the themes suggested if there were a meeting held on the subject in Benicia. He discussed the presentation made by CALTRANS to the Parks and Cemetery Commission in March 2009 for the landscape plan of the southern gateway as part of the Benicia Bridge project. He feels that city logos can be somewhat boring and the City has an opportunity use the art community to display Benicia's "wares". He also feels that the urban design plan should also include the freeway. He closed his comments by saying the Historic Preservation Review Commission needs to look at this issue as well because the Arsenal Historic Preservation Plan has recommendations on what happens to the freeway as it goes through the lower Arsenal, and that needs to be incorporated into the Commission's review.

Marilyn Bardet, 333 East K Street- She agreed with Commissioner Bortolazzo saying that the city has an outstanding arts community. She commented that she was recently part of an Arts Benicia show and a noted an impressive piece by a Benicia resident and sculptor, who studied at UC Davis and has associations with other well-known sculptors in the area. She stated she is discouraged that East Second Street is not considered a gateway and the City should take examples from other cities about how internal entrances

are treated and would like to see shorter exits improved as part of our tourism plan. She concluded that landscaping is part of it, and a holistic approach should be used.

Dana Dean, 835 First Street- Attorney that represents the lessor and lessee of the Pine Lake Area. She appreciated Commissioner Bortolazzo's comments and wished to explain the current status of the area. She indicated that there has been a transitional period going on, but CC Meyers is committed to staying in Benicia and participating in the community. She continued that they have submitted a landscape plan for review.

Commissioner Bortolazzo asked if the area was to become an appropriation yard. Dana Dean answered no and explained that there will be an office with some yard involved, but a major portion will meet the long-standing terms of a landscaping plan for that area with a water feature. She noted three General Plan requirements for the site have been worked through and are part of the submitted plan. Commissioner Bortolazzo asked if the site would be for aggregating construction equipment and materials. Dana Dean answered that there will not be equipment but there will be some materials. Commissioner Bortolazzo indicated that the area was unattractive and perpetuated an industrial look. Dana Dean explained that as it sits, the site is a temporary circumstance and they have been working hard to come up with a plan that will protect and enhance the view corridor.

Chair Healy asked about the proposed water feature of the Pine Lake Area. Dana Dean explained that there would be more than one water feature so that it is visible from different points on I-780. She mentioned that they have focused on the CALTRANS plan to harmonize with CALTRANS property nearby.

Commissioner Dean asked how many acres the Pine Lake Area encompasses. Dana Dean answered that it is 28.36 acres.

Chair Healy brought the discussion back to the Commission to talk about five questions posed by staff. One question was what would implementation of the five gateways look like

Commissioner Ernst spoke about Suisun's attractive sculpture of the marshland, noting that he has pushed for more artist input for all of our gateways. He suggested that they look into categorizing gateways to segregate them into internal and external locations. He indicated that the bicycle pedestrian bridge that comes into the lower Arsenal could be another gateway and would like to see improvement to the signage of the lower Arsenal.

Commissioner Sherry noted the three things that need to be implemented are landscaping, art feature and signing. He indicated that those three elements should be incorporated into every gateway and that every gateway should be different.

Commissioner Bortolazzo indicated that he would not encourage anything at Lake Herman and felt that the Pine Lake gateway should be dealt with the quickest. He also listed the southern entries off of the Benicia Bridge near the refineries a priority. He also liked Commissioner Ernst's suggestion of a bicycle path as a gateway.

Commissioner Dean suggested that the number of people using each entry should be looked at in terms of priorities. He indicated that a natural entry point is East Second Street and wanted to explore what can be done to help direct people and make it a more welcoming entry into the city.

Commissioner Syracuse spoke about the internal signage at the apex West K and Military West and the past condition of the East Second Street exit. He agreed that the gateways should be different and indicated that the use of logos is important. He also indicated that the planting of trees to screen the Pine Lake Area is also necessary.

Commissioner Thomas agreed that the rare resource of the art community is diverse and broad. He also agreed that the gateways should not look the same. As Benicia is multi-faceted, they should reflect that. He noted how there is a different feel coming into the City from the State Park area as opposed to the Lake Herman side, but that both have characteristics that are part of Benicia. He suggested the unifying element of the gateways could be the use of the artwork itself. Commissioner Thomas indicated that tapping into this great resource would actually advertise one of the great aspects of the city without overstating it.

Chair Healy suggested inviting the public and art community to tell the Commission what they think and to come up with ideas. He also proposed they should continue the discussion with regard to tree planting in the City to come to a consensus before pressing forward on Pine Lake and other issues related to the gateways.

Chair Healy asked the Commission their view on whether the gateways should be prioritized. Commissioner Sherry indicated that East Second Street is critical if they were going to incorporate the internal gateways.

Chair Healy inquired as to if the Pine Lake plan would be brought back to the Planning Commission for review. Senior Planner Lisa Porras indicated that the area is in the general industrial zone and design review in that zone is done at staff level, but the Planning Director has the authority to remand it to higher level decision making process, in which case it would be directed to the HPRC.

Chair Healy asked the Commission if there are any gateways not listed in the General Plan but are important to consider. Commissioner Ernst indicated that Park Road could be considered a gateway. Commissioner Bortolazzo noted that the scale of signage is important. Commissioner Syracuse indicated that the freeway corridor overlooking the high school towards the water is also an important location. Commissioner Bortolazzo suggested that massive wildflower planting would be inexpensive and impressive as well.

Chair Healy suggested that Valero be invited into the discussion to field the questions of aesthetics regarding the refinery area. Commissioner Ernst suggested that the schools should also be involved. The Commissioners agreed on the importance of focusing on

the most visible of the gateway locations, the scale and supported research to find out who Benicia wants to attract with the signage.

Senior Planner Lisa Porras indicated that staff would provide a record of the comments made, including what groups to work with, the ideas of gateways being unique and how they can evolve. She added that staff will go back and discuss with the Planning Director how this project fits in within the larger context of a priority project identified by Council, and some of the things that staff can do to continue the discussion and work with the community to start planning with budget constraints. She welcomed the Commission to email any additional thoughts to staff to memorialize the evening's discussion.

## **VII. COMMUNICATIONS FROM STAFF**

### **A. UPDATE ON THE INTERMODAL PROJECT**

Gina Eleccion, Management Analyst, referred to the February 4, 2010 memorandum, which included a brief history of the project, funding, and locations researched to provide access to bus route 78 that travels between the Vallejo Ferry Terminal and Walnut Creek Bart. She also brought the Commission current on staff's efforts to address several concerns by the Commission and public regarding the original proposed sites, and the status of alternate sites researched by City staff. She noted the importance of a proposed site being visible, identifiable and easily accessible from the freeway, in which the current route does not present many possibilities.

Gina Eleccion indicated that staff is continuing discussions with the Gateway Calvary Church, working towards a partnership that would fit the community needs as well as the church's needs for future expansion. She anticipates additional communication from the Church within the next three weeks to know if staff can continue to move forward with that site, and at that time will be able to schedule workshops to move forward with preliminary designs.

Commissioner Dean asked whom the target group to use the park and rides are and asked if this is a long-term infrastructure project. Gina Eleccion explained the City's Transit Services Division could better answer the question with regards to the ridership base. She added that the City will promote the location to Benicia residents to develop a higher level of use and availability, but that it is not restricted to anyone living outside of Benicia.

Commissioner Sherry asked about an intermodal facility at Goodyear and asked if that station would incorporate a park-and-ride, a bus station and train station. Lisa Porras indicated that the city is seeking funds of \$150,000 from MTC through STA to develop a transit plan for that area. The Planning Division is waiting for a response. She also indicated that the plan would incorporate all three types of transportation.

Commissioner Thomas asked how many parking spaces were inquired about at Solano Square and if the related conversations involved Safeway. Gina Eleccion indicated that there was not direct communication with Safeway and there were approximately 30

spaces involved. She noted that the management company of the property conveyed Safeway's request to have more parking, in which a proposal to utilize any spaces would not fit into that request.

In relation to the Gateway discussion, Gina Eleccion indicated that staff is looking at the Intermodal Project location as a "gateway" type project that would require signage identification. Additionally, she noted that they are looking into monumental type signs that tie in the public art aspects of the previous discussion to connect the entrance to the west side of town with the other proposed gateway sites.

Commissioner Ernst inquired about the State Park lot and the CALTRANS vehicle storage area off of East Second Street. Gina Eleccion indicated that it is almost impossible to get a commitment from the state for a project of this type, and would require bus stop relocation. She further noted that Route 78 does not travel up East Second Street.

Commissioner Sherry inquired about the Sundowner location and the cost to acquire. Gina Eleccion explained that the appraisal of the property was unrealistic and the money allotted for this project cannot be used to purchase property. She noted that the money is to design and construct the plan.

Chair Healy opened up the topic to public comment.

Dana Dean, 835 First Street- Representing the Gateway Calvary Church. She indicated that the church is very open to this discussion and are sensitive to the timelines the City has to stay on in order to meet their funding obligations.

#### **ADDITIONAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Gina Eleccion, Management Analyst, notified the Commission and the public that the Historic Context Project is well underway. She explained that the purpose of this federally funded project is to document the "built environment" in Benicia and how it affected what was built and what remains today. She continued that they are looking for public participation, maps, photographs (particularly of street scapes), postcards, and newspaper articles. She noted that there would be oral histories conducted. She concluded by welcoming input and noted that the Benicia Herald will continue to promote this project.

#### **VIII. COMMUNICATIONS FROM COMMISSIONERS**

None.

#### **IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Healy adjourned the meeting at 9:00pm