

Cuyahoga Falls City Council
Minutes of the Public Improvements Committee Meeting
June 1, 2010

Members: Don Walters, Chair
Mark Ihasz
Terry Mader

Mr. Walters called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. All members were present.

The minutes from the May 17, 2010 and May 24, 2010 Committee meetings were approved as submitted.

Legislation Discussed

Temp. Ord. A-49

Discussion

Temp. Ord. A-49

An ordinance authorizing the Director of Public Service to execute a modification of the contract or contracts for the design and engineering of State Road and Portage Trail relative to the construction of Portage Crossing, and declaring an emergency.

Mrs. Truby stated the City entered into a contract with GGC Engineering to complete the design and engineering of the improvements to State Road, and part of that process was the traffic study. Present this evening to discuss the traffic study are Mike Workosky of Wells & Assoc.; Eric Smith and Kevin Westbrook of URS; Mike Carter and Mike Bender of GGC Engineering; Jack Bialosky and David Craun of Bialasky Partners; and Steve Rubin, COO of Stark Enterprises. Jack Bialosky gave an overview of the study. Everything contained in the study is conservative. Currently, there is a minimum amount of traffic coming through the area. The goal is to increase the number of people coming to Portage Crossing. They plan to do it in a way to improve traffic around the area. Currently, there are six ways in and out of the site. The Portage Crossing plan contains eleven ways. The current speed limit on Portage Trail is 25 mph, however, people travel faster than that. They will develop the area in such a way that people will travel through it at 25 mph or less. They plan to change the roadway from four lanes to three, plus two lanes for dedicated parking. They want to create an area where people spend time on the sidewalk.

David Craun explained the flow of traffic and how it will move through the space. The impact study was based on the traffic count done by URS. Wells used the data to run their formulas. They plan to modify some turn conditions and reduce some of the width. Generally, anything over four or five lanes of traffic makes it difficult for pedestrians. The City's Code states there can be up to 33 feet of pedestrian crossing before you need to introduce a boulevard or midpoint. Areas that are similar to what they are proposing are Broad Street in Medina; Erie Street in Willoughby and Liberty Street in Wooster. All three are similar to Portage Trail in the number of vehicles that pass through. They believe they can successfully reduce Portage Trail in such a way as to not impede traffic.

Mr. Bialosky added that all of the improvements being suggested are within existing rights-of-way so no properties are affected. There had been some discussion of truck traffic on Portage but they have determined that only three percent of traffic is large trucks.

Steve Rubin stated they attended the ICSC in Las Vegas. They had arranged more than 90 meetings and one of the major projects that was discussed was Portage Crossing. There were 40 meetings just on

Portage Crossing. Of those, they had two “no” responses but everyone else was interested. They will be following up with the interested parties within the next 45 days and will make an announcement as soon as they can. Until then, he cannot talk about specific tenants. This is a project they believe they can get off the ground. The plan is to break ground in early 2011 but they are trying to do it by the end of this year. For the retailers who are agreeing to be a part of the main street concept, it is important to include the street parking. This allows for in-and-out parking for deliveries. Without it, the main street concept is significantly depleted. It is a very important piece of the project. Programmable traffic signals will help with the flow of traffic.

Mr. Walters asked about the timing of the completion of the engineering study as it relates to the grant submission. Mike Carter stated they can be 60-65% complete by the submission date. They lost some time with the delay in the previous not-to-exceed ordinance, which set them back, but they plan to move full steam ahead with the passage of this ordinance. Mr. Ihasz was concerned about reducing Portage Trail from two lanes to one from Lillis to State Road. He referred to the numbers listed on page 15 of the traffic study. Currently, with two lanes, there are 439 vehicles in the morning, 476 in the evening rush hour, and 589 on Saturday. After the improvements, it lists 498 in the morning, 568 at evening rush hour and 754 on Saturday. This plan reduces the lanes from two to one and that is for traffic going straight through. He feels there will be serious congestion. Mike Workosky stated the way things function in the westbound direction depends on the key intersections and how they work. When you enter at State Road, there is only one lane. There are two at Lillis. Currently, there are operational concerns at State and Portage, but the planned improvements will not necessitate a widening. There will also be protected turning at the intersection, which means turns can only be done with green arrows and not a full green light. How key intersections work affects how traffic flows. Mr. Bialosky added that more vehicles will make it through the intersections. Currently, there is a wait time. Mr. Workosky stated that sometimes certain intersections will take a little longer to get through. Mr. Ihasz also commented on the on-street parking just past Lillis. He asked about drivers having a problem pulling into that spot. Mrs. Truby stated that everything is conceptual. GGC will look at the size being adequate for drivers to pull into that first spot. Council is not voting on this design. It is a continuation of GGC’s contract for them to design the plan. Mr. Workosky stated the traffic pattern will remain the same. It will just be adjusted. Mr. Bialosky added that they may find they need to move that first space out. These are longer spaces to make it easier to maneuver in and out. During peak hours, it will form a new pattern. It is their belief that traffic will be improved over a 20-year period as opposed to there being a negative impact. There may be a longer time getting through the 600 foot space but cars going through the intersections will be increased so overall flow will be better than it is now.

Mrs. Hummel asked how many cars the current design would allow to stack when turning left onto Portage Trail from State Road. Mr. Bialosky was not sure. They have not yet gone through the design with GGC. They may find that the median at that location may not remain there. Mrs. Hummel asked if it remained, would there be access to the entrances into Portage Crossing and also to the businesses on the opposite side of the road. She did not want drivers to have to make U-turns. Mr. Bialosky stated there would be access to Portage Crossing and for all of the businesses except one. It will be their goal to eliminate anyone having to make a U-turn. Mrs. Hummel stated when Council received the Development Agreement, there was a lot written about the City borrowing \$2.5 million in notes for infrastructure improvements and applying for a \$1 million grant. If the City is successful with the \$1 million grant, how much impact will that have on what is being discussed this evening in terms of traffic. Mrs. Truby stated they are applying for the grant in June but the project will be more than \$1 million. They are guaranteed 50%. That amount will get closer to \$2 million but they will not know until GGC has completed the entire design. Mrs. Hummel asked if the City is not successful in receiving the grant, would the developer then decide whether or not to undertake the improvements as a condition of closing. She is concerned that the traffic improvements being discussed need to be accomplished whether the City gets the grant or not. Mrs. Truby agreed and added that the area is experiencing issues right now. Mrs.

Hummel asked if the City does not get the grant, where would the rest of the money come from. Mrs. Truby stated it is a condition of closing. Stark can look at it and determine whether to do them all or forego some. Mrs. Hummel asked whether there were other infrastructure items that could be put aside. She does not want to see the traffic improvements put aside. Those need to happen for this project to work. Mrs. Truby stated they have CDBG funds earmarked for this area. Mr. Demasi added that the two major recommendations in the report for the dual left-turn lanes on Graham will be done this year as part of another project. Later in the year, Portage Trail will be paved and those dual left-turn lanes will be installed as well. They are currently looking at whether the signal at State and Portage will need to change. Mrs. Hummel asked if the roundabout at Lillis was still in the plan. Mrs. Truby stated it is not. Mrs. Hummel asked about the language on page 29 which states that “[w]hile the redesigned Portage Trail would reduce through traffic capacity in the vicinity of the development, the State Road/Portage Trail intersection is expected to provide an overall acceptable level of operation during the weekday commuter peak hours and on Saturday in the near-term. However, the intersection would approach capacity on Saturdays under long-term conditions.” Mr. Workosky stated that report was completed before they had discussions with URS and they looked at how traffic was distributed through the network. At the time, they forecasted the initial capacity but that will not be the case. Since the date of that report, they have talked to URS and they predict the area will not reach that level of service. Mrs. Hummel wanted to make sure they understood that Council was being asked to make a decision based on the report they had in front of them. Mrs. Hummel asked about the access point on the south side of Portage Trail and Lillis called Cody that is going to Schiller. Mr. Carter stated they would like to take it to Schiller, but it would not be a formal street at this time.

Mrs. Pyke stated she is in favor of Portage Crossing and would like to make it pedestrian-friendly but she has concerns about narrowing Portage Trail to one lane. The level of service for the intersections after it is redeveloped is a “D” which is acceptable. She would expect it to be better if the changes are made. She does not believe a “D” is acceptable. Mr. Demasi stated that whenever traffic is added, an intersection’s grade goes down. “D” is standard across the State and the country and is considered acceptable at 20 years. Mr. Bialosky stated they are talking about 20 years out. There may be other improvements that take place. This is actually better than if the City did nothing. Mrs. Pyke stated she liked the idea but is worried about the traffic coming through. Mr. Bialosky stated the traffic engineering design is based on the goal desired. If the goal was to make through traffic better, it would be a different design. Mayor Robart stated it is a hard idea to grasp and he had to abandon the traditional idea ingrained that to get cars through an area as quickly as possible, you add lanes. Until something is actually put in place, it will be hard to understand. They are not trying to slingshot vehicles through as quickly as possible. They want to slow it down. He has seen examples in other places and he approves.

Eric Smith of URS stated they reviewed Wells’ traffic study extensively. His first thought was how do you narrow Portage Trail. The more he thought about it and worked with Wells, the more comfortable he felt. What made the decision for him was the area at Highland Square at Market and Portage Path. They did the same thing there and Market Street has a lot more traffic than Portage Trail. Mrs. Pyke stated that Portage Trail was the City’s major east-west street. She does not want people finding alternate routes that would take them through residential neighborhoods. Mr. James stated that Council is responsible for everyone in the City. They depend on Council to make the right decisions. Mrs. Pyke and Mr. Ihasz came up with some good concerns that everyone has heard. He has been taking a lot of calls from people. He asked if every square inch was being used so they could do the parking and leave Portage Trail alone. Mr. Bialosky stated there are a lot of pieces that need to fit together. He stated that would not work. It is already wider than they would like it to be.

Robert Stark explained why they are not going to leave Portage Trail alone. He was asked to take the existing area and transform it into something that was state-of-the-art that would put this community at the forefront of development that benefits the community and the neighborhood. If strip centers were put

back on this site, the levels of service would not be any better. Anywhere there is commercial business, you have intersections that are a “D.” Widening public store fronts would make things too far apart, and there would be no relationship between both sides of the street. They are providing flow-through points and access. The whole neighborhood will be upgraded because of the multiple points of access. This is all positive. His job is to make sure everyone will love it. Mayor Robart added that when the City decided to purchase the property, that was a huge leap of faith. Then, they hired the finest developer. Now they have 38 retailers who have expressed interest. We need to let Mr. Stark show us he can do it. Mr. Stark stated that the best example would be Lee Road at Cedar. He recommended Council drive through that area. You would be able to gauge the parallel parking and feel the distance and the level of traffic. Both roads are similar to State and Portage. The trick is to fill the balance between pedestrian and vehicle traffic. They both have to work. Mrs. Pyke asked about Table 6-1 on page 31. Mr. Workosky stated that was because they had the existing condition vs. the proposed condition. It is not a quantitative analysis.

Rocco Caponi, has a business on Portage Trail. He had been concerned about the narrowing on the east side of Portage Trail and how that would affect the businesses. There are already a lot of vacancies. After listening to the presentation, he is hoping this vision will fill all of those vacancies. He asked if there has been any study on eastbound Portage Trail. Mr. Workosky stated there has not other than the specific intersections that were studied. Mr. Caponi stated that tonight’s meeting allowed him to envision this project. He thought of what was done at Highland Square and has seen how that has not affected the traffic. State Road Shopping Center was somewhere he went as a kid. This new project will be like having that feeling back. He is looking forward to it. He thanked the Mayor and City Council for selecting Robert Stark who has the vision.

Mario Caponi stated he has lived on Portage Trail and worked there for the last 48 years. He feels he has used Portage Trail more than anyone else. Cuyahoga Falls is his City. He raised his family here and they have been comfortable living here. He is glad to see what is going on west of his business. It is a good idea and looks like it will be a beautiful project. He wasn’t sure it would work at first but, after listening to Mr. Stark and the experts, he thinks it will work. It will be the beginning of not only the vitalization of the State Road Shopping Center but also of Portage Trail.

Mr. Mader stated he has traveled around different areas. Crocker Park is a great example of what this area will look like. Hudson is another. All of the streets are condensed to where traffic moves slow. We do not have a crystal ball to see how things will turn out but if we do nothing, it will be worse. The traffic is slow through those areas so it gives him a chance to see what is there. Cuyahoga Falls will have the same thing here. It will draw people. We have to take it a step further and step out. He is excited about it. He attended an event a year ago at the Sheraton and this type of development is where development is going.

Mr. Walters stated slowing down the vehicles is not a bad thing. It is 25 mph there. There will be people in the cafes and children crossing the street. The last thing anyone wants is people going through there at 35-40 mph. He is in favor of this.

Committee recommended bringing out Temp. Ord. A-49.

Temp. Res. A-70

A resolution pledging cooperation by the City of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio in the matter of the State Road and Portage Trail Roadway improvements related to the redevelopment of the former State Road Shopping Center, and declaring an emergency.

Mr. Demasi stated this is the resolution for the OPWC application that allows the City to apply for the improvements just discussed. Application is due at noon on June 30. The preliminary scores were 10/20. Final scores are due out in late November. The money would be available July 1 next year if the City is successful.

Committee recommended bringing out Temp. Ord. A-70.

Meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.