

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA

Parking and Traffic Committee

September 23, 2004

The Parking and Traffic Committee met in formal session at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, September 23, 2004 in The Alcazar Conference Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by Chairman, Daniel Sullivan and the following were present:

1. ROLL CALL

Members:

Daniel Sullivan, Chairman
Gerald Dixon
Fred Harris
John Marples
Phillip Moan
Nancy Sikes-Kline
David Toner

Excused: William Abare

Tom Kavanaugh
Richard Pinto
Henry Whetstone, Vice Chairman

City Staff:

John Regan, Chief Operations Officer
William Harriss, City Manager
James Whitehouse, Staff Attorney
Cathy Dupont, Neighborhood Council Coordinator
Pam Halterman, Recording Secretary

Also present:

James Zimmerman, Resident
Kati Bexley, Reporter

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of the June 24, 2004 regular meeting were approved as presented.

3. OLD BUSINESS

None

4. NEW BUSINESS

4.a. Staff update on the VIC and San Sebastian Transportation facilities

Staff advised that some major issues had surfaced recently, which would delay the project. It was noted that the design team had continued to work and had met all the scheduling need. It was advised that the goal was to start the construction in September 2004 in order to complete the project in early spring 2006, which would limit the impact to the tourism industry. It was noted that the strategy that was adopted was to separate the civil engineering components of the project as an early bidding package, which included the realignment of Cordova Street, retention ponds, the removal of landscaping to a temporary nursery and construction of the temporary lot.

Staff explained that the cost estimate for phase one of the project was approximately \$700,000.00. It was noted that the City had only received two bids, one for \$1.5 million and the second for \$3.1 million. It was advised that staff had found during their questioning that very little interest existed within the industry regarding that type of work. It was noted that the northeast Florida industry was currently dealing with the 2005 Superbowl event. It was stated that those elements from the main project were less important but more complex, which would force the cost to double what one would expect to pay. It was explained that the City's goal to open the facility in spring 2006 did not warrant paying an \$800,000.00 premium; therefore, both bids had been rejected. It was stated that those elements would be placed in the main project for re-bidding of the entire project. It was affirmed that much interest had been viewed by staff regarding the structure. It was said the expected completion date had been extended two months. It was noted that staff was confident in the original estimate of \$700,000.00, which involved straight forward work.

Staff noted the following points regarding the project:

- The project was simplified by placing all elements back into the main project package
- Project estimated at \$16.5 million dollars
- Separation of elements were not financially feasible
- City departments were participating in the project
- Financing associated with the project had been completed
- Monies from the previous bond issue would be used for the project
- An additional \$18.2 million dollars had been borrowed
- Total project cost would be \$22.5 million dollars
- The City had obtained the strongest credit rating ever received
- A lawsuit was filed against the City by an individual concerning the project's financial issues
- The City would defend itself against the lawsuit

4.b. Discussion regarding transit vehicles

Staff noted that they were interested in discussing the Neighborhood parking plan as indicated on the agenda; however, it was asked that the agenda be changed to allow a discussion regarding transit vehicles. It was advised that a representative from a company who was a candidate for providing a vehicle for the transit system was able to furnish a vehicle for the members to view outside and return to the meeting to

discuss the issue. It was stated that many options were available with each type of vehicle.

Due to the Sunshine Law, Staff cautioned the committee members not to discuss the vehicle while outside, but to wait until they arrived back in the meeting room. It was advised that if some of the members decided to take a ride on the vehicle after the meeting, the Sunshine Law governing the committee members would still exist and should be followed.

In response to an inquiry regarding fuel sources, staff advised that most of the vehicles had optional fuel sources, such as diesel and natural gas; however, it was unknown whether an electric or electric hybrid vehicle was available.

Item 4a, continued:

Staff advised that, due to the pending litigation, the groundbreaking event had been postponed until February 2005. It was voiced that staff was disappointed with the delay, but they had done their best to meet the schedule they thought was best for the community.

It was questioned when the realignment of Cordova and Orange Streets would begin.

Staff said the construction would begin in February 2005 and would be one of the earlier elements of the project.

Staff thanked the school board who had approved the interlocal agreement that allowed the alignment to occur, and noted that the agreement would be presented to the City Commission at the next meeting.

Chairman Sullivan called a recess at 8:50 am in order for the committee to view the vehicle. He reconvened the meeting at 9:07 am.

Item 4b continued:

Staff submitted documents to the committee members on the transit vehicles and introduced Dennis Gouwens, representative from Getaway Marketing Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Mr. Gouwens offered the following information regarding the transit vehicles:

- Vehicle line came from the Optima Bus Corporation
- Distribution source located in Florida
- Vehicles were built from the ground up
- The bus was available in two sizes, 29 and 34 foot lengths
- Low floor vehicles with space measuring thirteen and one-half inches from the ground to the first step
- Diesel engines standard on all vehicles
- Noise more insulated in the trolley type vehicle than in the bus, due to the low profile of the bus

- Components that operate the bus were located in the rear of the bus under the upper level
- Trolleys quick to load/unload wheelchairs
- Cost would be \$250,000.00 per trolley and \$225,000.00 per bus
- Bus could handle more standees
- Both vehicles approximately the same size

Staff offered the following points regarding the bus vehicle:

- Air-conditioned
- Handicap accessibility
- Vehicles would meet the specifications necessary to obtain Federal funding

Staff advised that the committee needed to help staff and the City Commission with the performance criteria issues. It was noted that many issues needed to be addressed, such as noise and if an electric product was available.

It was noted that the trolley measured thirty-one feet in length and the bus measured thirty feet in length.

Staff advised that, as a comparison, the currently operating and licensed trolleys measured sixty feet in length.

It was suggested that low-profile vehicles be used, which would offer easy on and off access. It was noted that the loop route was short and using vehicles that allowed one to stand would work well in the downtown area.

Mr. Gouwens advised that the vehicles' interior was changeable to limit the number of seats or to add standing positions. He asked how many hours the vehicles would run each day.

Staff advised that the operational estimate involved two vehicles at twelve hours each day. It was noted that ridership was currently unknown. It was explained that the transit vehicles would be targeted primarily to visitor of the Visitor Information Center.

It was pointed out that the town was flat with no hills for the vehicles to climb; therefore, no extra power was needed with the vehicles.

Mr. Gouwens advised that vehicle availability would be an approximate four to six month wait. He noted that the vehicle paint scheme could be changed to any color.

Staff explained that some of the committee members would like to take a ride on the transit vehicle after the meeting was adjourned.

Mr. Gouwens stated that he would be available to offer a ride to those members.

It was noted that the vehicle would need to meet necessary criteria to obtain Federal funding. It was suggested that the City start with two buses and add open trolleys later.

Staff advised that, generally, open type systems did not qualify for funding from the Federal Government. It was noted that, although the vehicle cost \$225,000.00, the City could create a joint project with the Council on Aging and other such agencies in order to lessen the cost for each vehicle to \$20,000.00 for the City. It was noted that the sample trolley would be FTA compliant.

It was suggested that loading and unloading would be cumbersome with the trolley type vehicle. It was stated that vehicles with standing straps would work better for the downtown loop.

It was agreed that most of the people riding the trolley could stand for the short ride. It was noted that currently trolleys turned around in the Oldest Drug Store parking lot, and did not find it a problem with the tight turn. It was suggested that two vehicles could be operating concurrently with one vehicle for standing only and the other as a sit-down ride. It was pointed out the many visitors preferred to walk; therefore, no waiting line would exist.

It was suggested that the larger question was whether the ride would be free to the visitor. It was stated that the shuttle could be tied in with the parking facility.

It was noted that the ride only took about ten minutes for the complete loop.

Staff advised that the sample trolley appeared as the Rolls Royce of trolleys.

It was stated that the sample trolley was all about comfort, luxury and hospitality for the visitor.

It was noted that the committee had previously reviewed many different vehicle styles and had chosen the trolley look as the most desired. It was suggested that the committee was reviewing the same elements that had already been completed.

Staff clarified that the previous array of products were not ADA compliant. It was explained that the committee needed to narrow the choices for the committee's review. It was noted that the committee members were concerned about the noise, and it was suggested that they review products that would offer less noise, which would be a good performance goal.

It was noted that the new parking facility would consist of the most state-of-the-art electronic elements. It was suggested that the City Commission retain that thought process while reviewing transit vehicles to include electric vehicles, which were quieter, less costly and easier to maintain. It was stated that if the transit system changed the life style of the City, it should be done correctly at the start.

It was noted that the sample trolleys were very similar to the ones in Charleston, which worked well in that City. It was said that the trolleys were easy to get on and off and were ADA compliant. It was noted that it was a nice experience from a tourist standpoint.

It was affirmed that Optima Bus Corporation was the company who had furnished trolleys in Charleston.

It was stated that Savannah's trolleys system was very similar to the proposed trolley with the exception of a bicycle rack located in front of the trolley to allow bicyclist to ride.

It was stated that the downtown area was very tight and smaller compared to those larger cities.

It was explained that the loop would need to be reviewed frequently to see whether to add more vehicles or stops.

It was suggested that the downtown loop could be free to visitors; however, a charge could be added if a stop was located outside the downtown area.

It was advised that the Charleston trolley was not expensive and the noise issue was not noticed during the ride.

Staff offered to bring in a trolley for the committee members to ride and view.

It was voiced that the committee should come to some kind of consensus regarding fuel systems and then test ride it. It was suggested that the committee offer desired elements they would like with the trolley in order for staff to pursue.

In response to an inquiry regarding whether staff knew how much Federal funding would be allocated for the transit system, staff advised that they did not have an accurate figure to offer the committee.

It was suggested that the element of funding should be investigated in order to see how much money was available for the system.

It was explained that the longest wait for the shuttle would be two minutes. It was noted that the City would start with two buses on a ten minute loop cycle. It was affirmed that staff had not reviewed electric fuel source vehicles; although, FPL had electric programs that might fit the project if electric was part of the program.

It was suggested that all fuel sources be reviewed.

It was noted that visitors were being invited to the community and were guests; therefore, they should be treated well, which would make them want to return in the future.

It was clarified that the representative for Optima stated that each vehicle could be custom built.

General consensus of the committee was that the noise level was one of the top issues.

In response to an inquiry regarding the number of stops for the shuttle, staff advised that it would be six; however, staff had not finalized that element.

It was noted that the VIC could install a loading platform in order to meet the height step of the bus.

Non-agenda item

It was asked that a revised timeline be given to the committee.

5. DISCUSSION OF TOPICS FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING

None

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

7. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 a.m.