



CITY OF LA CENTER • WASHINGTON SUB-AREA PLAN

La Center Junction Sub-Area Plan Open House Public Workshop #2 Summary

DRAFT

Tuesday, June 23, 2009
6:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

ATTENDEES:

Jon Bockmier
Susan Gilbert
Steve Horenstein

Mark DeFrees
Beth Erickson
Sharon Zimmerman, WSDOT

PROJECT TEAM AND ADDITIONAL STAFF:

Dale Miller, City Planner, City of La Center
Bart Stepp, Public Works Engineer, City of La Center
Karen Ciocia, Normandeau Associates
Dena Horton, Normandeau Associates
Christy Osborn, Maul Foster Alongi

EVENT OVERVIEW:

A public workshop for the La Center Sub-Area Plan (SAP) project was held from 6 – 8 p.m. on Tuesday, June 23, 2009 at the La Center Community Center located at 1000 East 4th Street in La Center, Washington. Six attendees signed in (see Appendix A – Sign-in Forms) and viewed evaluation criteria exhibits (see Appendix B – Open House Exhibits). Project staff members were available to share information and answer questions. Comment forms were provided to record attendee input. Information regarding annexation, sub-area planning, and a copy of the staff report regarding the La Center Junction Sub-Area Plan phase I process were made available to meeting participants (see Appendix C – Open House Handouts).

The open house workshop was promoted via a flyer insert in the sewer bill distribution and the same flyer was sent via first class mailing to 114 property mailing addresses. Copies of the flyer were available for at several locations in the city limits of La Center including City Hall and Public Works offices.

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

Karen Ciocia facilitated the meeting and provided brief welcome and introductory remarks. Dale Miller discussed the project purpose and need. He explained the need for creating more jobs in La Center and the La Center Junction as the area to be developed for the City's economic future. The purpose of the subarea plan is to define anticipated development, identify necessary supporting infrastructure, and developing a plan for financing infrastructure improvements at the Junction. Dale provided a history of the public involvement efforts to date and explained that the Western Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) Hearing Board appeal was overturned so the land at the Junction is now in the City's urban growth boundary again. At this point, no additional appeals have been filed.

ALTERNATIVES AND DISCUSSION:

Land Use Alternatives

Dale Miller defined the land use designation terminology and reviewed the land use alternatives currently under consideration. One of the assumptions used when calculating the values is that the values were based on the lands as-is with no improvements. As a result the property tax was increased by 10 times its original value, however if the properties are improved, then the value could be higher. The alternatives explored consider options with the potential for a casino resort development at the Junction and without the casino resort development. The land use alternatives are described as:

Alternative X – the current City zoning plan

Alternative Y – most of the current City zoning plan remains the same, however the NE quadrant of the Junction is altered.

Dale Miller outlined the two alternatives in terms of job creation potential, households, tax revenue and operating revenue generation capacity, estimated wages potential, and potential for parks/open space. Alternative Y has approximately 40 more households, 60 less jobs, approximately \$297k less in tax revenue potential, approximately \$2.6m less in estimated annual wages potential, and slightly more multi-family dwellings and acres of available open space than Alternative X. The difference between the two alternatives is negligible and falls within the margin of error.

Transportation Alternatives

Bart Stepp reviewed the existing transportation layout of the Junction area. He described the six transportation alternatives and noted that the representations are very rough drafts, not actual alignments. The transportation alternatives were described as follows:

Without the casino resort:

Option 1A – Same as existing layout but adding a lane, adding three signals, and closing a few roads close to the interchange

Option 2A – Adds three new signals

With the casino resort:

Option 1B – Same layout but adds a signal and lengthens some lanes

Option 2B – Widens the interchange

Option 3B – Reduces the need for one signal, adds a loop, and no left turns

Option 4B – Maintains more of the existing alignments, adds more loops, may be lowest cost, but highest amount of Right of Way to be acquired, and only has 4 or 5 lanes needed on the overpass

Questions & Answers

Q: Why such a heavy focus on manufacturing?

A: The City Council directive instructs the planning department to limit the amount of warehousing/distribution and focus more on light industrial, manufacturing, and employment campus development.

Q: Will zoning and ordinances need to be changed?

A: Yes. Following the finalization of the subarea plan, the City Council will evaluate zoning and ordinances to ensure consistency.

Q: Is the zoning for a Safeway store the same as the zoning for a K-Mart?

A: Dale Miller will research this question and provide an answer at the next meeting.

Q: Is transportation alternative 1B consistent with the environmental impact statement (EIS) created by the Cowlitz Tribe for the casino resort development?

A: The traffic volume numbers used by the Tribe were combined with the City of La Center's information to generate alternative 1B. When Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) developed the transportation alternatives for the Cowlitz EIS, PB was not required to consider development east of I-5, however the La Center subarea plan (SAP) is required to consider development both east and west of the I-5 interchange.

Q: If the casino resort is developed, will the Cowlitz Tribe be required to build the interchange as spelled out in the subarea plan or what the Tribe outlined in the EIS?

A: The EIS supports a federal action to allow land to be put into Trust only. Ultimately, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is responsible for the building and maintenance of the interchange. WSDOT's approval process will be used and public involvement will be conducted as part of that approval process. Transportation alternative 1B is similar to what the Tribe had outlined in the EIS. The goal is to find the best way to serve the traffic and other infrastructure needs of the Junction area for the least amount of cost.

Q: When will a decision be made about whether or not the Cowlitz Tribe's land will be put into Trust or not?

A: At this point, it is not known. A record of decision (ROD) is anticipated within a year or so, but could potentially be appealed. Currently, the Tribe is required to

interface with Clark County about the land and their plans until the land is annexed by the City of La Center as part of its urban growth area.

Q: What type of development brings more tax revenue?

A: Retail sales and commercial property taxes generate a large portion of tax revenue.

Q: How soon will the new bridge access be built?

A: The additional bridge over the East Fork of the Lewis River is anticipated as part of the 20 year plan in order to accommodate growth and traffic volumes.

Q: What does the cross-hatching marks in the southern portion of the subarea plan represent?

A: It is a contingency. If the casino resort development is built, then approximately 150 acres of land will not be able to be developed by the City. The 120 acres of cross-hatched area on the map will be added to the La Center urban growth area to balance out the loss of land for the casino resort development.

Comments

Steve Horenstein stated that the City will only get one real chance to develop the area and suggested that the City really evaluate the market needs for other things like warehousing, distribution, transportation, etc. He stated that most big box stores have difficulty achieving structures larger than 200,000 square feet, so the City may wish to re-evaluate some of its code if the desire is to decrease the ability of big box store to locate in the area. He also suggested removing the residential component from the land at the junction to increase the potential for business development and job creation. Steve agreed with Susan Gilbert that there is more value to having more commercial development along La Center Road and that the City should be wary of setting certain land into industrial and then facing massive pressure to convert that designation to something else. He believes the City should also avoid creating tons of jobs at the Junction and having a separate downtown, but rather, the City should be planning for the entire community. Steve also commented that he was concerned about some of the draft transportation alternative alignment configurations.

Susan Gilbert stated that the City should consider the highest and best use of the land. She also stated that Alternative Y is favorable because it prevents large trucks from being required to drive through mixed use development to get to industrial/employment campus development as is laid out in Alternative X. The mixed use is then located closer to homes or downtown. She believes that the Junction area businesses and downtown businesses can coexist since they will be different venues and will attract different types of business and not necessarily compete against each other for the same business. Susan stated that the live-work option is becoming more popular and therefore some consideration should be given to mixed use with some residential included especially since there are some potential environmental concerns with some of the properties. She would like to see more architectural integrity to create a look and identity that has continuity throughout town rather than the multiple designs, facades, etc. that currently exist.

Beth Erickson is required to travel for groceries and other services but would like to see those developed in La Center. She believes that green space is important and even a little green space can break up the monotony of concrete and make a place more desirable in which to live and work.

Karen Ciocia stated the stakeholder interviews and other comments heard have suggested that attracting more food and grocery options to the area is highly desirable and therefore, the City should be mindful not to institute zoning or ordinances that would preclude a grocery store development. She also suggested that the highest and best use for an area may not be open space, however it will be important to keep connectivity to trails, parks, etc. in mind as we move forward with planning. Also, the citizens stated in stakeholder interviews and other meetings that jobs are important, but not just the number of jobs generated, but also the number of quality and “family wage” jobs that could be generated should be considered.

Christy Osborn stated that it is possible to explore the options with and without residential at the Junction especially if the City already has the numbers available to evaluate. She believes there should be a mix of parks/open space included in the plan and reminded the group of critical areas to consider as well.

Dale Miller stated that if the residential component is removed, then one downside is the loss of community policing capability in that area.

EVALUATION CRITERIA PRIORITIES:

Karen Ciocia explained the purpose for evaluation criteria to be used to judge which options are a better fit for the long term vision and plan for La Center. The attendees and residents were given three green dots and one red dot to mark their top three evaluation criteria priorities and highest criteria priority respectively. Karen reminded the attendees and residents the mandatory and comprehensive plan criteria that must be met in order to be consistent with laws, regulations, and the comprehensive plan. However, the group was invited to weigh in on the importance of the remaining criteria as well as list any additional criteria that should also be considered.

The criteria are as follows:

Mandatory Criteria

- Shall be consistent with all relevant statutory requirements under federal and state law
- Shall be consistent with all applicable goals and policies of the comprehensive plan
- Shall maximize the efficient use of public facilities and services
- Shall be consistent with the population projections provided by the Washington State Office of Financial Management as allocated by Clark County

Comprehensive Plan Criteria

- Shall be consistent with all applicable goals and policies of the comprehensive plan

- Shall meet any locational criteria for the proposed district as set forth in the comprehensive plan and municipal code
- Shall better implement applicable comprehensive plan policies than the current map designation
- Shall maximize the efficient use of public facilities and services

Criteria

The attendees and residents were given three green dots to affix to their top three priorities on the evaluation criteria list. In order of priority, the results were as follows:

Received 5 votes:

- Potential to generate jobs

Received 3 votes each:

- Potential impact to traffic
- Potential environmental impacts
- Potential for providing goods & services currently unavailable in La Center (i.e. grocery store, clothing store, etc.)

Received 1 vote each:

- Potential to generate revenue for the City
- Potential impact to downtown
- Potential public uses (i.e. parks, trails, etc.)
- Use of minimum design guideline standards

Received 0 votes each:

- Meets purpose and need
- Potential impact to existing businesses at the junction
- Potential impact to tourism in La Center

The attendees and residents were given a red dot to affix to the single evaluation criteria they believed should be given highest priority when considering the alternatives. In order of priority, the results were as follows:

Received 3 votes:

- Potential for providing goods & services currently unavailable in La Center (i.e. grocery store, clothing store, etc.)

Received 1 vote each:

- Potential to generate jobs
- Potential to generate revenue for the City
- Potential impact to traffic

Received 0 votes each:

- Meets purpose and need
- Potential impact to existing businesses at the junction
- Potential impact to downtown

- Potential environmental impacts
- Potential public uses (i.e. parks, trails, etc.)
- Potential impact to tourism in La Center
- Use of minimum design guideline standards

Additional Criteria

The attendees and residents were given an opportunity to list any additional criteria they believe would be important to consider when evaluating the alternatives. However, no additional criteria were listed on the display.

FOLLOW UP:

- It may be helpful to schedule a meeting with the representative of the Cowlitz Tribe to discuss transportation issues only.
- It may be helpful to schedule a meeting with Dale Lang to discuss the alternatives and the potential impacts to his property at the Junction.
- Dale Miller will research the question about whether or not zoning for Safeway is the same as zoning for K-Mart and provide an answer at the next meeting.

Appendix A – Sign-in Forms

Appendix B – Open House Exhibits

Appendix C – Open House Handouts