

Franklin Street Redevelopment Study Phase II
Public Advisory Committee Meeting
October 2, 2013
Portland Public Library

Committee Members: Markos Miller, Christian MilNeil, Bob Stevens, Chris O'Neil, Jaimie Parker, Jon Graback, Yugu Yobo, Ethan Boxer-Macomber, Sally Oldham, Alex Landry, Hugh Nazor, Mark Adelson, Sam Cohen, Bill Hall, Robert Stevens, Scott Markovski

Staff: Mike Bobinsky, Jeremiah Bartlett, Bruce Hyman, Alex Jaegerman, and Bill Needelman, City of Portland; Carl Eppich, PACTS; Darryl Belz, MaineDOT; Tegin Teich, Gary Andrishak, and Jeanne Lukenda, IBI Group; Tom Gorrill, Gorrill-Palmer; Carol Morris and Scott Hastings, Morris Communications

The meeting started at 5:37 pm

Markos Miller, co-chair of the Public Advisory Committee (PAC), opened the meeting and introductions were made all around.

Jeremiah Bartlett, from the City of Portland's Public Services Department, said a few words about how he valued the input the PAC had given so far and felt that regardless of the early stage of the project, a lot of useful conversations had already taken place.

Tegin Teich of IBI Group then took the floor. She agreed that the input that they had received so far had been very valuable. She noted that the Measures of Effectiveness and the Goals (which had been a topic of a previous Google Groups online discussion) were not the subject of that night's meeting but assured the committee that they were a work in progress. She also noted that measures to evaluate Lincoln Park specifically, as well as development potential, are underway.

Tegin then reviewed the Existing Conditions report, starting with the study area's demographics. The area has limited residential use, but where it exists it is relatively dense. Other areas are entirely commercial or industrial. The area has a higher percentage of poverty than the rest of the city with almost 70% of the households being below the federal poverty level for most of the study area. Hand in hand with this, residents of the area were more likely to walk or take transit than residents of other areas of the city.

The area currently has traditional Euclidian zoning, which outlines uses on a location by location basis. As a result, uses for the most part are segregated from one another.

A committee member commented that a recent housing development in the India Street neighborhood was aimed at high-income residents and that a similar upward trend in income is to be seen in a number of areas. He noted that this would significantly change the demographics, particularly the percent of the neighborhood in poverty.

Tegin agreed and noted that the Existing Conditions report is a snapshot in time and doesn't look at the trends. She said that the team was keeping these trends in mind, however. She added that the PAC had defined some goals and objectives related to equity and affordable housing. She went on to talk about the existing land use in the study area. It primarily reflects the zoning, with residential relatively segregated from the other uses. She noted that Franklin currently acts as a divide between uses. There is a lot of parking and underutilized lands. Parcel ownership shows that there are larger parcels than one would expect in an urban neighborhood. This provides a challenge in that it contributes to the underutilized land problem, but is also an opportunity going forward as it reduces the challenge of aggregating many individual land holdings for the purposes of intensification or redevelopment.

She reviewed the proposed developments in the study area, commenting on how there is a lot of potential activity, particularly in the India Street neighborhood. She also pointed out the large development proposed for Bayside.

At this point the floor was turned over to Bill Needelman, City of Portland Planning Department, to talk about the concurrent planning efforts in the India St. neighborhood. He explained that it was very important that the Franklin Street project was informed by the India Street planning efforts and vice versa.

The India Street neighborhood has recently been given recognition from the city as a distinct neighborhood. A height study was done in 2012, and more recently the neighborhood was selected as one of nine pilot communities in the Sustain Southern Maine regional planning effort. This has given the neighborhood the opportunity to do some preliminary visioning. A plan has been created as an example of what could happen. This plan is only an example and is not binding in any way.

There are some clear areas of overlap between the two planning efforts, for example the connection of streets, such as Federal, across Franklin St. The Sustain Southern Maine work gave two possibilities for Federal, one being a right-in, right-out connection to Franklin, the other having a bike/ped crossing and a pocket park at the end of the road. Another area of concern to both groups is the alignment of Franklin within its right of way. The Sustain Southern Maine work has proposed moving it toward downtown and opening up space for intensive development in the neighborhood. That is just one possibility. The question of the Franklin alignment will be answered here in the Franklin St. study but it needs to be informed by the India St. work.

A question was asked about the boundaries of the India St. neighborhood and whether it included the Portland Company property.

Bill answered that the boundaries went from Franklin to Montfort, and Congress to Commercial. The Portland Company property is close but not in the study area.

Tegin added that they were aware of the potential development at the Portland Company property and were keeping an eye on it even though it was not strictly in the study area for Franklin St. either.

It was asked if inclusionary zoning was a part of the visioning process.

Bill responded that the Sustain Southern Maine effort was mostly concerned with form rather than use and had not gotten into that level of detail.

It was noted that economics is an important part of the area and that efforts were needed to make sure that they included space for low income populations.

Carol responded that while it was outside the scope of this initial planning work, the India St. neighborhood expressed strong support for affordable housing in the area in addition to the higher priced housing now being built.

A committee member noted that keeping the economic diversity of the neighborhood was one of the goals of the Franklin St. project and that the neighborhood has been looking into how to get some sub-market rate housing.

Tegin moved on to existing conditions of streetscapes. The report splits the corridor into three sections. Zone A extends from the I-295 to Oxford St. It is the entrance to the corridor and is primarily commercial. It is visually broken up with distinct separation of uses. It is hard to know the options for navigating here, especially for bikes and pedestrians. Zone B extends from Oxford St. to Federal St. This section has some large, unbalanced buildings and lacks sidewalks in a number of places. It is at the crest of the hill. Zone C extends from Federal St. to the ferry terminal. The road narrows here and there is an imbalance between tall buildings close to the street on one side and smaller buildings set back on the other. The corridor ends with the visual wall of the parking garage, which is unbalanced by any other large building to the left.

A committee member asked if it would be possible to shift the road east slightly to better align with the Maine state pier entrance and to provide room on the west side for a wider sidewalk.

Tegin responded that that was something they planned on looking at. She then turned the floor over to Tom Gorrill, from Gorrill-Palmer, to explain the traffic flow analysis for existing and future conditions.

Tom explained that there is significant difference along the corridor in traffic. The Commercial Street end sees an average annual daily traffic (AADT) count of close to 5,000 cars while the end near I-295 has an AADT count of around 27,000.

He showed that the corridor has had a slight downward trend in traffic volumes over the last several years.

Turning movement volumes showed a similar story to the AADT, with much lower numbers at the Commercial Street end of the corridor than the I-295 end.

The only high crash location is the intersection of Marginal Way and Franklin. Tom showed an analysis of accidents in the intersection over the last three years.

A committee member asked about the Fox St. and Franklin St. intersection.

Tom responded that it was not officially designated as a high crash location, although certainly crashes have taken place there. He went on to show vehicular levels of service for the corridor. The Commercial St. end of the corridor had very high levels of service but these degraded as one moved to the I-295 end, with the ramps and the Marginal Way intersection mostly being F's.

The predicted levels of service for automobiles for 2035 showed little change over the current values, with mostly good levels from Somerset St. to Commercial St. and mostly Fs from Somerset St. to I-295.

A question was asked about the assumptions in traffic growth for the predictions.

Tom responded that they were based on a one-half percent per year growth rate.

At this point Tegin took the floor to talk about multimodal levels of service. Using a different level of service methodology, IBI evaluated the corridor for vehicles, transit, bikes, and pedestrians. She stated that the methodology Tom presented is a better established way to assess automobile level of service. Transit does not directly serve Franklin St. and so it received an F level of service throughout. Bike levels of service were poor, with mostly Es and Ds. Pedestrian levels of service were mostly Cs throughout, though she noted that most of the corridor was not ADA compliant. She mentioned that there was much more detail in the Existing Conditions report.

A committee member commented on the inconsistency of pedestrian crossing configurations and signaling along the corridor.

The team mapped out the conditions of the sidewalks, crosswalks, and informal crossings in the area, as well as the pavement conditions. This work informed the bike/ped conditions.

The team attended a meeting of the Portland Bicycle and Pedestrian committee and asked for their input. From this input, they mapped out the generators and attractors of trips. The bike/ped committee felt that there were more generators to the east and attractors to the west of Franklin Street. The team also solicited input from the committee on particular problem spots for bike/ped users of the area and asked where people currently traveled across the corridor. One desire line for travel that is not currently met is a direct connection between the east and west sides of the corridor diagonally across Franklin Street.

The team also mapped the existing transit in the study area. A committee member noted that the route of the Number 8 bus in the vicinity of Marginal Way and Franklin St. had changed from what was shown.

At this point Tegin turned over the floor to Gary Andrishak, of IBI Group, to talk about the challenges and opportunities that he saw in the corridor.

His first observation of the corridor was that it was not really a corridor at all as he defined it. He said that a corridor is akin to a tube, that what went in one end goes out the other. The Franklin corridor, as evidenced by the traffic counts, experiences a lot of “leakage”.

He went on to review what the study area looked like before the current Franklin Arterial was built. He felt the current arrangement was a brutal slash across the peninsula splitting neighborhoods. This provides a big opportunity inherent in fixing the corridor, namely stitching the neighborhoods back together. He noted that you can see the need for this in the desire paths that cross Franklin at various points. He then commented on the large green space that exists in the corridor and how it is lost as an amenity due to its grade and its isolation.

The three scenarios outlined in Phase 1 of the Franklin project included an “urban street” option and he cautioned the committee against this. It is a long street and to get the amount and density of development that is necessary for a good, active urban street along the entirety of the corridor would be a challenge in terms of the amount of commercial development needed and would dramatically change the dynamic of the city.

IBI’s approach in other locations has been not to look at the long corridor but instead to look at the cross streets. Use these cross-locations to focus sufficient development to bridge the corridor at these points. If development then continues perpendicularly along the corridor, a real node of activity would be created. If things are really successful and the economy is on an upswing, then the nodes can build toward each other. It is not likely that development can occur along the entire corridor at once. He identified Cumberland St., I-295, and Commercial St. as three likely cross streets to work from. In particular, he felt that a better treatment of the ferry terminal was needed and would do a lot to beautify that end of the corridor.

He stressed that the connections across the corridor should be the focus. Regardless of what else is done with the corridor, that is how this planning group can accomplish re-integration of the City fabric.

He noted that the grading of the corridor was a challenge, particularly if the green space was left as is. He believed that it should be possible to make the existing median into a usable space and that this might provide some opportunities for interesting use. He also felt that streetscape improvements were a good investment for the dollar and could be pursued first. There are a couple of large buildings that are out of scale with the corridor. He recommended that rather

than looking to “fix” these buildings or match them with new buildings, the focus should be to improve the poor quality of pedestrian experience.

He then reviewed a project that IBI worked on in San Diego to bridge building connections over a highway that was run in a sunken corridor through an urban area. IBI placed transit stops on the roads over passing the highway to keep activity in the empty space and took their cross street/node approach to building connections.

In conclusion, he noted that Portland had very good bones in being a city built before the automobile. He also said that doing something of significance to change the area does not need to be a huge grand gesture, but could just as well be small things that bring the community together.

A question was asked about how he felt about the relative importance of vehicular and bike/ped connections across the corridor.

He responded that bike/ped connections were the most important but vehicular ones are also necessary. He recommended improving the vehicular connections that already exist.

At this point Markos took the floor and gave a quick review of the three Phase 1 alternatives. He asked the committee to keep in mind that the goal of the discussion was to bring up points that could be used to refine these options.

The three alternatives were the Urban Street, the Urban Parkway and the Multi Use Boulevard. The Urban Street called for development up to the road and had bike lanes and parallel parking. The parkway had a large median with a separated multi-use path along one side. The boulevard called for a major through street with parallel local streets along both sides that would also carry bike and pedestrian traffic. All three could allow for the expansion of Lincoln Park and for the connection of cross streets.

There was some discussion at this point of the need to accommodate growth in traffic counts. Some committee members felt that the projected numbers were higher than necessary. Tom Gorrill explained that the .5% annual growth rate was newly developed, based on the land use model developed in cooperation with City staff.

Carol took the floor to facilitate the discussion portion of the meeting, explaining that the elements chart handout was meant to generate discussion about the various aspects of the Phase I alternatives. She stated that, in the interests of time, it made sense to start with looking at the land use elements as a group.

A committee member pointed out that the end result does not have to be one of the three alternatives from Phase 1 but can be a mix of them. He also wanted to note that while this effort needs to be informed by other planning efforts in surrounding neighborhoods, it still needs to be its own and look at issues from its own context.

Another committee member said that he agreed with what they had heard earlier: that it was hard to call the study area a corridor and that they thought it should be looked at from a more fine-grained approach, street to street. He stated that it needs to be broken up and each section looked at individually, especially since the two ends are so different.

A committee member noted that the Phase 1 alternatives do already look at the corridor in parts. In particular he pointed out that the Boulevard option changes drastically along the corridor. Markos noted that all the options have fewer lanes between Congress and Commercial Streets.

Carol asked what people envision for land uses on either side.

A committee member said that he had come into this thinking that it would be multi-use throughout. He envisioned retail on the first floor, with offices above that and residential above that. In particular they mentioned that putting something a little higher at the crest seemed appropriate to get the views.

Another member noted that they agreed with the idea of higher buildings on the spine because they would not block other's views.

A committee member commented on the segregation of uses and felt that work should be done to meld commercial and residential uses at the nodes that had been discussed earlier.

Markos agreed with the vision of mixed use with retail on the first floor. He also felt that the footprint of buildings was important. If there are large lots, there will be large buildings with poor permeability. Smaller footprints are better for that and also add to visual variety.

A committee member commented that if the Lincoln Park restoration was going to happen it would need to be coupled with a large amount of residential focused around it in order to build the base for the activity that it would warrant.

Other members agreed, noting that Lincoln Park was a key pedestrian link and that maybe it would make a good focus for one of the nodes that was discussed earlier. Another said that bigger or not, what the park really needed was more people.

Carol asked how important green space was to the committee.

A committee member responded that it wasn't about quantity but instead about quality.

Another commented that they were struck by the idea that the area would not all develop at once and so there would be defacto open space for some time. They felt that instead of thinking about creating open space, it should be more about managing it and maintaining it later on as the area develops more.

A committee member added that they felt public space was more important than green space saying that a plaza would be just as welcome as a park.

Another committee member noted that a lot of the lots on the compass north portion of the major intersections were under-developed or undeveloped and he felt that they would be good locations for larger buildings, as they would not cast as much of a shadow on the neighborhoods. He also noted that when talking of development, they had to talk about parking as they felt that city parking requirements were inhibiting development.

Bill Needelman explained that even where the city has no parking requirements, parking is still built because of the market demand for it. Parking is built/provided because developers feel it necessary.

A committee member expressed the opinion that parking requirements were prohibitive in the creation of affordable housing. He felt that there was a large population that could not drive who needed affordable housing in the city.

Bill responded that that was true and that the group needed to look at it from that point of view, the side of demand. They needed to figure out who would be there and how they would get around and then they could look at the parking requirements and potentially make adjustments.

At this point, there was some discussion about the viability of certain types of buildings and the requirements for parking that went with them. Carol noted that Bill's comment was to ask them not to just look at changing parking requirements, but to determine need first.

Carol asked Mark Adelson to talk about the work the Portland Housing Authority is doing to build a building with no parking in the study area. Mark said that they have a lot of housing in the area and 70% of the units have at least one car. That being said, they felt there was a market for smaller units for people without cars and that that was the market being targeted for this development.

A committee member commented that it was a balancing act. On one hand we want to be as permissive as possible so that development happens quickly and efficiently. Developers will come and they will want changes to whatever regulations are enacted. On the other hand the committee is here to try and envision what they want to see here. He wanted to caution the committee against being too restrictive on uses and sighted the waterfront as an example. A certain amount of the waterfront is required to be marine-related uses and it has resulted in a lot of empty space.

A committee member wanted to add to the parking discussion and noted that parking requirements are problematic but that there are other forces that lead to unneeded parking. Many of the financing models include parking and that makes it hard for developers to get

financing when they don't have parking. Also the State of Maine can withhold occupancy permits if there is insufficient parking. This means that alternatives such as on-street parking, car shares and transit have to be documented.

Another committee member voiced the opinion that on-street parking is the best parking because it doesn't take up a lot of space and can add to the life of the area. Going back to the traffic growth and adding capacity, it was noted that reconnecting the grid could take care of a lot of that capacity. It was argued that this kind of redesign - connecting the grid and fixing certain problem intersections - could account for all the needed growth in parking capacity.

A representative of Greater Portland Landmarks said that GPL supports restoring the grid to its historical pattern. She noted that GPL also believes that the narrower the street the better, as long as it accommodates multimodal traffic.

Carl Eppich, PACTS, mentioned that while the corridor does not currently have transit service, Falmouth, Yarmouth and Freeport are now looking into providing transit into Portland based on the ZOOM model. He wanted to challenge the committee to consider how accommodating growth could incorporate this service.

A committee member representing the India St. Neighborhood noted that while they are all in favor of connecting the streets between Cumberland and Marginal, every time the issue has been brought up at India Street Neighborhood Association meetings, the Assn. has been opposed to reconnecting Federal and Newbury streets, specifically for vehicles. He said that bike/ped connections were seen as okay.

Markos spoke up to advocate for keeping the community gardens, saying this is a real asset. He then agreed with earlier comments that on-street parking was a good thing and that parking lots and garages were not. He proposed that a TIF could be used to help develop transit to serve the potential nodes of development. This could help to encourage the potential Falmouth Yarmouth Freeport service to stop there. He felt strongly that if Portland is going to work, it has to find a way to bring in people to the peninsula by modes other than single occupancy cars.

Carol noted that there had been a lot of advocacy to give transit a high priority when assigning space. She asked if there was a general agreement. There was a round of agreement.

A committee member said that as a commuter, they had assumed coming in that some of the recommendations would make it harder for commuters to access the area but they very much liked the idea of having expanded transit service to surrounding towns. They felt that this addressed commuters' interests while still meeting the needs of local pedestrians. To this committee member, the problem was shifting from the Franklin corridor to focus more on the I-295 interchange. It carries a lot of traffic and has serious safety issues.

A question was asked about how the potential bus service would affect the traffic numbers.

Carl responded that the service could be included in the models but that it would likely be a small amount.

Jeremiah agreed that it would be a relatively small number. He pointed out that the numbers presented are very small increases and that addressing certain specific problems such as the intersections at Cumberland and Congress leave a large portion of the corridor with excess capacity. *(NOTE: This new transit service will be incorporated into future scenario modeling later in the study, not in the Existing Conditions report.)*

A committee member wanted to bring up a point he had brought up at the previous meeting, cautioning the committee that they should not restrict capacity too much in terms of traffic. He stated that there is a lot of potential for new, large development at the Commercial St. end of the corridor and if there is not enough room to allow for additional capacity, it will be hard to accommodate that growth. There are significant development opportunities being examined there right now that could bring a lot of additional traffic to the area and he did not want the final plan to be so restrictive of traffic to not be able to accommodate that potential.

Another committee member brought up the idea of retiming lights to condition and encourage people to drive at a certain speed. They felt that by carefully timing lights to allow a person to traverse the length of Franklin at a reasonable speed, it would improve efficiency and safety of the corridor.

A committee member said that they were in favor of connecting Federal and Oxford streets and felt that they could be designed as slow traffic, pedestrian-friendly roads that would add to the neighborhood rather than detract. They were also in favor of the Urban Street and Boulevard alternatives, as they could envision the buildings coming down to the streets and saw a real population explosion there. They also liked the restoration of Lincoln Park for this reason, to provide better open space for the new residents. They felt that restoring the park would also make sense in that the grade supported moving the road eastward.

Carol pointed out that the meeting was already slightly over time and asked if the committee was okay in extending it fifteen minutes to continue the discussion. Everyone agreed.

A committee member said that they appreciated the Existing Conditions report for its historical grounding and value. They were in favor of restoring Lincoln Park for its potential role to bridge the downtown historic district and the potential India Street historic district that is under evaluation.

Another committee member noted that if Lincoln Park were to be improved it should be as part of a nexus of development, as it is currently surrounded by some less than aesthetically pleasing buildings.

A committee member agreed and added that it really needed the additional activity that new development would bring.

There was some discussion about whether a full restoration to the original footprint would leave enough room for the road. This is something that will require more research.

A committee member commented that one of the things that concerned them from the Sustain Southern Maine work was the big blocks of buildings that were placed right up next to Franklin. They felt these buildings were out of scale with the neighborhood and were not compatible with a historic district in the area.

Another committee member agreed and said that they felt form based codes were the way to enforce a proper scale while getting the activity everyone seems to want.

Carol said that the meeting had now gone almost a half hour long, and asked if there were further comments.

Markos had two questions for the committee. First he asked if they felt the node approach looking at key intersections and building out was a good one. This met with nearly unanimous agreement. Second he asked if people thought that the project should entertain leaving the large green median and just improving it enough to act as a functional green space. This met with a mixed response.

Carol asked the committee if biking was a necessity on the actual corridor, as currently biking on Franklin is avoided by most and maybe bike traffic could be handled by parallel streets.

A committee member responded that people should be able to ride comfortably on any city street.

Another committee member noted that they lived in the area and did ride on the section from Fox Street/Somerset St. to 295 to get to the Back Cove Trail. They felt that since the Exit 7 trail connection was put in that movement has become much more common and that bike use on that part of Franklin is critical.

A committee member noted that people don't use it because it is not friendly to bikes, not because they don't want to use it.

At this point, Tegin told the committee that further comments could be submitted by email after the meeting but asked that they be in by a week from the following Monday (October 14).

Markos thanked everyone for their participation and attendance and apologized to the members of the public in attendance that there was not time to allow them to speak as well.

Carol covered the next steps. The next PAC meeting would not be until January at which point specific refinements of the Phase 1 alternatives would be presented for discussion. A public meeting is also scheduled for January. As a cost-saving measure, this is currently planned to

happen on the same day as the PAC meeting. Carol presented three alternatives for scheduling the PAC meeting: a lunch meeting the day of the public meeting, 3:30-5:30 just before the public meeting, and the evening before the public meeting.

Most of the committee could make a lunch meeting or an afternoon meeting, but the most popular option was the evening before.

At this point, Carol thanked everyone for their input and closed the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7:56 pm.