

Agenda
Planning Commission
Committee of the Whole
CITY AND BOROUGH OF JUNEAU
Ben Haight, Chairman
November 13, 2018

I. ROLL CALL

Ben Haight, Chairman, called the Committee of the Whole Meeting of the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) Planning Commission (PC), held in the Assembly Chambers of the Municipal Building, to order at 6:06 p.m.

Commissioners present: Ben Haight, Chairman; Paul Voelckers, Vice Chairman; Dan Miller, Dan Hickok, Carl Greene, Michael LeVine

Commissioners absent: Andrew Campbell, Nathaniel Dye, Percy Frisby

Staff present: Jill Maclean, CDD Director; Tim Felstead, Planner I; Laura Boyce, Senior Planner

Assembly members: None

II. REGULAR AGENDA

Mr. Felstead addressed the committee, mentioning that at the previous Planning Commission meeting he provided materials regarding the upcoming Capital Improvement Program (CIP). In the materials was a memorandum in response to the Planning Commission's letter from last year regarding last year's CIP projects that was meant to describe how things have progressed on priorities of the Planning Commission. He also provided some background materials from discussions between the Planning Commission and the previous Director of CBJ Engineering and Public Works. Mr. Felstead introduced Mike Vigue, current Director of CBJ Engineering and Public Works, who was in attendance to answer any questions regarding the forthcoming CIP. Mr. Felstead also provided a draft letter that was put together by four of the commissioners that formed a small subcommittee to look at what the priorities might be for the forthcoming year for the Planning Commission. Mr. Felstead asked if the Committee would like to ask their questions now.

Commission Comments and Questions

Mr. LeVine welcomed Mr. Vigue and stated that finding meaningful ways to participate in the CIP process has been ongoing and evolving for the Planning Commission for quite some time.

Mr. LeVine asked about the value of the Planning Commission participating and starting early with the CIP and how what is submitted might get factored into the decisions made and what ideas Mr. Vigue has about that.

Mr. Vigue discussed how the process that has been followed for the last few years is new to him as well and how he is still learning how everything works. He has become more engaged in this process in the past month and that started with the email that was sent out to all of the departments, asking them to compile their prioritized list of projects and send them in to the Engineering and Public Works department to begin compiling the new program. The development of the CBJ CIP is, from what he has seen so far, pretty similar to what he has seen 4 or 5 different State DOT's, both from him working at the DOT or being an overseer with the Federal Highway Administration. Initially, what is going on seems appropriate. Mr. Vigue stated he doesn't have any preconceived ideas and is trying to look at the Planning Commission's position from a fresh perspective. He believes that whenever you want to be involved, through the CDD, that's a smart thing to do. From the perspective of our projects that are listed and approved adopted plans included in the CIP, that is a valuable exercise for us all to go through.

Mr. Voelckers stated that over the last 3 or 4 years the Planning Commission has tried to work together with CDD and brainstorm ways to be more useful to the process and have developed more of this front-loaded, more generalized sort of goals with a few reasonably specific things to work toward. One of the observations as a Commission, he believes they've noticed, is that the City, for better or worse, tends to be structured by department, which means some of those information streams can be a little siloed. There was a little concern that there wasn't necessarily enough voice that was more generalized or holistic that saw what was missing; there are some gaps. It also seemed appropriate that CDD and the Planning Commission worked together to be able to offer some reinforcement of things at a community-wide level that seemed to need more emphasis.

Mr. Vigue commented that Mr. Voelckers comments are spot on and the dynamic of the departments all working together, trying to pull this program together without having any gaps is not an easy task. Other organizations he has worked with have had the same dilemma. He believes that improved communication and more coordination are always beneficial. If you can keep that in the forefront of the process, he believes it will get better. While he was looking through the process, he noticed that the Planning Commission seemed to be involved at the end, before it went to the Finance Committee. He looked into how things have been done in the past and how we should move forward. The first step Mr. Vigue and his team do after pulling the draft plan together, after getting all the input from all the different departments, is

put it in front of the Public Works and Facilities Committee as an informational item. He believes what would be beneficial is, after it goes to the Public Works and Facilities Committee, the draft would come back to the Planning Commission for review, then go back to the Public Works and Facilities Committee as a final action item. That would give the Planning Commission an opportunity to see the draft, comment on the draft, and give the public an opportunity to comment on the draft, because it would be taken up at a full Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Vigue believes this would be a more meaningful timeframe for the Commissioners to be able to comment on what's there, identify gaps that you see, work with CDD to make sure that the specific projects that are in approved adopted plans are included in the CIP, then have it move through the rest of process.

Mr. Voelckers said he loved that progression sequence suggestion, especially the opportunity for a formal public comment.

Mr. Vigue commented about how it can be difficult to get the public to engage on a regular basis. When he looks through the process, he sees that there is a Public Works and Facilities Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Assembly meetings are open to public comment. He is not aware how much public comment has happened in the past, but he would guess that there is probably a group in Juneau that regularly identify with the Planning Commission, because of the work that they do, so there is a chance they could get a better turn out for public comment, if it was part of a Regular Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. LeVine wanted to flag that one of the frustrations felt in the past is that providing input and not knowing what happens to it or how it was, or was not, accepted. He believes that a list was sent in with the same 10 things on it for 7 years in a row, something would go up or down in priority, but they are trying to stop that process by participating earlier. He believes it would be valuable for the Committee to know how what the Planning Commission has identified as priorities for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, and other plans, have either been considered, accepted, rejected, how they are reflected in the final plan. By drafting this letter, they tried to distill down the discreet projects and provide the rationales for them as they are tied to the Comprehensive Plan and other plans. That is the Planning Commissions way of asking you to tell us how the final version is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. That would be useful to the Planning Commission as well. Having this opportunity to participate earlier in the process, when it comes back to them later, an explanation of how their comments were considered and why they were, or were not, accepted would be really helpful.

Mr. Vigue stated that is reasonable. One of the big challenges he's seen is there are too many needs, and not nearly enough resources. Whether you're talking about the local level, the state level, national level, everyone is dealing with that. You can look at the approved CIP that is out there now and there is an awful lot of work out there. You always hope that you can get more money, but it doesn't always come to be. You can look through the list and think about areas where you might be able to find other money, but that other money tends to come with strings attached to it. One of the examples is the State DOT just recently put out their solicitation for project proposals for their transportation alternatives program. There are several projects that would nicely align with that funding source, like the Lemon Creek Pedestrian Bike Trail. Whether we're successful with the grant application is something we will find out, but something to remember is that the federal money comes with strings and timelines that are more difficult to meet. Where our expectations are, we're doing projects with local money, you still have to meet certain federal requirements, but you don't have to follow all of the rules that the Federal Aid Program puts in place. It can be a double-edged sword. There are opportunities out there, but those opportunities sometimes come with a cost. That is part of what we have to balance when we're looking at how much money we have, what projects we can do, and what's the best way to pursue those projects. Sometimes extra money looks really good, until you look at the fine print and realize that the project you might have been able to deliver in a year or two is now going to take three, or four, or five years to deliver, because of all the extra work you will have to do.

Mr. Miller referenced the letter that was written and feels that it looks really good. At a previous Title 49 meeting, there was an item he thought they might like to add to the list on the letter. That item is energy efficient home construction. He mentioned that the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation actually gives more points for an oil boiler in an energy rating than they do for a heat pump in Juneau. The reasoning is that they don't trust our electric grid. He has been in meetings with officials from AHFC and there is concern due to avalanches in the past, so they don't count our electric systems as good enough system to give points to. Mr. LeVine suggested writing a letter. He is aware that energy raters from Juneau have argued with officials at AHFC and haven't had any luck. This is something that they have been trying to change for 4 or 5 years and just hits a road block. Maybe it takes more energy, but he doesn't believe it would take much as a CIP line item for a little bit of funding, or maybe this is something that needs to be taken up with CDD. He agrees with Mr. LeVine's comment that writing a letter would help to get things changed. Mr. Miller believes that heat pumps are truly more efficient than an oil boiler. Yes, there is potential for an avalanche to take out Juneau's grid system for some time, but the chances of avalanches are low enough that we can trust in our system. Is this something we can add onto our list?

Mr. Voelckers directed everyone's attention to the 3rd page of letter, 3rd bullet from the top, under Housing, it talks about energy efficiency programs and mentions heat pumps. Mr. Voelckers agrees with Mr. Miller. It may be that they just need to enhance the information that is already there. He attended a workshop on heat pumps that was at the UAS Tech building that previous weekend and there was quite a large turn-out. There was discussion on the Assembly looking at a way to under write heat pump programs. A lot of people were serious about taking up this topic, so adding some strength and possibly adding something about working with AHFC to this letter could be the way to move this forward.

Mr. Miller believes this would be great.

Mr. LeVine brought attention to the first sentence of the bullet Mr. Voelckers referenced and showed where in that sentence Mr. Miller could add strengthening language to enhance the item. He is in support of Mr. Miller's suggestion.

Mr. Miller believes Juneau has a solid electric grid, but feels it is important to get AHFC to recognize this and adjust their perspective on the sustainability of our electric grid, including reaching out to AHFC to gain perspective on their understanding of Juneau's system.

Mr. Haight, having worked in the world of energy and energy grids, he is interested to know more about AHFC's resistance to this, knowing that the RSA requires that AEL&P maintain firm energy, regardless, so they have to maintain one hundred percent supply of energy for all of the loads in Juneau, regardless of whether the transmission line goes down or not. So that is why we have all the additional back-up generators in Juneau. It's kind of an interesting issue that they pose, knowing that it's impossible to be without electricity.

Mr. Miller stated that the answer given to him was as soon as you go on to diesel generators, it's no longer the sustainable and efficient system that they would like to have reflected in their energy rating. Mr. Miller has spoken with Charlie Ford, an energy rater and building official for CDD. Mr. Miller believes Mr. Ford would know and has spoken with Mr. Ford specifically about this. It looks to be that it is more than reluctance with the HFC, they just won't do it. This discussion has been brought up with them for the past 5 or 10 years that Mr. Miller knows of. Mr. Miller is unsure how to get HFC on board, but believes that they would need to recognize our electric grid is sustainable and inexpensive.

Mr. Voelckers suspects that some language could be crafted and that the Manager's Office would not be reluctant to weigh in directly on this, because Mr. Watt has been very proactive in working with the Sustainability Commission's things and is not afraid to bring these sorts of issues up with state agencies. Mr. Voelckers believes having a letter come from the Manager's Office would strengthen this item.

Mr. LeVine brought up two other issues related to the letter, based on input received since it was drafted. The first is from the Juneau Commission on Sustainability; Steve Behnke was at a meeting and provided useful input on energy use and the heat pump topic. Mr. Behnke subsequently sent a note suggestion that the Planning Commission add a bullet about developing a program to make land available for community gardens and agriculture, so land that is not immediately available for development, making it available for gardening and agriculture. Mr. LeVine does not feel very strongly about this, but wanted to flag that the topic was raised and he would like to put it out for conversation.

Mr. Voelckers found this idea kind of appealing, because it doesn't have a lot of cost impact, but he is worried about feature creep in the letter. The intent was to keep it to 4 or 5 easy-to-identify, strong central pieces and now it's up to 3 pages and starting to get easier to dismiss in some respects. He doesn't believe it rises to a level of urgency.

Mr. LeVine believed it was okay to pass on this topic, as there wasn't much enthusiasm behind the item. Mr. LeVine moved on to the second topic of the ongoing conversation regarding the status on the block Capital Avenue between 9th Street and Willoughby. This is the one block that runs behind the Governor's Mansion. There are lots of potholes, it's dark, and it's a major commuter lane for walkers, bikers, and drivers. The downtown neighborhood associations and lots of families are asking what can be done to get this area fixed. Mr. LeVine suggested that they comment to the Planning Commission and to the Assembly on the CIP process, because that is the right time. The item is on the CIP list in out years, possibly next year, or the year after. Comments have been received from two different downtown residents highlighting that area, along with the need to fix the sidewalks past the Governor's Mansion. There is another block in that area as well that also needs to be done. In response to these comments, Mr. LeVine suggests that these items go with the bullet regarding the downtown circulator. He would like to see the Planning Commission on the community vitality side of this topic. Implement the downtown plan, including a circulator and other immediate road resurfacing needs. Mr. LeVine does not want to see this item fall off the CIP list and believes this would definitely improve the conditions about downtown and is willing to craft a short statement regarding this, if it would help.

Mr. Vigue stated that the Capital Avenue project is in 2020. It is being discussed and Mr. Vigue believes that the people who reached out to Mr. LeVine are probably the same people that came in to talk to him. It is a complicated road due to right-of-way ownership. Part of the road is on AEL&P land, part of it is on City property. One of things being discussed is when DOT starts doing their 10th domain project from the bridge around on Egan Drive, how much traffic detouring is going to go on through that area of town. If there is a project going on, on Capital Avenue and it becomes part of the detour, it could complicate congestion. There are discussions happening regarding all of this and it is on the radar, but no conclusion has been made yet.

Mr. Voelckers brought attention to the next to last bullet in the letter: Sustainability. That has worked in an issue that Andrew Campbell had raised, but Mr. Voelckers felt that there were two different issues. He believes they had an established energy base line, but that Mr. Campbell's thrust was that we had aging, buried infrastructure and we need to have a timeline of when things would need to be replaced and be more systematic.

Mr. LeVine tried to capture Mr. Campbell's points, but is unsure if he adequately captured what Mr. Campbell had been trying to portray. Due to Mr. Campbell being absent from the meeting, he would like to discuss this with Mr. Campbell to make sure he correctly portrayed what Mr. Campbell wanted captured.

Mr. Vigue stated that he has discussed this topic with Mr. Campbell. Mr. Campbell is also a member of the Utility Advisory Board. At the last Utility Advisory Board meeting, Mr. Vigue brought this topic up as an item of need for the utilitist to have a good asset inventory of what is in the ground, so we can develop a 10 year CIP that would also help develop a rate model, because you can't develop a rate model unless you know what your needs are going to be in order to keep the assets in a state of good repair. We have talked about this at the UAB and how to go about it. It has also been brought up with the City Manager a little and it is something that they will be working on going forward with, as far as trying to get that inventory of what is in ground, when was it put in the ground, what the material is, what the pipes are made out of. Mr. Vigue is not sure how they will get there. Going back through all of the as-builts will be a fairly labor intensive process. Ideally, they would be able to go through all the as-builts, pull that information out, and put it into a GIS database. Then they would have layers of GIS data they could use. That conversation is going to continue with the UAB, it is an item of interest for several members of that board and will be something that will be worked on over the next year.

Mr. Voelckers stated that it sounded like there are two slightly different issues here. There is operating energy, pumps, and other similar items, but it sounds like Mr. Vigue is talking about the physical inventory of how long pipes will last in the ground.

Mr. Vigue stated that both of those things are being discussed. When they are working to put the CIP together, they try to see where they need to do sewer and water improvements and tie that in with a road project, so they can gain efficiency. That is the way things have been working in the past. Knowing what's in the ground, when they're going to have to replace a sewer line, or water line, and you have to tear up a road, it makes sense to tie that in with the road project so you can both things done at the same time.

Mr. LeVine asked if Mr. Vigue felt that the bullet captured that understanding or if more wordsmithing was necessary. That understanding is what he tried to capture in the bullet, but is willing to rework it, if it needs more clarification.

Mr. Voelckers suggested they try a little wordsmithing and send it to Mr. Felstead for more review, in order to work everything into the item. Mr. Voelckers feels that there's a pretty good understanding of what the intent is, but there is room for improvement in the language.

Mr. Felstead asked how the Commission would like to try to take action on this letter. Does the Commission want to formerly adopt the proposed letter at the subsequent regular meeting? Or does the Commission feel this subcommittee has enough authority to complete the letter at this meeting?

Mr. Haight believes there is enough authority to complete the letter within the committee, but if they take it to a Regular Planning Commission meeting, he believes they will have to take it to the next meeting and have proper advertisement for the public.

Mr. LeVine said they had discussed this previously. He asked Mr. Vigue if bringing the letter to him on November 27th would hinder Mr. Vigue's process.

Mr. Vigue stated it would not hinder his process.

Mr. LeVine recommended that they wordsmith this item and put it on the regular agenda on the 27th, so there is more opportunity for public input.

Mr. Haight stated the Planning Commission can work on this and bring it to the Regular Planning Commission meeting on November 27th.

Mr. Hickok asked if the community input is more involved in the budgeting process rather than this part of the process. It seems like the Assembly is asking for input from the Planning Commission, not necessarily input from the public.

Mr. LeVine stated this was a very good point. There was some discussion regarding this previously, so far as there's never really been any opportunity for meaningful public input into this process. He likes the suggestion of having the Planning Commission's input between the Public Works. There will be actual opportunity for the public to provide input on the substance of the CIP. He sees that we're asking the public to provide input on the Planning Commission's input for someone else's process right now, but he sees that it is reflective of the fact that the Commission is slowly playing catch up to allowing the public to have some input and there is going to be a weird process right now and hopefully they're getting better every time they do this.

Mr. Hickok asked if it is the job of the Planning Commission to get the public input, or is it the Assembly's job.

Mr. Haight stated that when there is a Planning Commission meeting, it is the Commission's job.

Mr. LeVine stated that his view, in part, is that by the time it gets to the Assembly, it is too late. If the Commission can facilitate public input now in the process, they can help before it gets to the Assembly. He believes the Commission has a role to play in encouraging public input while it is meaningful.

Mr. Voelckers believes this raises a good point. One might be able to say that the public input would be on the same things that the Planning Commission is trying to look at, like what is being missed. If it's on a specific construction item on the list, for example, that should be at the Assembly forum, not through the Planning Commission.

Mr. Vigue commented on one of the bullets under "Sustainability" regarding the development of a community-wide electric vehicle plan that supports the adoption of electric vehicles, stating that the portion of the item requiring that all CBJ construction and street projects plan for and incorporate electric vehicle charging infrastructure is not practical. He used examples

of how his department does a lot of projects that are just pavement preservation. They go out, mill the pavement, repave the road, and don't do any other work with that. That would be considered a CBJ construction project on a street. There would be no real advantage to high jacking a project like that in order to incorporate electric vehicle charging or infrastructure along those lines. Mr. Vigue believes the word "all" is a bit of an overreach and would like to see that brought back. He believes the concept is a good idea, but it wouldn't be applicable to all projects.

Mr. Haight asked Mr. Vigue if he was planning to bring this back to the Planning Commission after they proceed over the next couple months.

Mr. Vigue stated he thought it was a wise thing to do and would do that.

Mr. Voelckers asked if there was a sense of a timeline for that yet.

Mr. Vigue stated that it would probably be in February when he would return with everything. The way the schedule looks from past years, is the Public Works and Facilities Committee at the end of January would be where he would bring the draft to them as an informational item. Then the Planning Commission in February is where he would bring the draft before the Planning Commission. In March, the Public Works and Facilities Committee meeting would be the action item on that agenda. From there it would go to Finance by April 5th. This is a rough schedule of how things would play out.

Mr. Haight said as there were no other discussions brought up they would do some wordsmithing and have the draft ready for the next meeting.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:46pm.