

SMILE Station

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OFFICERS PRESENT: Gail Hoffnagle, President; Pat Hainley, Treasurer; Vice President Mat Millenbach; Eric Norberg, Secretary

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Gerri Sue Lent; Michael Hayes; Nancy Walsh; Brian Posewitz; Bradley Heintz; Ellen Burr; Bob Burkholder; John Fyre

SMILE President Gail Hoffnagle called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm, and asked for introductions around the room. After that, she asked for a review of the August 18 Board meeting minutes (one correction noted), and also of the October 9 Special Board Meeting (no corrections or omissions reported). Brian Posewitz moved that the first set of minutes be approved as amended and the second set as submitted; Pat Hainley seconded the motion; the motion carried unanimously.

The first item on the agenda involved Brian Posewitz: PBOT has approached SMILE about their plan to modify the S.E. 17th and Tacoma intersection to improve its safety. Brian explained the plan and the safety issue; the lane realignment, to be done with paint, would also improve the efficiency of the intersection by adding an eastbound lane dedicated to left turns. He reported that there has been some concerns expressed about what the change would do to the access for two businesses -- Real Deals, and Alpine Floors. There is also some worry that improving the intersection efficiency could provoke higher speed by eastbound motorists.

Brian said he has met with all parties and heard their concerns. The city expects to preserve one parking spot at Real Deals/Alpine Floors. The city is also requesting ODOT reduce the speed limit on Tacoma Street from 30 MPH to 25 MPH. Brian thinks, on balance, that these changes are beneficial, and will propose a resolution this evening for Board approval. PBOT is willing to make adjustments to mitigate any issue, if it is possible to do so.

Andrew Sullivan of PBOT was present at the meeting to answer questions about this project. He expects the state to oblige with the speed reduction on Tacoma west of 17th, and hopefully east of 17th as well. A woman identifying herself as being from Real Deals worried about the possible impact of removing some parking spaces -- where she said she and an employee regularly park. Gail Hoffnagle asked her if the remaining parking space would provide loading space for her store; no clear response.

Apparently both Real Deals and Alpine Floors use large front garage doors to allow customers to drive in for loading purchases, and that would probably continue. Real Deals is only open to the public on Thursdays and Saturdays ("Fridays till Christmas") -- disclosed in response to a direct question. The woman from Real Deals added that Alpine Floors is open Monday through Saturday. Hoffnagle asked when delivering merchandise to both stores is commonly done? "Usually 8-10 am for both".

Ron Swaren from the audience asked about adding left turn lights for those turning left on the east-west axis. The city currently has no budget for that, but those could eventually be added if the safety issue is not fully mitigated by the proposed lane realignment.

Mat Millenbach, having reviewed with the rest of the Board Brian's resolution in favor of this traffic pattern change, moved that it be approved by the Board, with a discussed and agreed addition. Eric Norberg seconded the motion. The motion carried: 10 ayes; 2 abstentions; nobody opposed.

Nanci Champlin, Co-Chair of our S.N.A.C. Committee, next presented a "Public Involvement Plan" for the "Sellwood Gap Demonstration Project", which involves SMILE-overseen neighborhood involvement and maintenance. (The plan is incorporated into these minutes by reference.) Bradley Heintz thanked Nanci and the Committee for all the hard work done on this plan. He asked how much of the plan is required by Portland Parks, and how much is what S.N.A.C. wants to do, and what it wants to focus its energy on? Nanci said the question was a good one, but deferred to upcoming public input to help define the answer. The demonstration project is proposed to focus on "parcel two". There was considerable further discussion of details of the plan.

Mat Millenbach made a motion to approve the plan; Michael Hayes seconded. Motion passed with 11 ayes, 1 abstention, no nays.

Next to appear was Kevin Downing, Chair of the Friends of the Sellwood Community Center Committee. He started by reiterating the background behind the offer SMILE made to the city earlier in the year -- that SMILE would explore our taking over and running the Center, to end periodic city threats to close or marginalize it, and to respond to community needs. We are in a period of "due diligence" promised to the city, in which we are seeking to determine the feasibility of doing this.

Kevin said it is now his hope to get the Board's vision for such a plan. Can we manage it financially? -- that is still to be determined. What if it closes and we lose it? He introduced a woman identified as Erica Gish, a 22-year resident and longtime user of the Center, to share some thoughts about all this.

She began by saying that she has used the Community Center many ways over the years but, with her kids grown, not so much now. She read the BEE article on the Center by Kevin earlier this year, and has joined the project.

"The Parks Department has given us some breathing room -- it's a welcome pause." She drew a treelike diagram on a large piece of paper -- showing its root system in the community. But this project requires money; the building itself has issues. If SMILE takes over the Community Center [even if Parks continues to own the property, which is seen as a given], would that trigger the overturning of the grandfathered status of such issues as ADA accessibility and earthquake retrofitting? We just don't know yet, she said. How much "human capital" will be required to pull this off?

Moving up her treelike diagram, Erica said (and drew) that her "tree" has three main branches, identified as three alternate options: (1) Let the Center close; there is not the constant community support we saw in the beginning of this discussion; (2) Keep it as it is -- continuing to cut services, operating mainly pre- and after-school services, primarily for Llewellyn School students; plus occasional yoga classes -- with SMILE running it much as the city does now; (3) A complete transformation. This seems to be what we were originally contemplating -- but SMILE would have to be deeply invested, making it "front and center" for SMILE.

What the Committee now needs from SMILE, she said, "is a little clarity".

President Hoffnagle remarked that she likes the tree simile. The building does have big issues, but Parks keeps threatening to cut it out. We need to know the city's vision for these small Community Centers. It would be in SMILE's interest to work with Parks -- but if they're going to chop it, why waste our time? Conversely, if we work with Parks to upgrade the building and as time passes gradually assume some programs and responsibilities, that could be a vector to take over the Center's operation eventually. "A well-rounded recreational program would do really well," she suggested.

Erica responded that part of the issue is whether SMILE is ready to hire someone to develop programs for the Center; Gail said, "we are not there yet." Pat Hainley and Bradley Heintz met with Kim at the Community Center, and are not encouraged -- the city is dictating a top-down "you will do it our way" approach. The city would want us to maintain the building, but would continue to own it. (The building is listed on the National Historic Register; SMILE bankrolled the listing process.) The city is now big on regional Community Centers, and sees small local Centers as costly and inefficient.

Kevin Downing reentered the conversation by urging, "Think about what we could offer that's needed, if we run this Center." John Fyre said he is supportive, but is aware of the pitfalls. And, he added, people are not roused to action until after the unthinkable has already happened.

Bradley and John commented that they would like to see us innovate while the Center is still open and running. Erica interjected that there aren't many "windows in the schedule" at the Center at present in which we could innovate.

Michael Hayes remarked, "The building is a gem, but asbestos removal would be a nightmare; the bathrooms need work; and the building is noisy."

Erica pointed out that SMILE "needs to define a destination, and a clear path to get there."

Brian Posewitz mused that this would be a major undertaking -- we'd be adding a third business enterprise -- is this feasible for a Board of volunteers? Pat Hainley reflected that we'd need to form a new entity to even get started with the city on this. "I'd push for 'complete transformation'," he said, "And see where we get with the city."

Next on the agenda was an item requested by Tom Brown, President of the Sellwood Westmoreland Business Alliance. He has expressed interest in siting an informational kiosk (like the one on the corner of S.E. Bybee Boulevard and Milwaukie Avenue) on SMILE Station property. Pros and cons were discussed. The Board seemed to think it might be slightly off the beaten path to meet the goals of the business association. The originally-discussed location at Tacoma and 13th would be better -- and, too, Pat Hainley said, "The Sock Dreams corner would work."

Pat Hainley presented the proposed budget for the forthcoming SMILE fiscal year, which starts this month. He asked Board members to review it -- and discussion and adoption will be deferred to the November Board meeting.

There being no other business, President Gail Hoffnagle declared the meeting adjourned at 9:23 pm.