

Aetna Viaduct Alternatives Committee (AVAC) Meeting
December 11, 2007
City Council conference room
9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Attendees: Joe Barber, Jennifer Cassidy, Toni Gold, Jackie McKinney, Tomas Nenortas, Roger O'Brien, Bob Painter

I. Announcement

ConnDOT Public hearing about Aetna Viaduct Phase I on January 23, 2007 at 7:00 p.m. to talk to public about their project at Union Station.

II. Steering committee membership

We should ask Mike Zaleski and Mike Marshall. Bob said he would contact them. Joe will ask Linda Bayer if she would be willing at least to stay on the list.

III. Vision/goals document

In our position paper we did not have a vision/goals thing because we were just asking for a broad-based study. We need to go further with this, starting with the draft that Toni circulated ahead of time.

We want to define the project area before ConnDOT does so. We are actually talking about redefining the whole study area as a transportation nexus or hub. "Hub of Hartford" may be a good name, which will help us redefine the project as something more than a bridge project. The steering committee agreed that we will use the new name "Hub of Hartford" until a better one comes along. A lengthy editing session followed for the vision/goals statement, which refined the language and broke out and detailed a number of sub-points. Toni will re-draft accordingly.

IV. Who can help us?

The Congress for a New Urbanism (CNU) and the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) may be able to help us scope things out because they are big picture folks.

We may be able to get CNU interested in this project. It is funded to do such things through the Surdna Foundation. For example, CNU has a whole project called "Highways to Boulevards".

We have all experienced the technical brush-off from engineers, and that is what the Washington State DOT did with the Alaska Way freeway. The 19-page handout sent ahead is a technical response prepared by the consulting firm Smart Mobility, and commissioned by the CNU as a response. It is an example of the kind of approach we want used for the Aetna Viaduct. A group like CNU also could also presumably help us out in fleshing out the rest of the RFP document—scope, schedule, deliverables. Toni will call Norman Garrick to ask for funding and contracting help, and to ask him to contact the Congress for the New Urbanism.

V. City issues

Roger brought up the idea of whether we could get a ConnDOT/Hartford planning committee for all Hartford transportation projects (e.g., commuter rail, Northwest Corridor study, New Britain-Hartford Busway, etc.). Each is dealt with by ConnDOT in a vacuum, which is very frustrating.

Bob said that he would call Albert Martin at ConnDOT to see if we could get folks together to see if everyone is on the same page or if we can get them to be.

Bob also stated that we have a mandate from the Mayor to keep himself and Roger involved. And because Bob will soon be leaving the Council, we will have to make an even more concerted effort to keep the Council involved and understanding what we are doing.

Bob suggested that perhaps we put together some sort of newsletter from us to the Council and that he and Roger should be reporting to the Mayor regularly.

Roger reported that Councilman-elect, Larry Deutsch, has asked about what he needs to know and documents he should be reading, and certainly something about our project should be included.

Matt Ritter contacted Toni and said he was very interested in this project. He said “you’ll need money,” which is a good sign. Toni told him that we were fleshing out our ideas in order to attract money, which he thought was a good idea. Matt is aiming to be chair of the Council’s Planning and Economic Development committee, and therefore, he is someone who we will want to be further involved.

VI. Staffing

Bob stated that in terms of staffing Bob and Jennifer will soon be gone. Toni followed up by stating that we need to have a workhorse staff person who is there every day to stay on top of this work. Moreover, we are getting to the point where we want to have formal commitment of dollars from the City to give us leverage with other potential funders (i.e., \$100,000).

Roger pointed out that the problem is that there are a lot of projects that the City has to address that need money, such as the old Sonesta hotel, the Butt Ugly Building, and Capitol West. We need to figure out how to integrate all these projects with ours, so that we are not dealing with projects in a vacuum as we criticize ConnDOT of doing.

Roger has three personnel vacancies in the Planning Division right now so there are probably things that he can do. The other important point is that he and his staff are currently out in the neighborhoods to help update plans. There is great potential power in the neighborhoods, and a project like this that brings neighborhoods together and can be integrated into their plans is a real positive.

The tension is that the City has limited capacity and funds, and we are pushing to make this a high priority, but it is a healthy tension. The struggle will be to get as many resources as possible and integrate this project into everything else the City is doing, while at the same time

not allowing it to get lost in the shuffle. It is probably important that this project gets on the budget radar with Roger, Lee Erdmann, and the Mayor.

VII. Assignments

Joe will do the notes and contact Linda Bayer.

Bob will contact Mike Marshall, Tom Maziarz and Mike Zaleski and ask them to serve on the Steering Committee.

Toni will revise the vision/goals draft and call Norman Garrick.

Everyone should send Toni any additional comments they think of to incorporate into an updated draft by our next meeting.

Next meeting: January 8, 2008 at 8:30 a.m. in the City Council conference room.