



MINUTES
NASHUA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
March 17, 2004

Members Present:

Frank Bolmarcich, Chairman, Nashua	Nelson Disco, Merrimack
John Eresian, Vice-Chairman, Hollis	Donald Wunderlich, Merrimack
Howard Dilworth, Jr., Treas., Hudson	Karin Elmer, Merrimack
Marilyn Peterman, Amherst	Richard Roulx, Merrimack
Martin Michaelis, Amherst	Bill Parker, Milford
Paul Wenger, Amherst	Cynthia Herman, Milford
Helen Fenske, Brookline	Vicky Arico, Mont Vernon
Richard Maddox, Hudson	Jean-Guy Bergeron, Pelham
Thaddeus Luszey, Hudson	Leo Thibeault, Pelham
John Kruk, Hudson	Becky Ohler, NH DES
Pat Jewett, Litchfield	

Staff Present:

Steve Williams	Angie Rapp
Mark Archambault	Shirley Vance
Ryan Friedman	John Vogl
Koren Melfi	Matt Waitkins
Camille Pattison	

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM.

Privilege of the Floor

There were no members of the public in attendance who wished to speak.

Introduction of New Members

The Chair welcomed John Kruk from Hudson to the Commission.

Approval of Minutes - December 17, 2003

It was moved by Thaddeus Luszey, seconded by Leo Thibeault:

THAT the minutes of the meeting held on December 17, 2003
be approved.

The motion carried with Marilyn Peterson and Howard Dilworth, Jr. abstaining.

Chairman's Report

Frank reported that the Search Committee formed to find a new Executive Director had recommended Steve Williams for the position. It was moved by Marilyn Peterman, seconded by Richard Roulx:

THAT Stephen Williams be appointed as Executive Director.

The motion carried unanimously.

Steve was congratulated and wished well by the Commission.

Regional Housing Needs Assessment

Steve Williams reported that the first meeting was held on March 11th. They reviewed and discussed the 1999 Regional Housing Needs Assessment. Data will be collected on housing stock and trends and a



series of 3-4 meetings will be held to review this information. It is anticipated that the final document will be ready for the June or September meeting review and approval. Steve noted that the committee will be meeting on the second Thursday of the month at 3:00 PM. He invited anyone interested to attend.

Commuter Rail Status

Steve discussed the commuter rail case that had been heard by the NH Supreme Court. The hearing was held on March 13. The opinion is expected to be issued by mid April. This hearing was a result of a lawsuit challenging the legality of using gas tax money to fund projects other than highways. If the court rules against using these funds for rail, the project still won't be "dead". Other sources of funding will be found. A meeting will be held with NH DOT to discuss how this can be done. Some possibilities are joint public-private partnerships, other State funds, etc.

Regional Water District

Marilyn Peterman reported on the status of the Regional Water District. The Committee has completed a draft of a water charter. This process took over one year to complete. Public hearings were held to receive input. They are waiting for feedback from the members of the Boards or Councils by April 1st to accept the charter as-is or with minor changes. Compromises have been made along the way. The City of Nashua has approved \$300,000 to study the costs of proceeding with eminent domain. After further discussion, John Eresian added that he thought the group had done a tremendous job.

Circumferential Highway

At its September 2003 meeting, the Commission discussed potential future options regarding the policy NRPC should pursue on the Circumferential Highway. Three options were identified at that time:

1. Full Support - Under this policy, NRPC and its members would fully support development of the North Partial Build Circumferential Highway as shown on the proposed map and would actively advocate for its development with state and federal officials.
2. Withdraw Support - Under this policy, NRPC and its members would state that they no longer supported development of the Circumferential Highway and would cease advocating for it with state and federal officials. In addition, NRPC would not include the Circumferential Highway in its 2004 Long Range Transportation Plan that is currently under development.
3. Alternatives Analysis - With this policy, NRPC and its members would state that although they did not believe the North Partial Build Alternative as currently configured is a viable solution to traffic issues in the Nashua and Hudson town centers, but that we also believe that those issues are serious and that alternatives need to be considered jointly by NRPC and the NH DOT.

At that time, the staff was directed to contact the four municipalities affected by the project (Hudson, Litchfield, Merrimack and Nashua), present the alternative policies information and request they then inform NRPC of their preferences. Responses from the municipalities is as follows:

Hudson - The Hudson Board of Selectmen stated that they supported continued support of the Circumferential Highway. However, they recognized that funding for the full construction of the project was unrealistic. Therefore they proposed consideration of alternatives.

Litchfield - The Litchfield Board of Selectmen stated that they supported the full North Partial Build Project. They stated that they recognized that the project would most likely be constructed in phases and that they believed that the phase that included the bridge over the Merrimack River should extend at a minimum to NH 102.

Merrimack - The Merrimack Board of Selectmen stated that they supported the construction of the full North Partial Build project under the condition that it not include tolls. Otherwise, they stated that they would not support the project.

Nashua - The item had been on the agenda of the Aldermanic Planning and Economic Development Committee 3 times and had been re-scheduled each time. We are still waiting to be placed back on the agenda.

Excerpts from a memo distributed to the Commission which discusses the pros and cons of the issue follows:

I. Full Support

Pros

- a. Existing Policy - The current North Partial Build alternative has been developed as the result of a long and difficult regional process and as such represents a policy consensus between the four municipalities and the region.
- b. Best Traffic Solution - The current North Partial Build alternative is the best traffic solution that has been identified.
- c. SEIS - The Army Corps of Engineers and NH Department of Transportation are close to releasing the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement on the North Partial Build Alternative. That document represents years of labor that would either be lost, or need to be redone under either of the other policy options.

Cons

- a. Expense - This is a very expensive alternative (\$168 million) in very difficult fiscal times for the NH DOT, the Turnpike Authority and for the federal government. The major state transportation investments that are currently proposed are projects that address safety and existing congestion issues. Since those priorities cannot currently be met with existing funds, it is difficult to convince officials from other areas of the state that this project provides benefit proportionate to its cost.
- b. Environmental Impacts - The environmental impacts of this project are one of the factors that have prevented it from moving forward in the past. New concerns about environmental impacts may be even more serious.
- c. Delay of Development and Implementation of Solution - It is a peculiarity of the transportation process that after a certain point, only one alternative at a time can be considered. Although this is designed to avoid wasting resources on consideration of multiply alternatives, it prevents the consideration of alternatives when that might be appropriate. In other words, due to the advanced state of the process on the Circumferential Highway, the North Partial Build Alternative will officially remain the preferred solution to these traffic issues until such time as the region agrees to cease considering it. If NRPC continues its support of the North Partial Build Alternative but it is not possible to construct the project due to funding constraints, our continued support of this alternative will prevent the development and implementation of other possible solutions.
- d. Funding of other projects - Our continued advocacy of funding for this project may prevent the region from receiving funds for other priorities.

II. Withdraw Support

Pros

- a. Funding - If NRPC were to renounce the Circumferential Highway project it would be obvious how little transportation investment is actually proposed in this region in the next ten years and could allow NRPC and its members to advocate more effectively for other projects.

Cons

- a. Traffic Issues in Central Nashua and Hudson - If NRPC withdraws its support from the Circumferential Highway and does not propose consideration of alternatives, there will be no effort underway to solve existing traffic problems in central Nashua and Hudson. These remain among the most important traffic issues in the region.



- b. Negative Perceptions - If NRPC withdraws its support at this time, it may create negative perceptions on the part of those who have worked hard in support of this project for many years.

III. Alternatives Analysis

Pros

- a. New Solutions - The alternatives currently under study were selected in 1982, over 20 years ago. A new alternatives analysis process would enable the region and the municipalities to reexamine priorities and perhaps identify different alternatives that are more in keeping with current concerns and values. We think there is a good possibility that solutions can be identified that will be less expensive.
- b. Improve Our Advocacy at State - It may be easier to solicit support for revised and hopefully, less costly alternatives with the NH DOT and the legislator.

Cons

- a. Cost of An Alternatives Analysis in Time and Money - A full alternatives analysis at this point may cost several hundred thousand dollars and require between a year and eighteen months to complete. After that, a further revision to the Environmental Impact Statement would be necessary.

The reasons NRPC is considering this issue at this time is that: the FY 2005-FY 2014 Ten Year Transportation Plan is under consideration for the legislature; the updated NRPC Long Range Transportation Plan will be submitted to the Commission for consideration in August; and the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the project will eventually be released. At that time it will be necessary to make an unequivocal statement about the region's policy on the project.

DOT Commission Carol Murray doesn't think that the funding (estimated at \$168m in 2001) will ever be available for this project, which prevents us from proposing other options. At their meeting earlier today, the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee recommended Policy Option #3. Discussion followed. A question was asked as to how the Commission can make a final recommendation without knowing what Nashua's option would be. After more discussion, it was moved by Vicky Arico, seconded by Nelson Disco:

THAT a vote on the Circumferential Highway be tabled to the June Commission meeting.

Cynthia Herman questioned where the funding for the project was coming from. It was the DOT.

The motion carried unanimously.

Regional Roundtable

A Regional Roundtable was held.

It was then moved by, Don Wunderlich, seconded by Richard Maddox:

THAT the meeting be adjourned at 8:40 P.M.

The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Williams, Official Recorder