COMMITTEE AGENDA TOPICS

Council Referral Item: Rezoning Process Improvements
Tree Canopy Action Plan

COMMITTEE INFORMATION

Committee Members Present: Julie Eiselt (Chair), Larken Egleston (Vice Chair), Ed Driggs, Matt Newton, Braxton Winston,

Staff Resources: Taiwo Jaiyeoba, City Manager’s Office

Meeting Duration: 10:43 am – 12:15 pm

ATTACHMENTS

1. Rezoning Process and Engagement Improvements
2. Tree Canopy Action Plan
3. Silver Line TOD

DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

Council Referral Item: Rezoning Process Improvements
David Pettine, Planning Design & Development; presented to the Committee the Council referred Rezoning process improvements. The Council and Committee Charge was to identify and provide new actions the city can take to further enhance our rezoning process to meet the need to increase community engagement.

Areas of focus include; improve access of information; clarify and enhance opportunities for citizen engagement and develop more educational materials on the rezoning process and how to get involved.
Plan in process currently underway to address growth and development and mobility are; Charlotte Future 2040 Comprehensive Plan; the Unified Development Ordinance; CONNECT Beyond a Regional Mobility Initiative; the Strategic Mobility Plan and Envision My Ride Bus Priority Study. All these processes have an impact on the rezoning process, these processes in place can support these initiatives and take us through the process how we can better integrate the goals of all these different plans into a conventional rezoning and how to engage the community to be certain they understand how the goals are linked together and how the rezoning process works.

In June CDOT came to the Committee with information on traffic impact policies and ordinances to capture mitigation, promote trip reduction and expand demand management strategies. Some example actions include; modify traffic impact study thresholds to capture additional transportation mitigations and expand mitigation options to include demand management strategies.

The Transit Priority Corridor Investment discussion goal is to identify and implement bus priority and microtransit projects to increase transit service and options in appropriate corridors, actions include bus only lanes, queue jumpers, microtransit service for first and last mile transit access.

Next steps discussed include; the Strategic Mobility Plan, the Bus Priority Study, CDOT Project Planning and Design where target and capacity investment areas were looked at. The Comp plan and the UDO are an opportunity for us to bring everything together to further some of the initiative and capture some of the goals through the rezoning process.

Goals of the rezoning process and public engagement are to improve the communities understanding of the process, improve access to information and ways the community can be actively involved and engaged. Another goal is to ensure our various users and customers can easily and equally access information about possible zoning changes.

Currently public outreach is led by petitioners rather than planning staff or neighborhood leaders. When a petition is received a mailing list is generated and notices are sent to adjacent property owners. This notice lets people know what’s going on in the community. We recognize a need and the opportunity to proactively improve education and engagement of residents more effectively that better integrates the community outreach and input.

Currently we are doing things above and beyond City and State law regarding petitions and have a rezoning website at rezoining.org that is customer friendly and customer focused. We recognize the need for continued improvements, we are headed for improvements to the website experience, and providing more FAQ and helpful information resources for citizens to understand the process and explain/find out how they can get involved, as well as improved exploring of opportunities for interactive mapping for citizens and notifications. We would like to explore continued live streaming
of community meetings which has been an advantage during COVID. Other ways to enhance the public engagement process is by helping residents understand possible changes in their neighborhoods, and how to navigate and participate in the process, helping them understand the terminology as well as other things. Identifying new public engagement methods for Charlotte like Nextdoor or something like it to notify residents of rezonings in their community. Improving relationships with community organizations, especially those that may not be active or involved. All these are things that City Staff will explore to have things available to us to consider. We want to create ways to help the public understand the rezoning process and how they fit into the process. These are high level items that we would like to explore.

**Tree Canopy Action Plan**

Alyson Craig and Tim Porter presented an update on the Tree Canopy Action Plan including recent engagement efforts, peer city analysis and preliminary canopy policies. The Tree Canopy Action Plan is guided by the vision of the Charlotte Future 2040 Plan, this plan will inform tree policy and future regulations alongside the City’s effort to plan for the future.

Key deliverables of the Tree Canopy Plan are;

- Analysis and inventory of Charlotte’s tree canopy
- Peer city analysis
- Community-driven tree canopy policy recommendations for Charlotte Future 2040
- Ordinance concepts for the UDO
- Final report summarizing recommendations

Tree Canopy Trends show Charlotte has a robust tree canopy of 45%. Our tree canopy has declined it was at 49% coverage in 2012 and 45% coverage in 2018. The greatest loss has been in residential areas. The City does not have equity in our tree canopy coverage and benefits are not being equally received throughout our community. The greatest loss of tree canopy has been in the South Charlotte area. Doing an analysis by zoning classification of canopy loss, 65% has occurred in single family residential areas, this is an area that needs to be looked at more closely to better protect the city’s tree canopy. The second largest loss is in our industrial areas, with 13% canopy loss.

Equity in tree canopy staff have been working with UNC Charlotte on these analyses. Looking at previously redlined communities a rating of grade A occurred in predominately white home owners; areas that were graded D were predominately African American communities. There is a great inequity in those communities. A study was done relating to temperature differences in those redlined communities and it show that temperatures were significantly cooler in the predominately White areas and warmer in the predominately African American communities; nationally temperature differences were 2.6 and in Charlotte the difference was 4.43.
Tim Porter presented a Peer City Analysis looked at Raleigh, Austin, Atlanta and Washington D.C. to better understand what they do in their communities and what we can do to make changes and better improve our canopy in Charlotte. Peer City take-aways were Charlotte should consider fee updates, most cities have higher mitigation/in-lieu fees and charge them for impacts not regulated by Charlotte. Some of the peer cities had programs that support assistance with maintenance and replanting is areas similar to ours. We need to pursue assistance in low income areas with replanting and maintenance of the tree canopy. Charlotte should pursue a program to address equity and canopy protection/expansion.

Another take away was tree protection criteria; many cities have thresholds for tree protection greater than Charlotte in both single family and commercial areas. Charlotte should also consider more tree save change criteria, be more flexible in tree save where there are more high-quality trees or forest patches exist and allow passive uses in urban areas. In the peer cities separate advocacy groups have successfully pushed for funding for proactive public care, as well as more stringent tree protection measures, and Charlotte needs this kind of support.

From the public opinion survey results there were 2,417 respondents, they were majorly White with some college education, the consultants are still working on the analysis and further segmenting of results is ongoing. The survey consisted of 8 questions with some supporting videos. We received 1,797 comments that the consultants are working to summarize. Survey results showed 47% of those who took the survey were not aware that Charlotte had a goal of achieving a 50% by 2050 tree canopy while 45% said yes, this shows we could do more work. It also showed that 50% said they had the right amount of trees in their neighborhood and 47% said they needed more. When asked in the survey if citizens were pleased with the amount of tree canopy citywide, 82% thought the city needed more tree canopy.

Emerging themes from the survey show; knowledge and awareness are needed, Charlotte’s tree canopy is aging, storms are making an impact on our canopy, our maintenance support is inadequate, we need to curb losses in development

And preserve existing canopy and lastly walkability and quality of life need to be considered. In the survey when asked to rank the most pressing need in neighborhoods, 81% said their neighborhood needed more tree maintenance. Another question on the survey asked which action Charlotte needs the most Citywide in order to sustain its canopy. 78% said the City needs more tree preservation in development, to keep trees from being removed as buildings and homes are being built. Survey participants were also asked which action would be of greatest benefit for underserved neighborhoods that have lower tree canopy, 84% said planting more trees.

The tree canopy policies support the Comprehensive Plan goals. Below are a few Tree Canopy Policy goals;
- 10-Minute Neighborhoods – all households will have access to essential amenities, goods
and services within a comfortable tree shaded 10-minute walk, bike or transit trip by 2040.

- Neighborhood Diversity and Inclusion – Charlotte will strive for all neighborhoods to have a diversity of housing options by increasing the presence of middle density housing; in development allow single family, duplex and triplexes to be developed in all zoning districts with appropriate lot size requirements for single family houses as stated in the UDO.

- Integrated Natural and Built Environments; Charlotte will protect and enhance its surface water quality, tree canopy and natural areas with a variety of trees, plantings, green infrastructure, green building practices and open space at different scales throughout the entire community as a component of sustainable city infrastructure.

Urban forestry place type characteristics

- Neighborhood 1 Place Type; 90% of all public and street planting sites will have trees, the majority of the tree canopy is located here, primarily on private land. Preservation of private land for tree canopy is priority. Areas not built on will provide for sustainable tree canopy growth and preservation, tree canopy ranges from 50%-60%.

- Neighborhood 2 Place Type; this place type depends heavily on street trees on sidewalks, road medians and supports growth and longevity of large stature, shade trees providing a pleasant pedestrian experience and environmental benefits. Tree canopy coverage ranges from 35% - 45%.

- Regional Activity Center Place Type; canopy is made up of primarily street trees. Design and construction in this area is such that sufficient trees planted to mitigate heat island effect and stormwater run-off. Tree canopy ranges from 15% - 25%; 90% of all public and street planting sites will have trees.

- Manufacturing and Logistics Place Type; Rights-of-way and private land adjacent to public streets are planted with trees appropriate for the space and industrial use by large trucks; newly constructed parking areas are designed and constructed to accommodate shade trees. Tree canopy cover ranges from 25%-35%.

Next Steps; refine tree canopy policies; a draft ordinance concepts for UDO, develop final report, expand partnership with UNCC to model and project canopy goals and update the Urban Forest Master Plan.

Silver Line TOD

John Lewis and John Howard presented and overview an update on the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study for the Silver Line corridor. Silver line studies were presented, the purpose of the TOD study is to integrate land use and transportation planning early in the process. There are integrated but different studies within the Silver Line program, each has their own funding source.
How is the TOD Plan different? The TOD planning effort is a unique opportunity to address lessons learned from Blue Line projects. We acknowledge there were missed opportunities related to equity issues such as displacement related to private development and the lack of planning for affordable housing. The TOD study addresses those topical areas as well as developing a TOD education strategy for the public and project partners. This is important when talking about equity, development and community character.

We are starting earlier with TOD and station area planning discussions, integrated with our station location and design decisions like the Blue Line and Blue Line Extension, we have an interdepartmental team, but we have expanded partnerships beyond the City of Charlotte and expanded the focus area to include open space and affordable housing. Expanded TOD Team consist of; Co-managed by CATS and Charlotte Planning Design and Development; CDOT; Charlotte Douglas Int’l Airport; Economic Development, Housing and Neighborhood services, Mecklenburg County, Gaston County, the towns of Matthews, Stallings and Indian Trail.

The goal of the study is to proactively plan and “place” around transit. There are 3 key questions the study seeks to answer

1. What place do we want to be? This is a diverse corridor and TOD will look different at different places along the corridor. This will also be different than the TOD we have seen occur along the Blue Line.
2. How ready is the Silver Line corridor for TOD? We need to understand the market and affordable housing potential and what future development and land uses are feasible.
3. What improvements do we implement to access transit and enable TOD? How do we plan to implement new sidewalks, bike facilities and roadways to support connectivity to stations and unlock TOD potential.

The scope of the TOD study includes community education and engagement; readiness/market study; station area planning and implementation of the strategy.

What is Transit Oriented Development? TOD is more than just TOD is more than just designing for the train. It needs to incorporate all aspects of “place” in order to be successful; we see it as a community building initiative, looking more inclusivity, diversity, affordable housing, land use and open space. This is not just about Charlotte but also our neighbors to the east and to our west.

The four overarching areas leverage transit to support our communities through improved mobility and access, land use, enhancing community design and improving equity. These components will help to improve a more equitable city and region. How can TOD achieve these things;
- Enhancing connectivity, enhance the existing transportation network to promote walking, biking and driving connections to transit.
- Encourage transit supportive development; focus on a mix of complementary well integrated land uses within walking distance of transit stations.
- Enhance community identity by using design to enhance community identity around station areas and to make it attractive, safe and walkable.
- Expanded opportunities; optimize access to transit to enhance economic mobility and access to jobs, increase affordable housing and neighborhood amenities.

We want access for all not just affordable housing, but also attracting new businesses and retention of current businesses.

The study conducted a corridor-level market assessment. It included understanding market trends along the corridor, where there are key employment and activity nodes and identify potential catalytic TOD sites.

The next phase of the study will include a detailed market assessment of the 7 demonstration station areas and developing corridor preservation strategies.

The TOD team has been working with the Design team to develop preliminary TOD concepts for the alignment and station alternatives to inform the alignment selection process. The study will ultimately produce station area plans for 7 demonstration areas (1 in Belmont, 1 in Matthews and 5 in Charlotte). The study will also outline critical infrastructure needs and market/housing/corridor preservation strategies for all station areas. Finally, developing some tools to help jurisdictions outside of Charlotte get ready transit-ready.

Affordable housing assessment, this included understanding housing trends on affordability and identifying naturally occurring affordable housing exists today. The next phase of the study will include a detailed affordable housing assessment of the 7 demonstration station areas and developing strategies to retain affordable housing and address residential displacement. The Study will outline all critical capital infrastructure needs for all stations.

The study is coordinating with several other studies to maximize outreach and leverage their channels; those studies are the Silver Line TOD project audience; 2040 Comp Plan; Silver Line Project Development/Engineering Study; Connect Beyond Regional Transit Plan; Silver Line Rail Trail Study as well as other local area planning efforts.

The TOD study has tailored outreach activities to specific stakeholders.

We held an 8-day virtual urban design workshop in May that included over 50 stakeholders from partner agencies and partner jurisdictions to work through urban design scenarios of the alternative alignments. We expect to continue that engagement through Core Team and Project management Team meetings and the station area planning workshops in the spring.
We have held several stakeholder interviews and follow up discussions with key developers and businesses along the corridor. We have also held 2 rounds of public meetings in conjunction with the Silver Line Design team and community engagement is planned for the station area planning in the spring.

Because the corridor has varied needs and contexts, we are tailoring our approach to engagement around TOD.

Work to Date:

- 8-day urban design workshop
- Developed preliminary TOD scenarios for alignment alternatives
- TOD metrics for all alignment alternatives
- Corridor-wide existing conditions assessment
- Corridor-wide affordable housing and market assessment in progress

Key findings; has a variety of character and opportunities; strong community desire for equity & affordable housing; strong bike/ped and trail connections; TOD is going to be different from South End; there are many infrastructure challenges along the corridor; and transit investment can create some significant TOD in pockets.

Next Steps; March 2021 MTC adoption of refined alignment, March – July 2021 station area planning and public engagement education of TOD; August 2020 station area TOD concepts; September – November 2020 outline capital investments and implementation and corridor preservation strategy development and finally December 2021 a Final Silver Line TOD Plan.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting is scheduled for November 21, 2020