

Committee imagines focus areas along Barbur Boulevard

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability's Barbur Concept Plan process last month processes last month entered a visioning phase, with members considering an ideal future for seven "focus areas."

These are also potential station sites for a future light rail line or high capacity transit route.

As proposed by planners Jay Sugnet and John Fregonese, these areas are: Gibbs Street, Hamilton Street, Terwilliger Boulevard, Capitol Hill Road, 26th Avenue, Crossroads (the Southwest Barbur Boulevard-Capitol Highway-Interstate 5 interchange), and Portland Community College's Sylvania Campus.

The current land uses at these locations are "a limited number of building types repeated over and over," Fregonese told the project Stakeholders Advisory Committee last month. "We want to start thinking with a bigger box of crayons."

Fregonese suggested the type of higher intensity development seen on the city's main streets, and particularly Northwest 23rd Avenue, Northeast Broadway Street, and Southwest Capitol Highway in Multnomah Village.

Fregonese spoke favorably of Multnomah's Headwaters housing project,

where "in summer you hear the buzz of animals and birds." Even more important is access to shopping.

"The number one reason people go out is to go to a retail store," Fregonese said. He said there should be parking for both bicycles and cars, and extolled mixed-use development.

"Right on a retail street may not be where you'd want to live, but a block away?" Much of southwest includes "formerly auto-oriented suburban areas that are evolving," said Fregonese.

Planners need to be flexible in their approach to Barbur, Fregonese said. "What works at Capitol Hill may not work on Terwilliger," he said.

Indeed, the focus areas as selected are themselves "crash test dummies" that can be rejected or moved if needed, he said. "We need to test what you do and don't like, ask the public to mix and match, and learn from our failures."

This was a fortunate attitude to take because, before the month was out, the South Portland Neighborhood Association had officially called for Gibbs Street to be removed as a focus area.

Delegates Laura Campos and Jim Gardner both said that the area is largely composed of single-family homes, which Gardner pointed out include part of the Lair Hill National Historic District.

They would be in jeopardy if the area was rezoned for higher density. Sugnet said the area was chosen in part because

of the tram and new pedestrian bridge bringing people to OHSU.

The study is not proposing zoning changes for single-family neighborhoods, he said. Fregonese said the focus areas need not be "monochromatic."

The Stakeholders and planners also looked at other focus areas. Planner Glenn Bolen said Sylvania was included in the hope of "connecting and making it more a part of the community."

Hillsdale activist Baack said that Southwest Multnomah Boulevard west of 19th Avenue is "a really great place for redevelopment."

Another stakeholder, Ken Williams, said areas to the west between Barbur Boulevard and Interstate 5 are totally undeveloped.

Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. transportation chair Roger Averbeck cautioned, "When you have a freeway off-ramp, it changes the conversation. The closer you get, the more expensive and complicated development is."

SWNI land use chair John Gibbon agreed: "I live in the neighborhood, and I avoid those areas like the plague." Sugnet said perhaps such areas would be better suited for office development.

Gibbon added that the cost of City-required storm water treatment with any development would be "really spendy." Fregonese said, "We need to make sure the person coming in for a



A potential light rail station, Southwest 26th Avenue is one of the focus areas of the Barbur Concept Plan. (Post photo by Don Snedecor)

remodel doesn't get tagged with it all."

Averbeck asked if the Oregon Department of Transportation would cooperate with proposed changes to Barbur and freeway accesses.

Fregonese replied, "They've changed a lot. They're not just about moving cars anymore." Some years ago, efforts to restore on street parking to Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard produced "a pitched battle," he said. "Now we're free to dream and imagine."

Different rates of speed may be appropriate in different places, Fregonese said, and traffic projects could mean "spending a lot of money for minimal improvement. The level of service is not the king anymore anywhere in the U.S."

Williams said, "The problem isn't Barbur (Boulevard) per se, but what's around it," including access streets.

Stakeholder Bill Garryfallow said, "The more people view Barbur (Boulevard) as their home, the less they'll zoom through."

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