



CITY OF LA CENTER • WASHINGTON
SUB-AREA PLAN

**La Center Junction Sub-Area Plan
Open House Public Workshop #1 Summary**

Wednesday, May 6, 2009
6:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

ATTENDEES:

Tom Kane
Greg Thornton
Gordon Haveman
Tom Wooldridge
Amy Chase
Rick Chase
Caren Carlson

Joe Wodaege
Ron Ostrander
Steve Horenstein
Bill Birdwell
Coramae Carlson
James Relyea
Les Greear

Mary Leslie
Ken Couch
Al Luiz
Ken Hickman
Judy Hickman
Susan Gilbert
Greg Gilbert

PROJECT TEAM AND ADDITIONAL STAFF:

Dale Miller, City Planner, City of La Center
Jeff Sarvis, Public Works Director, City of La Center
Bart Stepp, Public Works Engineer, City of La Center
Karen Ciocia, Normandeau Associates
Dena Horton, Normandeau Associates
Christy Osborn, Maul Foster Alongi

EVENT OVERVIEW:

A public workshop for the La Center Sub-Area Plan (SAP) project was held from 6 – 8 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6, 2009 at the La Center Community Center located at 1000 East 4th Street in La Center, Washington. Twenty-one attendees signed in (see Appendix A – Sign-in Forms) and viewed exhibit maps (see Appendix B – Open House Exhibits). Project staff members were available to share information and answer questions. Comment forms were provided to record attendee input. Information regarding annexation, sub-area planning, and a copy of the staff report regarding the La Center Junction Sub-Area Plan phase I process were made available to meeting participants (see Appendix C – Open House Handouts).

The open house workshop was promoted via a flyer insert in the sewer bill distribution and the same flyer was sent via first class mailing to 100 property mailing addresses. Copies of the flyer were available for at several locations in the city limits of La Center including City Hall and Public Works offices.

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

Karen Ciocia facilitated the meeting and provided brief welcome and introductory remarks. Dale Miller discussed the project and explained the importance of planning for the sub-area even though the City of La Center has not officially, as yet, annexed the area into the city limits. Dale explained the Growth Management Act (GMA) Hearing Board appealed some of the land under urban growth area (UGA) and the appeal ruling has not been made. The City does anticipate getting the area in question back within the urban growth boundary eventually. It is wise to have a plan in place to ensure development occurs in line with the City's goals and the community's long term vision. There are two school districts and some port property involved as well as the utility districts, etc.

It is important to plan for the area to ensure that appropriate levels of services are available at the junction to make the developable land shovel-ready and attract businesses and development. Different uses have different needs in terms of services and utilities and having a plan will ensure the area is suitable for development and in the end, results in the least cost option for all concerned.

Dale anticipates the City Council will have comprehensive plan amendments for adoption in September 2009. While the boundaries are not able to change at this time, the land uses can be changed. Obviously, the freeway interchange would need to be improved for access, safety, and mobility purposes. In addition to transportation needs, sewer, water quality, and electricity needs will be studied as well to determine what is viable and reasonable. The City will need to come up with a least cost and fundable plan for the area. The next steps would include comprehensive plan amendments and changes in zoning regulations.

For the next sub-area public workshop in June 2009, alternatives with different uses based on stakeholder interviews, workshop discussion and comments received will be presented. At that time, the public will be asked if the alternatives are reasonable and will discuss the pros and cons of each alternative. The June meeting will flesh out the vision for the area and look at the alternatives in depth. Following the second workshop, the City will begin analyzing the service needs and improvements necessary for the area.

At a third workshop, in August 2009, a report will be presented detailing the improvements needed for power, water, sewer, etc. as well as a financial game plan and final adoption process by the City. The report will be presented to the City Council and the Planning Commission.

Al Luiz asked that for areas zoned industrial, what types of business could go in on the high end and what kinds of business could go in on the low end? Dale responded that the low end could see a manufacturing shop, lumber yard, or material handling and some light manufacturing. The high end business parks with 9 – 22 employees per acre would support more intensive use of the same area.

Susan Gilbert asked if the La Center codes had to reflect the Clark County codes. Dale responded that they are similar, but that the City's codes are meant to reflect the needs of a smaller community than the County.

Steve Horenstein asked if the City of La Center was planning to change the zoning scheme. Dale responded that this process is essentially a "gut check" to make sure the zoning scheme is still valid and applicable or not. Les Greear asked about the tax implications of changing the zoning to light industrial? He would like his property to remain outside the Urban Growth Boundary and is concerned that if the taxes increase a result of changing the zoning that he may lose his property because he won't be able to afford the tax increase.

Dale Miller outlined the Cowlitz Tribe's land on the map and explained the current status of the property and casino. Ron Ostrander asked if it was relevant to have a planning discussion without knowing the outcome of the Cowlitz fee land to trust land decision and if planning done will be a moot point until the outcome is known. Dale stated that the City is still responsible for planning the area regardless of whether the Cowlitz casino is built or not. Dale stated that when the final decision is made, if changes to the sub-area plan need to be made, then they can be made, but planning can begin now. There are other areas of the Junction affected by development and other parts of the City that are affected by development at the Junction, so planning needs to occur to adequately prepare for the type and intensity of use in the area.

Susan Gilbert asked if the industrial section could be right at the Junction rather than routing traffic through mixed use and other types of development in order to get to the industrial area so that heavy industrial traffic does not come that far into La Center. Dale responded that she had a good suggestion to note and that a small group meeting can be arranged with the properties in the northeast quadrant to discuss issues in that area further.

Another participant asked if the City of La Center will annex the property at the Junction or wait until the outcome of the Cowlitz casino is known. Dale stated that the City responds to property owner needs when it comes to annexation. He said that there are two criteria for annexation: 1. the property must be within the urban growth area, 2. the parcels must touch the current city limits.

Dale Miller remarked that the planning process looks out at the next 20 years as a minimum but that development could occur faster than 20 years from now. The City needs to be able to make sure that it can provide the services needed in the area.

Susan Gilbert asked Jeff Sarvis to discuss the sewer expansion plans and when sewer is anticipated to be needed at the Junction. Jeff stated that there is currently an \$11M project to expand capacity to the wastewater treatment plant to deal with current and future phases of development. The preliminary design has a line to the Junction however that part is estimated at \$7M and is not yet funded. The other part will be under construction in June and is designed so that if and when a line is built to the Junction, the plant has capacity to treat that wastewater as well. Another participant asked if the City will lay 24" pipe and then come back to rip up the roads and put in 36" pipe or if they will start with 36" pipe. Dale Miller stated that is why a plan is necessary

to understand the short and long term needs to know with which size pipe to start the project. When asked about the price per foot of \$7M line to the Junction (1.5 miles) which includes the main line and two pump stations, the price worked out to be approximately \$933 per foot. Bill Birdwell stated that sewer issues are being looked at by all communities within the County and that several communities are phasing in projects.

Susan Gilbert also asked about creating another transportation/road entrance to the City of La Center. Dale Miller stated that Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB) did a fatal flaw analysis of whether or not creating a publicly funded collector up 24th/26th across the East Fork of the Lewis River and linking near Larson Road will work. He also stated that the La Center, Woodland, and Daybreak Bridges are all expected to exceed their design capacity within the next 20 years so a second bridge will be needed to deal with future transportation capacity issues. Preliminary analysis shows that there is at least one alignment that would work.

Dale Miller explained the evaluation criteria document and stated that most of the mandatory requirements are needed to be in compliance with federal, state, and other local laws and regulations. He stated input from the public is needed on some of the common sense criteria to get a sense of the weight to apply to each criteria.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Dena Horton discussed the preliminary results from the stakeholder interviews. She explained that the purpose of stakeholder interviews was:

- To talk to people directly impacted by the sub-area planning first and take community input into consideration before developing plans and alternatives
- For the local community to have the opportunity to identify local issues and concerns to address early in the process
- To have a stakeholder interview list that represents a very broad range of community stakeholders so it is representative of the community, but also targets those most likely affected by the project too, such as property owners and business owners

Dena stated that the interview list included representatives from various groups and organizations including:

- Property owners in the sub-area
- Neighborhood Association leaders
- Business owners in the sub-area
- Downtown businesses (New Phoenix & Last Frontier)
- Developers
- Cowlitz Tribe
- Environmental groups
- City of La Center & La Center Planning Commission

- Clark County & several departments including Economic Development, Community Development, Planning, Traffic Engineering, Water & Stormwater
- Columbia River Economic Development Council
- C-Tran
- Washington State Department of Transportation
- Clark Public Utilities
- Northwest Natural Gas

Dena stated that currently, 24 of 25 interviews have been conducted and she anticipated completing the remaining interview soon. The stakeholder interview report will be available for review prior to the next open house on June 23rd. It will also be posted on the City's website as well.

Dena stated that the stakeholders were asked for information similar to what the participants will be asked in the small group discussion session at this meeting. The stakeholders were asked about their:

- Short and long term plans for their properties or businesses
- The kinds of development they'd like to see in the short and long term
- The kind of development opportunities they see possible at the junction
- Potential constraints or challenges to address
- Environmental issues
- Issues to address related to downtown La Center
- And ideas about preserving the character/appeal of La Center as planning and growth occur

The preliminary results reported by Dena at the meeting were:

- People care very much about the quality of life and community of La Center and genuinely want to be and stay involved in this project as it moves forward.
- Not all, but most people planned to still be living in or working in La Center for the next 5 – 20 years.
- Everyone has heard of potential plans for a Cowlitz Casino to be developed at the junction but none were aware of any other current development plans in the sub-area.
- There is a very broad spectrum of answers on the potential for types of development at the junction - Some people favor little to no development at the junction and others see some possibilities for a variety of job and industry types, and others envision much larger development options.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:

The attendees were placed into three small groups:

- Group 1: Facilitator Karen Ciocia and Group Reporter Susan Gilbert
- Group 2: Facilitator Christy Osborn and Group Reporter Bill Birdwell
- Group 3: Facilitator Dena Horton and Group Reporter Al Luiz

The small groups discussed and answered the following questions:

Question 1: What does La Center currently have to offer that can be used to leverage economic development and economic diversity?

Group 1: There was concern for preserving the town, a lack of tax-based industry, and the potential outcome of the federal decision regarding the Cowlitz casino.

- Unused entry level workforce
- Strong nature-based draw
- Convenient access to I-5

Group 2:

- High quality of life
- I-5 access
- City services (police/fire response times)
- Small town feel
- Lewis River – recreation, views, public trails
- Available land to develop
- History

Group 3:

- Good high quality of life
- Good schools
- Good workforce
- Access to I-5
- Nice homes
- Adequate law enforcement

Question 2: What does La Center need in terms of infrastructure, utilities, and quality of life for its future?

Group 1:

- New road access
- Educate the public to understand infrastructure needs and services
- Grocery store, hardware store, pharmacy, etc.
- More recreational amenities
- More markings and public restrooms for hiking trails, etc.

Group 2:

- Extend current infrastructure to junction – sewer, roads, phone, cable, etc.
- Planning in place – land use and facility
- Maintain park standards – gear park facilities to youth as well as overall community
- Recreation
- Maintain small town or community feel
- Commercial development – hotel, grocery store, entertainment facilities

Group 3:

- Affordable housing
- Land for development
- Encourage development and growth
- Diverse businesses
- Mix at junction for multiple tax sources
- More retail and commercial

Question 3: What kind(s) of development, jobs, and industries should La Center pursue if the Cowlitz Casino is built? What kind(s) of development, jobs, and industries should La Center pursue if the Cowlitz Casino is not built?

Group 1:

If casino is built

- Gas station
- Motel
- Strip malls

If casino is not built

- Business parks
- High tech
- Auto repair
- Medical offices

Group 2:

If casino is built

- Technical school
- Grocery store
- Family wage jobs
- Green industry
- Farmers market - destination

If casino is not built

- Technical school
- Grocery store
- Family wage jobs
- Green industry
- Farmers market - destination

Group 3:

If casino is built

- Affordable Housing
- Food & beverages
- Lodging
- Repair
- Service stations
- Mixed use facility i.e. housing and businesses
- RV sales and parking, car sales
- Truck stop

If casino is not built

- Same as above
- Business park
- Contractors
- Light manufacturing
- Hardware store

Question 4: What kinds of jobs and industries do you want to see at the La Center Junction?

Group 1:

Group 2:

- Warehousing
- Light industrial campus
- Manufacturing

Group 3:

- Industrial
- Commercial

Small group discussion observations:

- All three groups cited access to I-5 as an asset and two of the three groups cited the natural environment and high quality of life as assets too.
- Two of the three groups expressed concern for maintaining the small town feel and a need for more recreational facilities for La Center's future.
- Two of the three groups also cited a desire for a grocery store and hardware store.
- Two of the three groups stated that the same kinds of development could occur regardless of whether or not the Cowlitz Casino is built.

After reporting the results of the small group discussion, the participants reassembled as a large group to answer the final question.

Question 5: What do you want for La Center's future?

- Don't make Ridgefield's mistake and have warehouses like Dollar Tree.
- What brought people to La Center was a sense of community and atmosphere, so keep that and expand recreation and other facilities like a summer teen center, senior center, etc.
- Consider standards for downtown buildings to have rivertown facades, lighting, planters, etc. and promote downtown as a destination.
- Examine the parking and public restroom facilities needs
- Find a way to leverage downtown as an attraction
- There are concerns about the affects and impacts to downtown
- There is a need to educate the public in both La Center and Ridgefield about La Center's needs

Comments arose about the impact of development of the Junction on downtown. Dale Miller stated that downtown is more land intensive and pedestrian oriented while the junction area is more land extensive and automobile oriented. Jeff Sarvis pointed out that both the downtown area and the junction area will need pedestrian, bicycle, and trail facilities and that perhaps design standards are needed to provide the connectivity to between the two areas to create a certain look and there needs to be measures to ensure downtown is not clogged with traffic. Al Luiz agreed that standards are needed from I-5 to the city to have facades and architecture to tie the junction to downtown so that it remains one city and to make the streets wide enough to accommodate traffic, pedestrians, bicycles, etc. Bill Birdwell stated that it is important to maintain the identity of La Center and to capitalize on the downtown area. It was also mentioned that the city should promote the natural features and have signage to direct visitors to trails, parks, and other public facilities. Lester Greear requested that it be noted that he has concerns about the tax and land use implications from changing the zoning for his property.

FOLLOW UP:

- Dale Miller to find out the tax implications of changing the zoning and inform Lester Greear.
- Dale Miller and Dena Horton will follow up to schedule a small group meeting for the property owners/residents of the NE quadrant.

Appendix A – Sign-in Forms

Appendix B – Open House Exhibits

Appendix C – Open House Handouts