

Minutes of the Transportation Committee of the SAP Community Council

Meeting Tuesday, August 28, 2018

Committee Members Present: Scott Jensen (Co-Chair and Convenor), Kim Frair, Karen Nelson, John Mark Lucas, Gordon Murdoch, Betty Wheeler

Guest: Mary Maguire Luhrmann

Location: SAPCC Office, 2395 University Avenue West, Suite 300E, St. Paul, MN. 55114

Item 1: Agenda for Tonight's Meeting

Scott Jensen provided the agenda to the Committee. By consensus, it was agreed the agenda was acceptable, with the addition to set up a Google form poll concerning the parking working group, on the SAPCC website.

Item 2: Minutes of July 31, 2018 Meeting

John Mark Lucas offered a motion to approve the minutes as they stand; Karen Nelson seconded the motion, and the motion was passed on a voice vote with no abstentions.

Item 3: Bus Stops in the Business Area on Como Avenue

Guest Mary Maguire Luhrmann introduced herself to the Committee. She wished to address the issues of bus stops along Como Avenue within the main business district.

First, she reported that businesses have generally seen a significant drop in their business during street construction. So the Community Council needs to be aware of this issue.

However, a big issue for them is that there are three bus stops along Como in both directions within only a 4-block distance, which are more stops than is typical along city bus routes. Mary and others within the community are proposing that one stop should be removed in both directions, and at least additional one location change should be made.

A representative from the Karta Thai cafe reported to her that they asked for an extra concrete pad in front of their (new) building during their rental negotiations, which was built in the last few years by the owner of Park Service Company. Their original plan was to use the extra room for summertime / good weather patio dining, which would be especially helpful due to the small interior dining footprint they now rent.

However, the city moved the westbound bus stop that used to be at the end of that block (at the Como / Doswell intersection), down the street and adjacent to the new concrete pad when the building was completed. That move stymied the Karta Thai's owners from providing patio dining.

A group of concerned citizens wrote a petition to the City Council, which acquired 200 signatures. It was reported that the Council has agreed that one bus stop can be removed in one direction. They have sent Mary an email that they will have a meeting on this issue. They have agreed with the sentiment of the petition to remove the westbound bus stop on Como that is located about one-half block east of Carter, because there is also a stop immediately at the intersection of Como and Carter.

So far, the City Council has not said they would agree to moving the one located in front of Karta Thai. However, they contacted Karta Thai and told the owners that they would need to pay for the relocation of the bus stop, if they still wanted it. The Karta Thai owners feel they are being treated unfairly, because they thought they had an agreement from the Park Service owner that they would get the patio seating, and they had no reason to expect the relocation of the bus stop by the city, at the time they were negotiating their lease.

Another petition has been circulating within the community that is requesting the City Council to move the bus stop from the Karta Thai location to the Como / Valentine intersection. Due to the length of the bus, and the need for merging out of and back into the driving lane, the petitioners state that 5 parking spaces in the heart of the business district have been lost, with the Karta Thai location.

The City Council has responded by saying that there is a tree at the Como / Valentine location that would need to be cut down, and some additional branches on a nearby tree would need to be removed. Mary reports that she believes the second tree is only a very small locust that actually has no hanging branches.

Mary reported that the former president of the St. Anthony Park Foundation has gone on record to request the City Council to simply remove the eastbound bus stop at the Finnish Bistro from that location, but keep the eastbound stop at the Como / Doswell intersection, and also keep the stop just south of the junction of Como and Commonwealth. He believes that when eastbound buses pull in at Finnish Bistro (intersection of Como / Carter), there are some safety issues. He states that drivers pull around the bus (which he contends is illegal), but because so many pedestrians cross there, including kids, that the passing drivers create a hazard for pedestrians because pedestrians and drivers cannot see each other due to the bus.

Therefore, the plan Mary and others (including the Scarborough Fair owner, the former SAP Foundation president and other business owners) are proposing includes only the following stops in the Como Business District:

Westbound Como Bus Stops

- 1 stop at intersection of Como / Carter (existing)
- 1 stop at intersection of Como / Valentine (moved from the Karta Thai location)

Eastbound Como Bus Stops

- 1 stop at intersection of Como / Doswell (existing)
- 1 stop at intersection of Como / Commonwealth (existing)

Each of these pairs of stops are, or would be, approximately 2 blocks apart.

John Mark Lucas asked Mary if anyone who rides the buses has been asked or surveyed. Mary replied that conversations she has had with others in the new apartments by Park Service say they mostly don't care about the bus stops. (There is some underground parking for those tenants, so most of them may have cars.)

Karen Nelson agreed with John Mark, that it would be good to get feedback from bus riders. She speculated that most likely, there will be some who would like the proposal and some would not, depending on whether the new stops and the removed stops are closer or farther from their destinations.

There seemed to be a consensus among the Committee that a survey of riders should be done, to learn what we don't know from the people who use the service. A good way to conduct the survey would be to organize a way to get emails or phone numbers of riders to contact for the survey.

Gordon Murdoch asked who clears the sidewalks in winter. This is a significant issue to bus riders, particularly for elderly and handicapped people, in order to access the bus. The answer is that, generally, the owner of the property with the sidewalk is responsible. However, in some situations, the responsible party is not always clear. For instance,

the location of the eastbound Como / Commonwealth bus stop is along the parking lot of the Methodist Church. Often, there the sidewalk is not cleared, or clearing is delayed after snowfall. When there is a merchant right behind the bus stop, it is easier for the city to enforce sidewalk clearing, and in most instances, the merchant's own motivation for accessibility for customers makes clearing happen anyway.

It was mentioned that the existing bus shelter in front of Finnish Bistro will be permanently removed and not replaced in the upcoming street reconstruction phase, because there are not enough riders to satisfy Metro Transit's ridership requirements for a shelter installation. They require a minimum average number of users at each stop, in order for the installation costs to be reasonable.

It was also noted that to get snow removal cooperation at a potential bus stop at Como and Valentine would require an agreement with either Luther Seminary or a new developer of their property. Usage of bus stops are generally not as convenient anyway, where there are no street crossing signals, which would be the case at Como / Valentine. However, there is a marked crossing at that intersection.

It was stated that if businesses (perhaps collectively) would agree to do the snow removal at the difficult sites (such as at Valentine and at Commonwealth), that offer would sweeten the deal which is being proposed to the city.

It was also noted, regarding all bus stops, that no parking is still allowed within 30 feet of a bus stop, so perhaps the proposed changes would not really be gaining too much in parking anyway.

Finally, Mary stated that tentatively there will be a City Council meeting on September 18, at either 10 am or perhaps 2:30, on this issue. The Committee thanked Mary for coming to the meeting and bringing the issue to our attention.

Based on the fact that the Committee does not have a strong feeling for the bus stop proposals as described by Mary, the Committee consensus is that we will not take any position on the proposal, at least at this time. However, if anyone on the Committee hears direct rider experience or discussion, they can report back to the committee. Similarly, the consensus is that this Committee will not send a member to represent the Community Council, or to present any feedback at the City Council's meeting because we are not taking either a positive or negative position.

Item 4: Parking in SAP Meeting

Karen Nelson asked if the Land Use Committee is coming to the city parking meeting. She feels that it would be best to also get at least one Community Council Board member to the meeting. Scott Jensen said he might be able to go to the meeting, which is next week.

Item 5: Cleveland Avenue Street Construction

There will be a series of meetings about this project, particularly because it is within, adjacent to or very close to so many properties and boundaries, and will affect traffic to all of those stakeholders. The list includes at least: Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, the University of Minnesota St. Paul Campus, the State Fair, St. Anthony Park (in the city of St. Paul) and Ramsey County. The first public meeting about the project is scheduled on Thursday, September 13 between 4-6 pm at the Falcon Heights City Hall, which is in about 2 weeks. The SAP list serve will be getting the information on the meetings.

The proposed construction schedule is unclear as of yet. So far, the only item completed is that the design consultant for the project has been chosen. Anything is still on the table; there are many questions yet to be answered, for instance: What will the road layout be? How will the design deal with bike lanes?

The process will be led by the County, but it will involve both the city and county engineers. The Cleveland Avenue reconstruction will include the entire street length from Como Avenue to Larpenteur Avenue.

Item 6: Bike Parking Update

Roberto de Freitas, the new Community Organizer for SAPCC, will be looking into the issues involved.

There is no estimated date for delivery for the bike racks, but the racks are known to be in production now. They may possibly require 6-8 weeks yet. John Mark stated that the city Public Works has promised they will install them as soon as they are available. It was suggested that someone (perhaps Roberto) should check to see if a contractor must be on site the day of arrival, or else they might not get installed as promised.

Item 7: Prior Avenue Bike Lanes

As of now, the city plans to do a mill and overlay project on Prior Avenue either next year or the following year. The question was raised whether we should issue a letter of support for bike lanes, even though it is out of our District. The consensus of the Committee was that we would not send a letter now, but if there is any controversy over the bike lanes, we could weigh in later.

Item 8: Mitra Jalali Nelson is Our New City Council Member

Betty Wheeler suggested that Mitra Nelson should be invited to come to one or more of the meetings of the Community Council. Would the Transportation Committee like to do so? If so, she suggested that we should look ahead at our agendas for a few months, and pick a month in which we are discussing a wide range of important issues on the table, to give her a flavor of all of the projects we are working on.

The consensus of the Committee is that we should not expect her to attend all our meetings. Also, perhaps it would be best for the Board to invite her first, and then different Committees could consider invitations.

Betty also informed the Committee that Mitra's swearing in ceremony will be on Wednesday, September 5 at 9 am at City Hall. She suggested that it would be good to have the D12 Community Council represented at the ceremony celebrating Mitra's achievement. The good will that could come from that might play a role in establishing good communication with her, in the hope that she will take more interest in the collective work of SAPCC and its Committees than our previous City Council Members have had.

Item 9: University of Minnesota Transportation Research

Betty Wheeler reported that she met Peter Dirks, who is involved with Transportation Research at the University of Minnesota, in the Transportation section of Civil Engineering. He is currently working on a study, in conjunction with the city, to determine if there is any change in traffic crashes from before and after a white stop line is painted on the pavement to indicate the location to stop at certain intersections where no line existed before.

The study has five different sites within St. Paul at which they have installed cameras to photograph driver behavior. Betty met Peter when he was installing the camera across the street from the Knapp / Como intersection next to the SAP Elementary School. Another location is at Territorial and Cromwell. Peter said that after at least 2 weeks of data is collected, the city will paint a stop line at the corner. Then the UM will return with the camera and capture 2 more

weeks of data. After all the data is collected, it will take some months for the data to be analyzed, before they will have the results.

Betty asked Peter if they were in touch with the SAP Community Council. He said no, that he didn't know there was a Community Council. So Betty explained the Community Council structure and the existence of our Transportation Committee. She also said we would like to learn more about this study and all their work, and asked if he would be willing to attend a future meeting to tell us more. He said he would be happy to do so.

Item 11: Update on the Parking Working Group

Scott Jensen reported that the parking working group has created an email address for group use. It is the following:

parking@sapcc.org

He is also working up a Google website that includes a poll to help gather input and other information for the group. He states that the website will be online soon.

Item 11: Adjournment

Karen Nelson made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Betty Wheeler