



**City of Ann Arbor**  
**Formal Minutes - Draft**  
**Planning Commission, City**

301 E. Huron St.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104  
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Tuesday, December 16, 2014

7:00 PM Washtenaw County Building, 220 N. Main St., board room

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**9-a 14-1761** Resolution in Support of Reimagine Washtenaw Corridor Improvement Study

*Jeff Kahan presented the staff report.*

**PUBLIC HEARING:**

*Peter Eckstein, 2551 Londonderry, Ann Arbor, expressed concerns with the study. He presented visuals to the Commission of Washtenaw Avenue, stating that there are thousands of commuters that use this main artery into and out of the City daily. He said a few years ago someone asked city planners if they had ever done a measurement of how many cars come onto this section of Washtenaw from US-23, to which they had responded they hadn't done that. He said how can you plan for this section of Washtenaw without knowing where your cars are coming from and where they are going. He said they have treated this as if it were a little bike ride or walk to Ypsilanti and that this is the major purpose of this highway, which it is not. He said reserved lanes for bikes and buses and wider medians can make the commute of the shopper slower and more arduous and more prone to accidents, but they are not going to cut down on the amount of traffic on Business 94. He said the theory might be that better bike paths will mean that people will take their bikes to the grocery store, hardware store and the auto repair shop, but the reality is far different. He said we had a test of that a few years ago, with a bike path coming from Tuomy Road to Whole Foods; the result was still a full parking lot and only a couple of bikes on the bike rack on a sunny day in June 2014. He said when you ask people why they don't shop along Washtenaw Avenue, they say, overwhelmingly traffic, traffic, traffic. He said we need serious plans to improve the flow of traffic and reduce gridlock along Washtenaw, not traffic calming and narrower lanes and fewer opportunities to make safe turns, adding that the more you restrict the flow the more you will endanger the businesses already there, the more they will die, the more you will force me and my neighbors to drive further and further away to do our shopping and eating, wasting gasoline, in order to meet our needs. He asked where the photo used for the Re-Imagine Washtenaw Corridor poster was taken. He said he believed it came from a super rich community in Southern California, and was what the song California Dreamin' referred to. He asked do you see anyone carrying grocery bags from Hillers or*

*items from ACE or furniture from ARHAUS. He said you have to look very seriously at the realism of the plan under which this proposal is based.*

*Donald Salberg, 3105 Lexington Drive, Ann Arbor, stated that he supported the comments made by the previous speaker, adding that he raised issues that haven't been dealt well, by those who have planned the Re-Imaging Washtenaw Avenue. He said we have to cautious with adding more crosswalks, along with the super bus stops and the impact those will have on traffic, which could be the same or worse than adding a stop light. He said he doubts that you want to have anyone left off half way between Huron Parkway and US 23, especially on the south side who then has to walk to the corner which might be several hundred yards to where there is a traffic light, cross, and then go back another couple hundred yards and then go about 1/8 of a mile into ArborLand to get to Hillers. He said certainly people who would not be interested in this would be the elderly, those who have infirmities and those who have young children and those who need to carry more than two grocery bags at a time, which could be a considerable number of individuals. He said if you were going to make a crosswalk, it would need to accomodate those with infirmities and therefore take longer to cross Washtenaw and slow down traffic. He echoed Eckstein's request that there be a measure of traffic flow along Washtenaw. He suggested that traffic counting cables be put between Huron Parkway and US 23 exiting and another between US 23 and Huron Parkway entering. He said he guessed that there would be 80% or more leaving Ann Arbor. He said if you want to discourage this traffic he suggested we put big signs out at the perimeter of Ann Arbor, saying, "If you don't work in Ann Arbor, we don't want you to live here".*

*Michael Homel, 3473 Wooddale Court, Ann Arbor, said he was a board member of the Woodcreek Neighborhood Association. He thanked the Commission for the opportunity to address the resolution, stating that in many ways the study seems positive, and is an exaample of governmental inter-cooperation, and has the endorsement of a lot of the expert planners, and includes a number of very positive recommendations, which include pedestrian sidewalks along Washtenaw Avenue, encouragement of bike lanes, and greater cognizance of the role public transit plays in this important corridor. He cautioned the Commission and later, City Council, to be skeptical of a blanket endorsement of the recommendations, which is what the resolution says. He said along with the positive things are things that seem to be in a planner's fantasy world, specifically dismissive of the crucial role the automobiles play in the necessity of our day-to-day lives. He said the endorsement of the resolution recommends narrow auto lanes, using one of the two traffic lanes to prioritize buses; he cautioned*

*a blanket endorsement of the general concept as he said it could be possible that in the future, staff would use the endorsement to implement specific recommendations which you might not find so congenial. He said the real problem, besides design, is over-use of Washtenaw Avenue, and anything that could be done to improve auto movement on Washtenaw Avenue; such as synchronization of traffic lights, getting the bus stop out of the lane of traffic and into a cut-off, which has been done on east bound Washtenaw at Arborland, and moving any impediments to traffic would be helpful. He said the report has a grassy median in the middle of Washtenaw, and he wanted to know how it would work for those of us currently using the median to turn onto Chalmers as well as onto Washtenaw if there is no center turn lane. He said there are a lot of things that need careful consideration before endorsing the report.*

*Len Harding said he lives at the corner of Washtenaw and Sheridan and has lived there for some 30 years, said he recognizes that the traffic is extremely heavy, but argued that auto and bus pollution is egregious and he fights the element carbon daily. He said it settles on his furniture in the house, and he has scrubbed it off his deck at length and is now down to the point where he has to refinish his deck every year. He said he has to scrub it on his hands and knees as a power washer will not get the carbon out of the wood grain. He said he is now putting an impervious coating on his deck, which he hopes will help. He said the fact is that elemental carbon at 2.5 microns in cells in your lungs causes lung cancer, which he doesn't appreciate. He said he would really like to see something done about the flow on Washtenaw Avenue, which is egregious and a major health issue in that entire area. He said the idea of putting in these major bus stops at the commercial centers is entirely erroneous since that is not where the riders are. He said the riders are up near Washtenaw and Stadium and Sheridan and near the church; he said he knows because he rides the buses all the time downtown and he attested that there is no standing room on those buses and sometimes the buses simply pass the bus stops because they are full.*

*Chair Woods closed the public hearing, unless the agenda item is postponed.*

**Moved by Bona, seconded by Clein, that the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby recommends that the Mayor and City Council approve the "Resolution in Support of the Reimagine Washtenaw Corridor Improvement Study," and**

**The Ann Arbor City Planning Commission hereby adds the 2014 Reimagine Washtenaw Corridor Improvement Study to the list of planning documents to be used as resource information in support of the City Master Plan.**

**COMMISSION DISCUSSION:**

*Bona asked staff to explain the difference between a resource document in support of the Master plan and the Master plan.*

*Kahan said that the Planning Commission annually approves a number of planning documents as well as a number of resource materials that can help provide them and City Council with information in making decisions about a variety of issues. He said master plans are approved visions for our community and include our land use plan and our parks and recreation open space plan. He said resource documents are pieces of information that may be intended to provide decision makers with technical information that can help broaden their understanding of issues. He said master plans are an endorsement of the way a community feels about a particular issue, whether land use or transportation or otherwise.*

*Bona asked for examples of other resource documents.*

*Rampson responded that the list contains approximately 12 items, such as the Northeast Area Transportation plan, the Flood Mitigation Plan, the Connecting William document. She said the Connecting William document involved a lot of good discussion and public input, but was not adopted into the Master Plan with its specific recommendations, but it is certainly something staff would bring forward when presenting projects in this area to the Commission. She said the corridor study is intended to be used as a resource as new development comes forward in this corridor. She said the document doesn't have the weight of the Master Plan, but simply gives a point of departure for their discussions.*

*Bona asked about possible next steps of the presented plan if it moves forward.*

*Kahan said he was extremely sympathetic to the comments heard tonight, and said it is safe to say that residents and commuters agree that the level of traffic along Washtenaw is extreme, and he believes that the study reflects a desire to do something better. He said to allow Washtenaw Avenue to continue as is, is unacceptable. He explained the study is a multi-jurisdictional effort that recognizes we have opportunities to improve land use and all modes of transportation in the corridor. He explained the study was a multi-year effort intended to provide recommendations on acquiring future right-of-way to ensure we have an adequate amount of space to create a more effective, more efficient transportation system for all users of the corridor. He said with information provided from the study, staff has already begin a GIS analysis of existing right-of-way lines, proposed right-of-way lines,*

*existing and proposed center lines, since we would like to know precisely where the existing lines are and where they should be. He said discussion is starting with City transportation engineers on how best to incorporate the recommendations of the study for right-of way into policy so that when future developers come before the City, we would be better equipped to request right-of-way that we believe is necessary to accommodate a more efficient flow of all modes of transit. He agreed with Bona that this effort would be a multi-decade effort to acquire right-of-way, making incremental improvements along the way, but ultimately have adequate right-of way to ensure that we have a more sustainable system of transportation along the corridor. He said this is just one initial effort and are not construction drawings nor a reflection of the City of any of the partners being ready to construct anything in the corridor at this point.*

*Bona said for other resource documents, this process has given a permanent place to issues with public input, noting that there are so many studies the City does and if they are not catalogued and given a place by this Commission they quickly collect dust and disappear, along with the valuable public input. She said this is not a Planning Commission generated document, but from her perspective this is an opportunity to put a public input conclusion into our catalogue, so we don't forget it. She felt it extremely important that all of the City's corridors become multi-modal, and the fact that Washtenaw is auto dominated is a problem to her. She said she didn't believe autos should be removed from Washtenaw Avenue but to find alternatives to everyone open to the using them. She said she was in support of the document and appreciated all the input that went into the robust and comprehensive document that she felt will help inform our other corridors that aren't as deeply challenged and will put us a lot further ahead.*

*Briere asked what role the Planning Commission is recommending City Council take with this document, given that the resolution recommends approval.*

*Kahan said if Council approves the document, the city staff will continue its work in identifying future right-of-way needs, which includes a technical component, and determine how best to incorporate the this future right-of-way into City policy. He said staff would ask developers to dedicate right-of-way along this corridor to accommodate future right-of-way needs. He said along this corridor, there is a significant difference in the width of right-of-way, and in the future the City would like sidewalks wider than five feet, vegetated lawn extensions, buffered bike lanes, at least two lanes of travel and a landscaped median than can accomodate Michigan lefts to expedite vehicular travel. He noted these improvements are items the City will work towards in years to*

come.

*Rampson noted that the three other jurisdictions; Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, Pittsfield Township have all approved this resolution in essentially the same form. She said if the resolution is not approved, it sends a strong message to staff that the right-of-way we have right now is sufficient and we won't be able to ask for additional right-of-way because we won't have anything that guides us as to what to ask for. She said the visioning process was a way to figure out what will we need to incorporate all of those improvements, whether we later decide if they are the best for this corridor. She said the recommended right-of-way widths are pretty much the most that we might need. She said if we don't approve it, MDOT will probably work with the other three jurisdictions and not with us and might mean that they won't have funding available for us if we want to do improvements in this segment. She said the City would like to be a part of the improvements and have the access to grant funding for such improvements.*

*Briere noted the public comments presented at the meeting touched on items that were beyond the right-of-way acquisition explained, and the resolution included several other recommendations that were equally as important. She asked how would that work as it is all inclusive in one document.*

*Kahan said the study on page 13 makes reference to current vehicular counts [average daily trips] along the corridor and shows that west of Huron Parkway approximately 30,000 vehicles use that segment each day and east of Huron Parkway, we're looking at 42,000, and through the US 23 interchange there are approximately 46,000 vehicles which is a very congested corridor. He said in regards to mid-island crossings, we have been able to document that people are already crossing Washtenaw Avenue at all hours of the day and night and in our opinion it is quite hazardous, and we feel that if we were able to provide a mid-block crossing with an island, individuals would have a safer time crossing the corridor and therefore the recommendation includes one such mid-block crossing. He reiterated that this is not a Master Plan document, but a resource document that is not intended to be used by staff as they would use a Master plan document, and staff makes it very clear which documents they use when making staff recommendations.*

*Clein said he appreciated the public input presented, adding that it is needed if they have any hopes of improving our quality of life for the future. He said it is commendable in that this effort is a regional approach, knowing that traffic, smog, and air quality is something that is not confined to City limits but something that is shared with neighboring*

*jurisdictions. He said he sees the envisioned hopes of the study to help modulate the flow of traffic and take away some of the problems with traffic, as well as create greater safety within the corridor through 'complete streets' that include non-motorized traffic as well as other forms of transit. He said the City of Detroit is doing this approach all over and it would be backwards for Ann Arbor not to be looking at 'complete streets' for its corridors, and this is seen as a sustainable approach to dealing with traffic issues in the future. He said current resource documents have remained as such and have been helpful for the Commission, and if this resource document were to become anything more than such, it would need to go through the Commission and City Council in becoming a part of the Master Plan. He asked if the document had been approved by MDOT.*

*Kahan said yes, that they were an active participant in the study's development all along and requested that the resolution be adopted by participating communities.*

*Clein said corridors like this offer a greater incentive for public housing and mixed use, adding that if more people were able to find affordable housing within our attractive City of Ann Arbor, we might see more of those people use bikes and buses instead of cars and we could continue the wonderful way of life we enjoy here. He said he was supportive of the resolution.*

*Adenekan said she too is in support of the resolution, but has listened carefully to the people who came out to speak. She said living close to the corridor, she agrees that the traffic is bad around 4 p.m. when one is stuck in traffic. She asked about the super-stops.*

*Kahan said that the study identified 2 super-stops within the corridor. He explained that a super-stop has higher amenities for the user and typically allows buses to pull off from the traffic lane, along with other amenities. He said AAATA is looking to add additional stops in the coming year.*

*Peters asked about MDOT's opinion of the traffic, given that they have supported this study.*

*Kahan explained that MDOT recognizes the challenges the corridor poses and also has a limited amount of right-of-way in which to work and limited resources for improvements that could potentially cost tens of millions of dollars. He said they recognize that widening partial stretches might not alleviate the over-all traffic issues. He said MDOT gets it that we need to provide better service, but they are also limited to what they can work with in this particular area.*

*Rampson said MDOT really understands and supports transit in the corridor, noting that this is a high demand corridor and has been for decades, and the recommendations are intended to allow for better bus service and increased bus service. She said MDOT also likes communities that get together and tell them what they would like to see, as it helps them figure out what is a better fix for those communities.*

*Mills said she has been both a driver as well as pedestrian taking the bus and trying to cross Washtenaw Avenue. She asked if Arbor Hills is allowing for any additional right-of-way.*

*Kahan said Arbor Hills is very close to the curb line and the developer worked with the City to provide a 23-foot City controlled easement which includes landscaping and the bus stop.*

**On a roll call, the vote was as follows with the Chair declaring the motion carried.**

**Yeas:** 7 - Wendy Woods, Eleanore Adenekan, Kenneth Clein, Sabra Briere, Jeremy Peters, Sarah Mills, and Bonnie Bona

**Nays:** 0

**Absent:** 1 - Sofia Franciscus