

**MINUTES
TOWN CENTER COMMUNITY
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE JOINT WORKSHOP MEETING
MARCH 15, 2023 - 5:30 PM
DESTIN CITY HALL BOARDROOM**

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Wernet called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM on Wednesday, March 15, 2023, at the Destin City Hall Annex Council Chambers with the Pledge of Allegiance immediately following.

2. ROLL CALL:

TC Members Present

Lockwood Wernet
Michele Sandstead
Delores Morrell
Dorothy Robinson
Joshua Cowsert

Member Absent

Nikki Johnson

Staff Present

Kim Montgomery Deputy Clerk
Steven O'Connor
Ryan Scott City Engineer

3. AGENDA APPROVAL:

Chairman Wernet announced that item 7A & 7B on the agenda needs to be combined.

Motion by Committee member Morell, seconded by Committee member Cowsert to combine Items 7A & 7B under the Directors Report passed 5-0.

4. MINUTES FOR APPROVAL:

- **July 20, 2022 Minutes**
- **October 19, 2022 Joint Workshop Minutes**
- **February 15, 2023 Minutes**

Motion to approve the minutes by consent was made by Committee member Robinson with Committee member Morrell providing the second. The motion passed 5-0.

5. NOMINATION OF CHAIR & VICE CHAIR:

Nomination by Committee member Robinson to nominate Michele Sandstead

Committee member Sandstead nominated Lockwood Wernet as Chair.

Committee member Sandstead stated that she is just too busy to take on the monthly commitment as Chair and declined the nomination.

Committee member Robinson provided the second for Lockwood Wernet as Chair, and the passed unanimously.

Nomination by Committee member Robinson for Michele Sandstead as Vice Chair with Committee member Morrell providing the second. The motion passed unanimously.

6. OLD BUSINESS: NONE

7. NEW BUSINESS:

➤ **Development Projects & City Projects**

Committee member Sandstead questioned the location of the Valiant Townhomes. Mr. O'Connor indicated they're located on the north side of Airport Road in a small section on the north side of Airport Road that's within the boundaries of the Town Center District.

➤ **Community Redevelopment Master Plan Update – Lauren Witt, 3TP Ventures**

Mr. O'Connor explained the purpose of this portion of the meeting is for the members to have one-on-one discussions with Mrs. Witt and provide feedback on what they would like to see implemented into their plan.

Mrs. Witt explained to the members the duration of Town Center CRA was extended to sunset on August 3, 2038. She then explained that some of their key take aways from their combined workshop were:

- Greenspace preservation
 - Creating Trails
- Improvement to transportation
 - Better connectivity
 - Reduce Congestion
 - Better walkability
- Enhanced Safety
- Affordable Workforce Housing
- Desire to have a true Town Center on Main Street

❖ ***The committee's role in the district:***

- *Knowledge of what is wanted and needed in the district*
 - *Provide feedback for prioritization*
 - *Identify areas of concern not currently being addressed*
 - *Reviewing and providing recommendations to the CRA/Council members*

❖ ***Primary Goals & Themes for the district:***

- *Projects that promote Economic Development*
- *Greenspaces*

- *Connectivity*
- *Safety*
- ***Key Strategies to promote within those goals within the district:***
 - *Enhance Economic Development*
 - *Placemaking in Arts*
 - *Redeveloping a true downtown area*
 - *Workforce Housing*
 - *More Greenspaces*
 - *Building the Linear Park*
 - *Connectivity – Cross Town Connector finalized*
 - *Completion of the Town Center Street Network*
 - *Improving the US 98 crossings for safety*
 - *Addressing pedestrian safety and crash reduction*

According to Mrs. Witt, there are still some projects identified in their existing Town Center CRA Master Plan that have not been completed. She explained they categorized them into this plan and wanted to make sure that they are still priorities, adding that if there are any projects that are not identified, there still is time to get those implemented into the plan too.

- Main street Redesign and Enhancement – Promote Economic Development
- Linear Park & US 98 Landscaping – Promote Greenspaces
- Entry Gateways – 98 Palms
- Promote Connectivity – Connection of Mattie Kelly & Palm Street
- Sidewalk Improvement Program – Bike Lane Improvements/Street Light and Utility Undergrounding

There was a discussion utilizing CRA funds to purchase properties within the district for a possible botanical garden, an art district on Main Street for people to gather, or another green space park setting for people to enjoy. Repurpose blighted property in the Industrial Park area by rezoning to Parks to possibly have gatherings for movie nights and the possibility of creating an area for skateboarding.

Chairman Wernet spoke of how currently there is not any language in the Master Plan for funds to be set aside to purchase land or redevelopment property with existing buildings. Mr. O'Connor agreed there is not a directive or policy for land acquisition. However, if the Committee wanted to push for property for civic or land development, they should recommend that to be implemented into their new Master Plan.

The members briefly discussed the City Center that has been discussed at the City Council level for the redevelopment of the property where the Old Time Pottery is located and where the new Publix grocery store will be built.

Mr. O'Connor informed the members that there is an RFQ out for consultants to help advise the city on the direction the city can take, and staff will be bringing the information to the committees on the process when it becomes available.

A) US-98/Stahlman Ave Intersection/US-98 from Marler Bridge to Airport Road Update

According to the City Engineer, staff reached out to Baskerville Donovan to look at the previous study of the intersection done by Volkert for the following:

- Make Hwy 98 for local traffic only and have the Cross Town Connector as the commercial throughfare.
- Look at Stahlman Avenue with an emphasis on avoiding erroneous trips, i.e. how to eliminate people driving around to find a parking spot by interconnecting parking lots on both the north and south sides of Highway 98, with shared access agreements between the property owners for the parking fees and they would divvy the collections on the amount of spaces each provides.
- Pedestrian Congestion and Safety
- Stahlman Avenue and impacts from the Cross Town Connector
- Eliminating left turns onto US 98 and consolidating driveways
- Conversion of some roadways into one-way roads and adding parallel parking
- Separations between roadway access points
- Short term and Long Term Transportation Improvement plans
- Interconnection of businesses Improvements list for the PD&E Studies

Committee member Robinson spoke of her concern over eliminating the left turns and how that may have an impact on businesses.

The Chair clarified that it would essentially allow right turns only out of businesses on Highway 98, and if the person needed to go the other direction, they would drive down to the next turnaround in the median.

Committee member Sandstead stated that as a business owner, she would not be in favor of that.

Committee member Cowsert spoke of the many accidents on Highway 98 that happen because of left turns out of businesses and agrees eliminating them on 98 would cut down lot of t-boning type traffic accidents and all the consequences that add up because of those accidents.

Mr. Scott clarified that the idea is to not allow left turns out of businesses onto Highway 98, left turns into those businesses would still be allowed.

The Chairman asked about the previous driveway cut mandate that all businesses get a driveway cut onto Highway 98. Mr. Scott explained that is still the case, but adjacent businesses can also share driveway cuts to help reduce the amount of them onto Highway 98.

B) Linear Park 98 Palms Extension

Mr. Scott presented the conceptual plan to the members explaining that in the Comprehensive Plan, Policy 2-1.1 outlines the addition of roadways and corridor improvements to relieve congestion, new roadway corridor alignments, and a map, which is available on the city website for motor vehicular transportation improvements and details the necessary roadway connections. He further explained the roadways that were installed and the Palm Street extension that was accepted by the city this past year and is now a public roadway. Currently under construction, south Mattie Kelly Blvd. extension located behind the Charles Apartments will be given over to the city soon and made public. So, all these combined coincide with the Pathways Master Plan outlined in the Land Development Code and is marked as Level II Priority with the roadway being identified as a Minor Collector roadway and provided a conceptual plan design and explained that the linear park portion, which is a part of the Florida Power & Light 100-foot utility easement whom the city is coordinating closely with. That portion of the roadway would connect to the walking trail portion that connects Royal Melvin Park to the west and to Airport Road to the east. Additionally, there are issues that come into play with wetlands in the western portion of the plan, and a roadway easement would have to be obtained from Destin Water Users, as well as relocating some of their infrastructure, addressing elevation challenge for ADA compliant accessibility purposes, relocation of FPL infrastructure, and installing a stormwater system, similar to the Cross Town Connector's stormwater and variances would have to be obtained from the Board of Adjustment. All and all, this is a very expensive project that will take years to complete. However, there is a grant that was made available to the city with the help of Representative Maney that expires in October for \$240k with a city match totaling \$480k and the reason why this is being fast-tracked is because a design has to be 100% complete by October or the city will lose the funding, and since the road and the park work cohesively together, both need to be designed together.

Mike Ironside – Twin Lakes HOA President

Spoke of Twin Lakes subdivision has 85 homes that are jammed in closely on 13 acres between Big Kahuna's and Airport Road. He encouraged everyone who has not been in the neighborhood to drive through there between 5-7 PM to see all kids playing in the street. He pointed out that the sidewalks are too close to the homes making the driveways too short which as a result, the homeowners park on the street, and with this plan, the way it's designed, anyone would be able to drive right through their neighborhood, which is what they do not want. However, just a short distance over to Mattie Kelly, people would be able to drive through that roadway and there would no impacts to neighborhood housing, and that is what they are proposing, to keep south end of Cordgrass Court closed to through traffic so cars on either Airport Road or 98 palms Blvd. would just be driving right by their neighborhood and not through it.

Mr. Scott explained how roadways are public rights-of-way, and he has to show the connection in the initial design, but there is nothing that stipulates that it can't be removed before construction, if the City Council agrees.

Committee member Robertson stated that she understands their point of view but questioned Mr. Irons about the necessity of emergency services needing to access the neighborhood.

Mr. Irons explained how currently, the fire departments only access their subdivision from Airport Road as well as school buses and garbage trucks all come into the neighborhood from Airport Road, like they always have since it was built. He also stated that they understand the road is city property and if they could afford to, they would make it private, but they just don't have the necessary funds to make it private and keep it maintained. Nor do they have the necessary funds to install a gate.

Committee member Cowsert asked if there has been any consideration for speed control if the street is opened in the back.

Mr. Irons stated that they have, they have discussed all options thoroughly and if it is opened, they would have to have speed humps installed. He spoke of how when the city is in full tourist season, if the roadways are jammed up, Google maps directs people to the shortest routes and would send people using it for directions, straight through the subdivision, and that is what they are wanting to avoid. Emphasizing that all they are asking is to not connect Cordgrass to the new roadway when built. If this is approved, they will agree to make the necessary improvements to the west end of the park with grass and irrigation.

Committee member Cowsert spoke of how he walks through the immediate area quite a bit and spoke of how convenient it would be for the homes in the back to get to the shops and grocery stores and people living in the neighborhood would want that access open, if not now, some would want too eventually.

Mr. Irons stated that may be the case, but currently all the homeowners were sent letters, notices, email, and posts were made on the neighborhood Facebook page and not one person came forward stating that they wanted it to be opened.

Mr. Sandstead spoke up supporting Mr. Irons and Twin Lakes desire to not have their neighborhood exposed to the traffic that would come through there if it is opened.

Mr. Alex Rivas, 230 Twin Lakes Lane spoke of having two children and how convenience is not always the way to go, especially when safety is factored in for your children.

Committee member Robinson made the motion to recommend CRA to eliminate the connections to Cordgrass Court from the Linear Park Design in the Twin Lakes Subdivision. Committee member Sandstead provided the second. Committee member Cowsert requested that a stipulation be added that no one could come to the city later and ask for the connection and the city be responsible for the cost of the connection. The motion passed 3-2, with members Morrell and Wernet dissenting.

Chairman Wernet suggested that staff consider a traffic light being installed at Airport Road and Mattie Kelly, which to him, would encourage people to take that route to the connection to the new roadway.

8. MEMBER COMMENTS:

Committee member Morrell spoke of knowledge that she was obtained that there are people living in the storage units located in the Extra Space Storage business located at 850 Airport Road in the Industrial Park area. She spoke of her concern of how unsafe and unsanitary it is and feels that the city needs to investigate this allegation and put a stop to it. She stated she has spoken to Code Compliance about it and was informed they went to the site and was unable to find anyone living there however, she know it's still taking place. Chairman Wernet suggested that she speak with the new Code Compliance Director about her concerns.

Chairman Wernet suggested they should invite the individual who spoke at the Joint Workshop in February regarding developing the City Center to one of their upcoming meetings to discuss his ideas.

Mr. O'Connor informed the members that because this person is a private citizen and developer, he does not think that would be a good idea to discuss this subject since they do not have legal representation at this meeting to provide them with guidance.

9. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mr. Ron Sandstead spoke of how when he first started hearing talk about the Linear Park many years ago, he never imagined that it would be a part of a roadway and stated that he thinks it is a bad idea. He stated that the whole idea was to just be a park with open green spaces where people could walk and ride their bikes across the city without having to get in a car and endangering people, especially children, on a roadway. He spoke of the importance of people needing to get away from automobiles.

Chairman Wernet explained that the potential roadway has been in the Comprehensive Plan as an east/west connection from Mattie Kelly to Main Street and is depicted in the map 2-1 that Mr. Scott showed them earlier in his presentation.

Bobby Wagner, 422 Anderson Drive spoke of how he would like for this committee to keep in mind, while considering the east/west multimodal connections, that if the city center is complete, for them to envision a connection and, working with United Methodist Church for an easement to connect the Harbor District from Mountain Drive with a Linear Trail to the Town Center District.

10. ADJOURNMENT:

Having no further discussions, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 PM.

Adopted and approved 24th day of May 2023

Lockwood Wernet
Lockwood Wernet Chairman

Kim Montgomery
Kim Montgomery Deputy City Clerk