Planning Commission meeting 5/19/16

All 7 Planning Commissioners were present: Chair Christoffels, Vice Chari Van Horik, Cruz, Templin, Fox, Perez, Verduzco-Vega.

TAPS spoke during public comment because we have been unable to get on the agenda.   This is the video of that part of the meeting.   
<http://longbeach.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=12&clip_id=8528>   
  
  
The TAPS part starts at time stamp 1:19:30.   (about 8 minutes long)  
After TAPS spoke, you can skip over the public comment from a lady about another issue.   
The Commission's comments and staff responses start at 1:31:39.   (about 8 minutes long)

**Public comment from TAPS**

My name is Debora Dobias and I live at 100 Atlantic Avenue in Long Beach. I am a member of TAPS, which is a group of residents who have been working on the parking issues in our area. TAPS and our supporters in this room will take under 15 minutes of your time tonight.

I am here to request that the Planning Commission hold a study session on solutions for these parking issues. We were informed today that Staff is now saying that parking is within the purview of the Public Works Department. However, it’s within the Planning Commission’s powers and duties to analyze data and information on conditions of the City and to report regularly to City Council on such matters. The Planning Commission would also need to be consulted if any changes were made to the Downtown Plan, and that would require research first, which requires the Commission to evaluate the need for a parking study and plan.

TAPS hired a highly experienced parking planner to do a preliminary evaluation of the parking issues. Mike Kodama knows of solutions that have worked in other U.S. cities and could work here, too. Right now, he is in Columbia speaking in 3 cities on parking and Transit Oriented Development. He teaches this stuff at USC and Berkley. Besides his experience with Parking Planning, he has done funding for studies and plans as well.

TAPS has met with City staff twice. We brought our attorneys and Mike Kodama. Staff told us that these were our options:

* To advocate for money from the General Fund
* To start our own Parking District
* To work with staff to implement changes, but only changes that are allowed within the City’s existing policies and toolbox.

In Mike Kodama’s evaluation, he noted key things that need to change in order to start fixing the City’s parking issues. Without these changes, nothing any of us do will stop the parking issue from getting worse as our city grows.

We sent the Commission an email Monday with some stories from residents. The email also had a link to a petition with residents’ comments and over 600 signatures, including both of the 2nd District City Council candidates, business owners, large property owners, and community leaders. We ask for your leadership.

We formally request that the Planning Commission move to set an agenda item for a study session on parking. TAPS will pay for Mike Kodama to present his findings, potential solutions, and funding options to you.

My name is Sharon Brown and I live at 2241 Earl Avenue. I am here to request that the Planning Commission hold a study session on solutions for the parking issues.

The City’s past actions have created cruising for parking. Except for a few hours midday, this cruising lasts typically 20 minutes to an hour for each person coming home, 365 days a year. With 60% of Long Beach working outside of our city, this daily cruising causes increased traffic, air pollution, safety issues, and lost revenue for our businesses. Our residents are experiencing and seeing the damage to our area increase rapidly.

The Downtown Plan was passed on the premise of “park once”, then walk, bike, and use public transportation. However, the Downtown Plan has some components missing like a plan for the “park once” part when it comes to residents or their guests. The City’s data shows that residents use transit, biking, and walking at a high rate already but still have a car. The reality is they cannot bike or take transit everywhere they need to go. The Downtown Plan was also missing data to support the new parking requirements. Data is needed to determine how much parking the new buildings will need to prevent their residents from parking on the streets and other lots in this parking impacted area.

Over the years, City leaders and staff told people that this cannot be fixed because there are too many cars, so the problem is too big and expensive to fix. The City has worked on a few parts of the problem but ignored the rest. Our City has not even had a dedicated Parking Manager for years, which is rare for a city this size. Now this is a City that people want to leave because of the parking issues.

When the building I managed was sold and it was no longer necessary for me to live in the downtown area, I took the opportunity to leave. After years of not being able to have guests over because of the parking issue, it is a vast improvement to my quality of life to be able to have friends and family visit me.

I request that the Planning Commission move to set an agenda item for a study session on parking.

My name is Jeffrey Thompson and I live at xxx. I am the president of the Alamitos Beach Neighborhood Association’s Parking Task Force. I am also a member of TAPS. I am here to request that the Planning Commission hold a study session on solutions for the parking issues.

The good news for our city is that there are solutions. These solutions have been used successfully in other cities our size. Nearby cities are carefully planning for parking in their development plans. Long Beach won’t be able to compete with them for business or residents. This is why a Comprehensive Plan that incorporates the many components of parking is essential for our city. Making a few smaller changes is good but is overall not effective to solve this problem. All types of parking needs must be coordinated with all available parking. For instance, a residential permit program that allows one space per home would need to coordinate with off-street parking in rental lots so that the homes with second cars have parking. Another example is that replacing the 2 hour zones with pay stations would make it easy for business customers to stay longer while also encouraging residential guests to visit and bring more business to the area. Plans like these should be made and implemented by people who are trained in the complexities of Parking Planning. A professional evaluation is needed to determine which actions would work in our area and to coordinate those actions. A Plan will also help us get funding to implement the changes.

We formally request that the Planning Commission move to set an agenda item for a study session on parking.

**Planning Commission and staff comments**

Chair Christoffels: Just so the commissioners know, none of the items that have been addressed to us here this evening at the Public Participation can be discussed because they are not agenda items. However, I think it would be beneficial if staff could clarify. We have made a previous request as a commission, as I understand it, requesting that the City Council consider including in next year’s budget some funding to study the parking issue. Is that correct?

Amy Bodek: You made an informal request, yes.

Chair: And until such a study is undertaken, staff is not in a position to provide information to the Commission relative to data about parking that’s occurring out there and alternatives as was brought forward today, is that correct?

Amy Bodek: Correct. I’d like to clarify the record without getting into a discussion but staff has met with TAPS three times, not twice. We also have been meeting with the Public Works Department which does have sole authority and responsibility for the review and operations of off-site, excuse me…on-street and public parking lots. Those are not within the purview of Development Services. Our purview is the Downtown Plan. Their purview is public parking so there is a distinction that I want to clarify for the record. So we have been having many discussions with our Public Works brethren about potential options to bring forward but at this time, we’re not prepared to have a study session or have those discussions because we are still in a fact finding mode.

Chair: I guess if the legal council obliges me, I guess that was the point of my questioning which was if we did conduct a study session, it appears it would be mostly one-way conversation from the public to us but at that point, the Commission really wouldn’t have the benefit of any staff input on the matter because we would lack the studies on that, is that correct?

Amy Bodek: Even preliminary studies that we don’t need, you know, general fund funding for that we are in the process of doing, so that’s correct.

Chair: OK. Thank you. With that, I’ll bring it back. Are there any final comments from the Planning Commissioners?

Commissioner Verduzco-Vega: Mr. Chair, I do want to reiterate, and again, you’ll excuse me if I, I don’t mean to discuss the matter,

Chair: Our attorney will correct us. Trust me.

Commissioner Verduzco-Vega: I hope so. I just wanted to clarify that the request for maybe not necessarily a parking study but to study the needs to change the parking requirements, if you will, the request has already has been made twice so it is on our radar and it is something that we, if I remember correctly, everyone on this Commission stated that it was very important to them to conduct this study session at the earliest time possible. And as it was stated to us, it was a budgeting matter why it couldn’t just be done at our whim. So I just wanted to clarify that.

Amy Bodek: That is correct.

Commissioner Verduzco-Vega: If possible, if you could just re-clarify to us the need to have a budget in order for staff to move forward with such a study session.

Amy Bodek: Our work program is essentially budget driven and our budget is determined and approved by the City Council so if we are not given approval to do certain projects or studies then they go into the bucket for the following year. Some of you know from past experience that there was a request to look at CDIP and that request was pending for quite a while until we identified funding sources and that was a million dollar grant from the State. With the addition of the million dollar grant from the State we were able to start the CDIP planning process. So it is important to again make the distinction between the development standards for private development versus being able to park outside one’s house on the street and there are differences. So we are not talking about development standards in Alamitos Beach that we have the ability to influence any new parking standards there or influence the creation of new parking spaces there so I want to make that distinction. Without even current information, it is very difficult for us to have a legitimate conversation where we can share information with the Commission. Certainly this Commission adopted the Downtown Plan, before your time of course, the City Council adopted the Downtown Plan. They get copies of your minutes. They understand the request. The City Council has not chosen to ask you to consider that and they have chosen not to address it themselves at this time. So there is only so much that I can do to ask the City Council if they are interested in addressing this issue.

Commissioner Verduzco-Vega: So parking standards outside of development, that’s really an issue that needs to be brought up with City Council. Initially could move those studies forward.

Amy Bodek: In terms of striping, meters, yes those are City Council directives that are controlled and managed by the Public Works Department. You as a commission have received several updates over the last year about what Public Works has been doing. If you’d like us to provide those to you again, we can. But they have addressed a number of issues that are within their realm and continue to do so but I can’t necessarily speak for all of those because they are not within our control.

Commissioner Verduzco-Vega: These matters are very important to me personally and I’m sure they are to all of Long Beach. So the most effective way to create that kind of change is though the City Council initially.

Amy Bodek: Correct but you also have to take it in context with the adopted Mobility Element, the Land Use Element, all of those things and what the directives have been on this issue to date.