

November 21, 2011, 7:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers, 333 Civic Center Plaza

Web Site: www.ci.tracy.ca.us

The meeting was called to order at 5:03 p.m. by Leon Churchill, Jr., City Manager.

Mr. Churchill greeted everyone in attendance.

Roll call found Council Members Abercrombie, Elliott, Rickman, Mayor Pro Tem Maciel, and Mayor Ives present. Also present were Planning Commissioners Johnson, Ransom, Mitracos, Chair Manne; Chamber of Commerce members Juana Dement, Ray Morales; Tracy City Center Association members Jan Courtier, Dino Margaros, and Dan Schack.

Mr. Churchill invited members of the public to address the Council/Planning Commission with any items not listed on the agenda. There was no one wishing to address Council.

Mr. Churchill provided a recap of the key items discussed at the previous Downtown workshop held on October 4, 2011.

Commissioner Ransom indicated they also spoke about the size of the Downtown at the last meeting.

Council Member Rickman indicated he wanted to hear more from the business and property owners.

Chair Ives indicated public safety and the feel for Downtown needed to be discussed.

Mr. Morelos stated the group needed more input from the property owners.

Question 1: Should the city increase the potential for new housing and higher densities within a half mile of the Downtown?

Question 2: To what degree should the City limit what happens on Eleventh Street for the benefit of the Downtown?

Commissioner Mitracos indicated he would like to hear discussion on parking in Downtown.

Commissioner Johnson stated that as a Planning Commissioner his job was to ensure conformation to the General Plan which includes making the Downtown a priority. Commissioner Johnston added that he wants to see housing, businesses, foot traffic, community spaces, etc.

Mayor Pro Tem Maciel asked how the City can get ambitious about making plans over property it doesn't own or control. Mayor Pro Tem Maciel indicated the plan has been to purchase property from the railroad; however, the railroad is not willing to work with the City. Mayor Pro Tem Maciel asked if the property would be available in the foreseeable future and if not, where

housing would be located. Mayor Pro Tem Maciel asked why anyone would invest in the old housing downtown when there is plenty of newer housing available in the city. Mayor Pro Tem Maciel added that affordable housing for downtown was a great concept, but that it appeared the City was chasing its tail.

Mayor Ives stated infill and the downtown were priority projects. Mayor Ives added he was interested in what the magic pills were to making Downtown into what the City wants it to be, and indicated housing might not be the answer. Mayor Ives suggested residents of cities with successful downtowns have a much higher level of disposable income than what Tracy currently has. People need to have a reason to live downtown. Mayor Ives stated he was not sure how much more the city could do outside of not creating onerous zoning.

Juana Dement stated the condition and age of the housing downtown make it difficult to receive loans for investment property. The private sector would be inclined to invest more which will create a lot of rental property which will throw off the balance. Ms. Dement further indicated it was not necessarily up to the city to help fund improvements to downtown properties. Ms. Dement stated homes in other areas near downtowns were better kept up and in better condition.

Commissioner Manne asked for input regarding housing above retail vs. current housing in Downtown and a historical district around the downtown.

Ms. Dement stated she is not usually involved in the Downtown but added housing usually has a better value if it has a historical element. Ms. Dement further stated the City needed to look at prime locations within the Downtown.

Commissioner Manne suggested the Downtown may be too large. Ms. Dement stated she didn't believe it was necessarily the size of the Downtown, but rather the ownership and ownership potentials.

Commissioner Manne indicated the General Plan may need to look at this in a broader sense.

Steve Nicolau, 445 W. Eleventh Street, stated he agreed with Mayor Pro Tem Maciel regarding the Bowtie area. Mr. Nicolau stated since we know the land is contaminated has the City considered pursuing legal action to have it cleaned up. Mr. Churchill stated the City has not declared the property a nuisance.

A member of the public suggested private development is on investors and property owners and asked what incentive would be for them.

Mayor Ives suggested it may not be a per capita issue and suggested there was something else.

Mr. Churchill asked if housing and a greater disposable income were the same or separate issues. Mayor Ives stated in general terms they were the same issue.

Debbie George stated a historical area was not a viable solution for the Downtown. Ms. George indicated individuals who purchased property in the Downtown are investors and the houses are not suitable for families that are buying in Tracy. The City has to make Downtown the hot spot if it wants people to live there.

Nicholas Boothman indicated he was concerned with any comments that suggest eminent domain. Mr. Boothman stated he would like to see if people use the Downtown residential area as commercial and would like to see what older cities say. Mr. Boothman added he believed it was a great idea to have higher density housing in the Mt. Oso area. Mr. Boothman agreed that the City should be heavy handed in dealing with the railroad to clean up the Bowtie area and also keeping rail service running through town/downtown.

A member of the audience asked if the City was thinking foot traffic would increase with more residential housing in the downtown. Mr. Churchill stated it was a theory.

Mayor Ives stated that if thoughtful decisions were not made now, another group will be discussing this in 25 years.

Ms. Dement indicated there is a need to talk to the owners of the properties in Downtown, because if they are not interested in getting on board, what is the use of all these efforts.

Christine Frankel stated she had looked at the Downtown Specific Plan and heard the discussion regarding housing and indicated it's not a draw, it's an anchor. Ms. Frankel pointed out towns that don't have housing downtown are not successful (Stockton). Ms. Frankel further stated there needs to be a mix to create that anchor downtown. The problem Tracy has now is low density housing. Ms. Frankel further indicated there were funds available that tie to improving housing and increasing density through sustainability.

Commissioner Ransom asked how the City prioritized housing, signs, etc., and added she would like to avoid putting the cart before the horse.

Mr. George stated that if the City doesn't have the jobs so the people have a choice of buying a condo or a house, then the City will be stuck with commuters who move here for affordable housing only. Mr. George stated until the City gets to the point where it has jobs that will sustain the population, there is not much that can be done with the Downtown problem.

A member of the audience asked what Tracy was doing regarding economic development and colleges.

Mr. Churchill indicated the City has an economic development strategy and a job strategy and a lot of time is spent on job diversity.

Mayor Ives indicated the City has spent years developing property for businesses to move to Tracy and one of the keys is having developable property available for when businesses are looking to move.

Council Member Rickman stated that when he talks to people, they do know where Downtown is, but that there are no shops where they want to shop. Council Member Rickman stated the City can't do everything; it is going to involve public/private partnerships.

Mr. Churchill stated the City was in the process of developing 17,000 acres of industrial land which could add 30,000 jobs.

Council Member Elliott indicated an essential part of that quest (higher education) should be trying to attract a 4-year college to Tracy. Council Member Elliott indicated the City needs to provide a way for individuals to be better educated. What the City can do for Downtown is to

promote those items that will draw people Downtown, along with economic development and a college.

Ms. Dement indicated the Chamber was working with the school districts on the Hire Me First Program which prepares students for part-time jobs.

Council Member Rickman asked if the Downtown would be decorated for the holidays. Jan Couturier stated there were plans for decorations Downtown this year.

Ray Morelos stated approximately 25 years ago he served on a committee called "Main Street". Mr. Morelos stated the Downtown doesn't have an identity; we have to get an identity for Downtown. Mr. Morelos asked what is going to attract people to the Downtown.

Mr. George stated he attended various events that were held Downtown and he didn't see the same people at each event. Mr. George suggested if the City continues those efforts, it will bring people Downtown.

Mr. Churchill stated there needs to be a marketing effort but who does the marketing is still the question. The block party was a \$75,000 effort with \$15,000 spent on advertising and promotion.

Ms. George indicated continuity was the key. Ms. George suggested that if people know something is going on Downtown, they will go.

A member of the public indicated business owners do play a big part in the energy downtown, and if it's closed down at 5 p.m. and not decorated, it's not festive.

Ms. Couturier asked if the individual meant business owners or property owners. The individual indicated business owners.

Question Two: To what degree should the City limit what happens on Eleventh Street for the benefit of Downtown?

Mr. Churchill indicated there was less concern on the land use and more on design and architecture.

Chair Mitracos indicated he had a problem with the question since the way it is worded, it benefits everyone.

Mayor Pro Tem Maciel asked if it was clear to the members of the public; what restrictions are imposed or exist. Mr. Churchill stated the only land use control that is debated at this time is the issue of restaurants and where they can locate. Mr. Churchill provided a couple of scenarios regarding restaurants.

George Riddle stated he had attended several Planning Commission meetings suggesting the Commission doesn't want walk-in restaurants and if a restaurant is vacant for more than six months they want to push walk-in restaurants onto Tenth Street and fast food onto Eleventh Street.

Mayor Ives asked if the City was being more prescriptive with Eleventh Street because the City is considering it as part of the Downtown district.

Mayor Pro Tem Maciel asked what parts of Eleventh Street were being considered for the Downtown. Mr. Churchill indicated we can make it what the community wants it to be; we have to figure out what that is.

Commissioner Ransom asked if Mr. Churchill could explain the purpose of zoning and why it is being considered for Eleventh Street. Commissioner Ransom clarified that the Planning Commission meeting Mr. Riddle referred to was a Downtown workshop and many thoughts were thrown out for consideration.

Jan Couturier indicated she did not believe it was communicated that the Downtown workshops were community events.

Mayor Ives indicated our consultant already told us that our Downtown was too big as currently defined.

Mr. Margaros stated he believed the problem was perception and not necessarily that you are taking from Eleventh Street. Mr. Margaros stated he didn't want it to be an "us vs. them" situation.

Mayor Ives indicated maybe this should be designed from the inside out; maybe the Eleventh Street discussion should be put off and focus placed on the downtown core.

An Eleventh Street property owner stated that according to Michael Freedman, the Downtown was too big yet the plan is to expand it. If you want people Downtown, then why is the Christmas tree at City Hall. Ms. Couturier explained. The property owner stated Tracy was an island while Livermore and Pleasanton draw from nearby cities. The property owner indicated he didn't understand why Eleventh Street was being expanded.

Christine Frankel stated the simple question is "What is the benefit of being Downtown?" That should be guiding the discussion.

An Eleventh Street property owner stated he was concerned that there are 12 non-conforming uses, and if the plan goes through there will be 32 non-conforming uses. The property owner stated he agreed that people who have homes there should be able to continue to live there. The property owner indicated he was told that Eleventh Street was going to be left out; it's a vehicular corridor and conducive to automotive uses.

Pete Navarro, representing property at Eleventh and F Streets, stated they would like to be out of the plan completely. Mr. Navarro stated Eleventh Street was structurally different from Tenth Street. Eleventh Street was auto oriented and would never be pedestrian oriented. Mr. Navarro indicated Eleventh Street could be architecturally upgraded. Regarding zoning, Mr. Navarro would like it to remain as is – out of the specific plan. Mr. Navarro believed Tracy was heading in the right direction and added he liked the idea of push vs. pulling. Mr. Navarro indicated a structural sustainable change to improve the business structure Downtown needs to include more bodies and a larger population and encouraged higher density housing Downtown.

Mr. Boothman indicated an easement needs to be kept open for commuter rail traffic. Mr. Boothman stated that if the City is going to have commuters they might as well come through the Downtown and the Downtown Specific Plan should be built around that.

Mr. Scott stated 1) commuters will come Downtown if you get their kids to come Downtown; 2) Eleventh Street made him realize that every aspect is represented there – farming, business, housing, etc; 3) he loves Downtown.

Mr. Churchill stated everyone needs to be a cheerleader for Downtown.

Commissioner Manne indicated he would like to see history repeat itself stating rail brought people to Tracy/Downtown and that having Ace rail come Downtown will bring people there.

Mayor Pro Tem Maciel indicated it was his understanding that the ACE station would be moved Downtown. Mayor Pro Tem Maciel further indicated that the the rails could not be used to bring the station Downtown.

Mayor Ives stated since day one it has always been a goal to bring ACE through Downtown Tracy. Mayor Ives stated the City has asked the Council of Government for ACE to have its own alignment over the Altamont to aim for Downtown Tracy. Mayor Ives indicated they are lobbying every year for \$450,000 for that project.

Commissioner Ransom stated the rail is a good opportunity but that it could take years, maybe decades and would like to put that item on the table, and focus on what we do control.

Mayor Ives asked Mr. Churchill what he saw as the next step. Mayor Ives suggested they have reached a reasonable consensus on the boundaries and tightening them up.

Mr. Churchill stated the logical next steps would be to use the comments in some refinement, of these ideas which will lead to an adopted Downtown Specific Plan. Mr. Churchill provided various dates for Planning Commission study sessions.

Mr. Overalls stated he had heard that the Westside Market was going to be turned into a parking lot and added he was extremely opposed to the idea. Chair Mitracos clarified that you don't eliminate parking Downtown, you move it a little further away.

Mr. Churchill summarized: Regarding property owners - when cities have to take the lead Downtown, something is wrong; the best Downtowns happen when the business community along with property owners get together, something is going right. When business owners organize and come to the city, a far superior situation is created.

Mr. Churchill indicated efforts will continue.

The above agenda was posted at the Tracy City Hall on November 17, 2011. The above are summary minutes. A recording is available at the office of the City Clerk.

Mayor

ATTEST:

City Clerk