

MINUTES

Citizen Advisory Committee
of the
Central Lane Metropolitan Planning Organization
Bascom Room, Eugene Public Library – 100 West 10th Avenue
Eugene, Oregon

March 21, 2013
5:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Edward Winter, chair; Diana Alldredge, Richard Beers, Linda Barrera, Wendy Butler-Boyesen, Cody Evers, Gary Gillespie, William McCoy, Bill Morganti, Eleanor Mulder, Kim Ridley, Leslie Fountain Williams, James Yarnall, members; Kathi Wiederhold, Paul Thompson, Bryon Vanderpool, Milo Mecham, Lane Council of Governments.

ABSENT: Bryant Dodson, member.

Welcome, Introductions and Agenda Review

Mr. Winter called the meeting of the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) to order. He announced that Jennifer Smith had resigned. He welcomed new committee members and those present introduced themselves and briefly discussed their backgrounds and interest in being a member of the CAC.

Mr. Vanderpool announced that he was retiring at the end of March and introduced Milo Mecham, who would be taking his position as Government Services Director at Lane Council of Governments (LCOG).

Comments from the Audience

There were no comments.

Approve December 20, 2012

Mr. Gillespie, seconded by Mr. Morganti, moved to approve the minutes of December 20, 2012. The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Chair

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Winter said, given the uncertainty of the CAC's future, he would be willing to continue serving as chair.

Ms. Butler-Boyesen, seconded by Mr. Evers, moved to accept Mr. Winter as interim sole chair of the Citizen Advisory Committee. The motion passed unanimously.

Review Direction for Proposed New MPO Public Participation Program

Mr. Thompson reviewed the Metropolitan Policy Committee's review last fall of the MPO public participation program and the CAC's role. He said the review was prompted by concerns about costs associated with the public participation program and support of the CAC's activities. He reminded the committee of the discussion at its December 2012 meeting with MPC members and while the MPC appreciated the committee's input, cost remained an issue. He said when the CAC was formed almost 10 years ago that was the standard for obtaining public input, but the emergence of social media and new technology had caused the MPC to consider more cost efficient ways to disseminate information and gather input from the public.

Mr. Thompson said as a consequence of that review the MPC had directed that the CAC would meet no more than six times during calendar year 2013 and its sole charge would be to provide feedback on a staff-driven proposal for a new public participation program. He said although the MPC had not explicitly stated the CAC's role would conclude in 2013, that was implicit in its direction and the decision to significantly reduce the cost of public participation activities. He said the new Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) reduced the budget for public participation by two-thirds, primarily by sunseting the CAC. He reiterated that the CAC's current assignment was to advise the MPC on what a new, cost efficient and streamlined public participation program should be.

Mr. Beers asked if public participation would now be conducted electronically. Mr. Thompson replied that electronic communications would occupy a much larger role, although would not be exclusively used, in public participation activities.

In response to a question from Mr. Evers, Mr. Thompson reviewed the federal requirements for public participation:

- Make information available and accessible
- Provide an opportunity to comment
- Visualization (interactive projects map, etc.)
- Consideration of public input

Mr. Winter added that federal performance standards for public participation also included early and continuous involvement and that should also be considered by the CAC. Mr. Thompson pointed out that public participation actually began at the local level during jurisdictions' project planning activities and those jurisdictions were subject to the same federal requirements as the MPO.

Ms. Mulder apologized to new members who may have had a different understanding of the CAC's role when they applied for membership.

Mr. Gillespie asked how the Central Lane MPO's public participation activities compared to those of other MPOs. Mr. Thompson responded that the Central Lane MPO's program was very effective in terms of public outreach and the amount of feedback obtained and was also more costly and complex. He said although the MPO had received praise for its program, the U.S. Department of Transportation was supportive of the proposed change and efforts to reduce costs.

Mr. Ridley commented that if the CAC was eliminated then MPO would be relying only on paid employees in the future instead of volunteers. Mr. Thompson replied that paid staff currently provided input, along

with the CAC. The citizen input provided by the CAC would continue under the new program, but through other avenues.

Mr. McCoy observed that if the CAC was disbanded, there were many other public meetings and opportunities for citizens to provided input. He felt that sometimes there was too much effort spent on trying to please everyone. Even without a CAC, many avenues would still remain for public participation and people would need to adapt to the new program.

Mr. Yarnall said the goal was to obtain a preponderance of opinion and take the temperature of the public on transportation issues. He felt the staff presentation was too global and the CAC's mission lacked specificity. He needed to understand what the MPC's primary interest was in order to focus the committee's efforts, given the variety of avenues for disseminating information, gathering input and developing a record of that input.

Mr. Gillespie commented that LCOG had undergone a number of budget reductions recently and was concerned about the point at which the community no longer felt it was being heard, even though projects still moved forward. He felt that a group like the CAC was more likely to provide unbiased feedback to the MPO, including occasionally saying "no."

Mr. Winter said many members who had been on the CAC for some time understood the steep learning curve involved in transportation planning and was concerned with how to get the public meaningfully involved during the early phases of planning.

Mr. Vanderpool thanked CAC members for their service and the high quality of the committee's feedback over the years.

The committee took a short break.

Review Direction for Proposed New MPO Public Participation Program (continued)

Mr. Thompson reviewed the agenda materials related to the proposed new public participation program and compared summary tables of public outreach/involvement activities under the current and proposed programs. He said adoption of the current program was prompted by the MPC's desire to increase public input; the proposed program would continue to fulfill that goal, but in a more streamlined manner. He said many of the tools and strategies for public outreach would become optional where appropriate under the new program, rather than being required for each MPO product. He noted that Attachment 1 to the March 14, 2013, memorandum from Ms. Wiederhold to the CAC proposed the basic public outreach tools the MPO would use to meet federal requirements, listed products that might require tools beyond the basics and provided a list of tools and strategies that could be used when appropriate and desirable for those products.

Mr. Thompson said staff had discussed how to meet Title VI requirements through the public participation program, including reaching out to and engaging the transportation disadvantaged communities, which were often more affected by transportation decisions. He reviewed the suggestions for establishing an ongoing relationship with those communities through various local groups and organizations in order to assure their voices were heard.

In response to a comment from Mr. Yarnall, Mr. Thompson said that outreach efforts would involve staff from local jurisdictions with expertise in particular areas, such as bicycle paths and trails, where those types of projects were concerned.

Ms. Wiederhold reviewed some of the CAC's activities since its inception, including a desire to establish relationships throughout the region and begin ongoing conversations that would serve to engage the public in transportation issues, particularly when an update of the Regional Transportation Plan was undertaken. She said open houses had once been a staple of public outreach, with varying degrees of success, but now people were seeking information online. She said while the use of technology was becoming more important for the dissemination of information, she did not feel it should be the sole mechanism and would continue to advocate for parallel strategies.

Mr. Thompson agreed that open houses would remain a useful tool for high profile and significant local and regional projects. He noted that there were a number of intensive transportation planning efforts being conducted by local jurisdictions with extensive public involvement; once those were completed there would likely be a lull.

Ms. Barrera suggested adding the University of Oregon student group Live/Move to the list of outreach groups in Attachment 1. She found attending transportation planning open houses useful because it provided greater connection to a project. Mr. Thompson agreed there was value in promoting attendance at those meetings because of the opportunity to provide input directly to policy makers.

Ms. Mulder said the Lane Area Commission on Transportation (ACT) was a good source of information for the region beyond the MPO boundaries.

Mr. McCoy said he was a member of the ACT, but there had been little public input at its meetings, which were always publicized.

Mr. Ridley said his understanding of the CAC's role was to provide neutral public input and oversee planning activities. He felt that only meeting minimum requirements usually resulted in minimal results. With respect to providing information online, he said people were constantly bombarded electronically with information and attending a meeting allowed for an exchange of information with other interested parties. He cautioned out that online activities were anonymous and there were no checks and balances, whereas face-to-face communications allowed others to determine how direct and committed those providing input were. Online comments were a powerful tool, but could promote inaccurate information and skew results.

Mr. Thompson acknowledged that staff was aware of the potential for abuse of online feedback opportunities, but so far there had not been any problems and use of that tool had greatly increased public input.

Ms. Butler-Boyesen posed several questions: Would CAC members remain on the MPO's email distribution list? How would the MPO continue to recruit interested parties to expand its list? How would opportunities for input on specific proposed actions be publicized? She strongly encouraged ongoing and increased use of maps to help the public visualize projects and make them more relevant. She also encouraged meetings to be held at times that would make them more accessible to the public, specifically during evening hours. Mr. Thompson said CAC members would remain on the email distribution list. He agreed that it would be helpful to hold meetings in the evening and that suggestion had been shared with various groups.

Mr. Yarnall said the list of basic tools was limited and many MPO products would require a more extensive public participation effort. He said the format of information was critical in order to clarify the topic for the public and assure informed feedback. Mr. Thompson agreed and said the basic tools would always be required, but the proposed program included a list of additional tools to be employed whenever more

extensive outreach efforts were desirable. He reiterated that while the basic tools were designed to meet minimum federal requirements, it was the intent to use whatever additional tools were appropriate for a specific product, as well as establishing relationships throughout the region with groups representing interested communities.

Mr. Yarnall said if the CAC was prioritizing or ranking the various tools and strategies he would give less weight to online feedback unless there was a way to assure its validity. He said there were other, probably more expensive, tools for gathering input. Mr. Thompson said the MPC was not asking the CAC to prioritize or rate various tools and methods; it wanted feedback on the staff's proposed PPP and tools beyond the basic ones that could and should be used to conduct outreach to the public and gather feedback.

Ms. Wiederhold asked if there were any comments on the Overall Goal of the proposed new public participation program.

Mr. Evers suggested clarifying how information gathered through broader public participation would be used by the MPO. Mr. Thompson said the current Public Participation Plan included specific guidance on how public input would be processed and that would not change. He said that topic would likely be covered in greater depth at a future CAC meeting.

Mr. Winter said the importance of early and continuous public involvement in transportation planning should be stressed.

Ms. Williams said the terms "stakeholder" and "interest" groups should be better defined. She asked how the MPO intended to reach out to individual citizens, beyond outreach to groups with particular interests.

Mr. Ridley agreed with Ms. Williams that the public participation program should also address outreach to individuals and not just groups as feedback from groups often represented a specific interest or agenda.

Ms. Butler-Boyesen said that postcards to households was one way to notify individual residents.

Ms. Wiederhold asked if there were comments regarding the proposed basic tools.

Mr. Yarnall said he interpreted the action requested of the CAC in the March 14 memorandum to mean the CAC was an oversight body to determine whether staff was complying with the Public Participation Plan requirements. Mr. Thompson explained that the CAC was not an oversight committee; it was being asked to provide feedback to the MPC on a new, staff-developed proposed public participation program that the MPC would eventually consider for adoption.

Ms. Butler-Boyesen said the cost savings involved in disbanding the CAC could be used to help local jurisdictions with their public outreach efforts.

Mr. Winter said it was his understanding that when local jurisdictions completed updating their transportation system plans (TSP) those plans would be used in a major update of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which could include an ad hoc committee to promote public involvement. Mr. Thompson said a major RTP update would commence after December 2014 and be a three- to five-year process that would likely involve an ad hoc advisory committee.

Wrap-Up

Ms. Wiederhold reviewed the updated CAC membership list and said the next committee meeting was scheduled for April 18, 2013.

In response to a question from Mr. Ridley, Mr. Thompson said the library meeting rooms typically cost about \$150, but there was no charge if the City of Eugene was involved in the meeting.

Mr. Thompson said the next meeting would focus on a continuing discussion of public involvement tools and strategies beyond the basic and suggestions for how they could best be used, how to engage groups within the region and other ways to broaden the MPO's public outreach.

Ms. Wiederhold encouraged committee members to provide their individual comments directly to staff via email prior to the next meeting and those could be compiled for consideration by the CAC.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

(Recorded by Lynn Taylor)