



Highway 93S Corridor Steering Committee

Meeting #5 Minutes

November 5, 2018

2:00-4:00 pm, 2nd Floor City Hall, Council Chambers Conference room

In Attendance:

Committee Members: Mark Pascoli, June Hanson, Roger Sherman, Marilyn Nelson, Lisa Post, John Middleton, Justin Lawrence (John Muhlfeld and Ryan Hennen absent)

Staff: Dave Taylor, Hilary Lindh

Invited guest: Christine Richman, GSBS Consulting

Public: Richard Turbiak, Mayre Flowers, Stephanie Reynolds (WGM Group)

A. Meeting called to order at 2:06

B. R. Sherman moved, and M. Nelson seconded approval of meeting minutes from October 22, 2018

C. Economic Analysis Presentation & Discussion – Christine Richman, GSBS Consultants

Christine presented the findings of her initial economic analysis of the City and Corridor. She described the trends in population, housing units and housing types, employment and job concentrations, and the annual number of visitors and their spending habits. A retail performance analysis which considered resident only market capacity, as well as resident plus visitor market capacity indicates that Whitefish is doing a good job of capturing some markets, but there is opportunity for growth in others. In the category of Motor Vehicle & Parts Dealers, Whitefish brings in more spending than anticipated by the capacity of residents and visitors. This is also the case in the categories of Clothing & Clothing Accessories Stores and Sporting Goods, Hobby, Book & Music Stores. Markets with the biggest opportunities for new retail at this time include Miscellaneous Store Retailers (85,000 square feet [sf] of new retail space could be supported), General Merchandise Stores (57,000 sf new), and Food Services & Drinking Places (50,000 sf new). Looking ahead 20 years, there is some indication that the combined buying power of residents and visitors could support an additional 341,000 sf of new retail space in Whitefish.

Armed with this information about what types of new businesses could be supported in Whitefish, Christine led a discussion with the committee to consider which of these opportunities might be appropriate for the Corridor. Are there uses that are appropriate or even desired but aren't currently allowed by the zoning regulations? For example, the current WB-2 zoning district does not permit most of the category General Merchandise (shoes, clothing, or dry goods like sheets and towels). If we start with a vision of what we want the corridor to be, we can then go back and determined what changes need to be made to facilitate the vision.

Marilyn emphasized that we need to balance opportunities with retaining what is unique and attractive about Whitefish; we don't want to give up what makes Whitefish an authentic place to live and visit just because some more retail space would be supported. When asked what makes Whitefish unique or



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authentic, Marilyn noted the prevalence of locally owned and locally servicing businesses and their eclectic appearances – the opposite of cookie cutter development. Christine suggested a mix of local and visitor serving businesses can help make downtown successful.

There was some discussion of the roles that the downtown and highway commercial districts play; they support each other and diminishment of one could have negative effects on the other. The group acknowledged the high cost of space downtown drives many local serving businesses out to the corridor. Even there, not all vacant land is available for new development due to the reluctance of property owners to sell at prices affordable to local businesses. How do we retain local serving businesses in Whitefish, then?

Some of the uses mentioned as appropriate in the corridor include RV parks, restaurants to serve hotel guests (importance of the right environment noted, such as facing an interior courtyard or plaza rather than the highway), and developments with a mix of uses. Mark asked Christine what goes into a successful mixed-use development and she described some of the things Whitefish already has including an abundance of natural settings, a well-developed core (our downtown), and a strong merchant's association that can promote a place, etc. She will send an article describing successful mixed uses in more detail. She will also send articles on retail trends including the importance of art in public places, as Mark requested. The right mix of uses would include new sources of buying power (residential and employment centers/offices), experiential uses (gyms, studios, activities, parks and open space), and walkable services, dining, and shopping to meet daily needs (groceries, dry goods, etc.). The plan could contemplate changes to zoning that would add residential and mixed uses (perhaps at select "nodes") to support new residents and that new residents would support. Christine noted that the risk to a developer of mixed uses is lower than to a developer of a single use.

Regardless of the use, the look of the Corridor is very important. Marilyn listed several ideas that could improve how the Corridor looks: getting rid of blighted buildings; burying overhead powerlines; adding residential uses (single-family, small lot) to break up the same-ness of the commercial strip; keeping an authentic look (an eclectic mix of buildings) and adding a landscaped median to the highway. She used the Safeway building as an example of a nice-looking building, with the Baker Avenue face broken up with some articulation and nice landscaping. Christine emphasized the importance of urban design guidelines that guide architecture, materials used, building orientation, landscaping, location of parking, signage, etc.

After the economic opportunities discussion, Christine briefly summarized the results of a study she co-authored that analyzed the economic impacts of adding a raised median to different road segments in the state of Utah. Business located along roadways with construction projects that continued to use a



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two-way left turn (“suicide”) lanes were compared to businesses along corridors where raised medians were added. In some cases (for businesses located at the corners of intersections), retail sales increased following the addition of the raised median. Businesses located mid-block performed as well as before the median was installed. The full report is available to download on the Long-Range Plans page of the City’s website.

D. Next meeting(s)

The next steering committee will be December 10 from 1pm – 4pm. The longer time will allow us to cover several items including traffic models/simulations from Abelin Traffic (tentative), public outreach activities for the public meeting scheduled January 8, a review of the online survey that will be available to public starting in January, and the goals, activities and logistics for the January 8 meeting.

E. Public comment

Mayre Flowers noted that the focus of the presentation was the City and the portion of the corridor in the City; the plan also goes into the County. The information presented will be useful in justifying to the County that Whitefish has the capacity to add more retail and commercial businesses and that the commercial strip zoning does not need to be continued all the way to Kalispell. The plan needs to state that retail leakage to Kalispell (big box stores/general merchandise) is acceptable. She also believes that any housing created in the corridor needs to be for long term Whitefish residents who will contribute to the City, not short term or transient populations. Mayre noted the upcoming County Commissioner’s meeting December 13 at which proposed zoning text amendments will be considered that could affect Whitefish and the Hwy 93 South corridor; suggests that the steering committee should review the amendments and provide public comment. She also noted that the Downtown Business District Master Plan also has estimates for new retail that could be supported in the downtown and are anticipated in the future).

F. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 pm



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