

**Meriden City Center Initiative Advisory Group**  
**Brief Summary and Action Items from CCAG meeting, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

The meeting convened at 6:00 pm as the facilitator, Stacie Smith, welcomed the attendees, overviewed the agenda, and reviewed the brief summary from the previous meeting. Members were invited to make additions or changes, though none were noted. One member noted that public comments were absent from the meeting summaries, and the facilitator replied that their comments were nonetheless incorporated into the record of proceedings, via the recorded DVDs of meetings.

A presentation on Transportation Improvements & Project Phasing was given by Geoff Fitzgerald, Project Manager at BL Companies. For details, see presentation posted on the project website: [www.citycenterinitiative.com](http://www.citycenterinitiative.com).

Advisory group members asked a number of questions about the presentation, including clarification of which streets and roads were proposed to be moved. The questions and discussion are summarized below:

- Is Columbia being moved to meet Camp? Geoff explained that the suggestion is that Camp be shifted to meet Columbia, which would impact a couple of apartment houses and automotive repair shop.
- Will we now have Exit 7 & 8 to get downtown? Geoff responded that exit 8 - Broad St - will remain a viable exit to get downtown.
- What about the idea of closing off Camp Street? From a flood control perspective, this could save the costs of rebuilding the Clark Brook bridge? Geoff replied that this could be considered as an option.
- Discussion ensued about altering a crossing from Hanover to Perkins the truck traffic on Hanover, which BL was not considering in this plan. Geoff explained that many of the recommendations being made are based on financial considerations and long-term planning.
- What about the aesthetics? Recently, DOT has cleared Columbia Street of trees along the Highway, along with other unattractive changes (billboards, etc). We should be coordinating with DOT etc to ensure that these travesties don't occur in the future. City councilor Joe Feest commented that the State did that clearing and that the City will look into that issue and will express the concern.
- The on- and off- ramps in that area are on four different streets, and your plans don't seem to resolve this. Geoff relied that it might be possible to extend State Street to send people more directly into the loop to get back on the Highway.
- What about public transportation – trains and buses? Is there still a consideration to use the soon to be vacated Post Office on Colony Street for a Transportation Center? How do we accommodate the Buses as they are an integral component of Meriden mass transit system. Geoff replied that this is part of the plan, to use the post office as a multi-modal Transportation center, and build a contiguous parking facility for it.
- I agree that the Camp Street change suggestion would resolves and improves the flow, and become a direct link to the Westfield Shoppingtown and offer dramatic aesthetic improvements to the area.

- I recommend you reconsider changing Center Street to an on-ramp to meet a long-term improvement of a two way interchange. Also, extend the State Street Blvd north beyond Camp Street.
- What about the previous idea (from the Master Plan) of the crossing of Olive over to Orange Street to provide East West Traffic? Geoff clarified that this and other recommendations in the Master Plan remain recommendations, but are not elaborated upon in this phase.
- I disagree with the suggestion to make the Olive and Orange connection. This would involve taking down more than a few houses, including disruptions on Cherry Street (including my house), and would not dramatically improve traffic since it is not part of the downtown. Geoff replied that the inclusion of any concept in the Master Plan or phase II plan does not insure it will occur. Each future project is subject to debate.
- What about changing West Main Street back to two way instead? It was noted that for reasons such as movements required in transportation circulations and the distance between the buildings and the street when incorporating adequate sidewalk widths, along with the costs of redoing all that was just done, the converting of West Main Street back to two way is not practical in BL's opinion.
- What is the acreage we are talking about – I keep hearing different numbers? BL responded that there are approximately 40 acres of land being disturbed, but the number changes when you either include or remove public spaces. The ultimate development site is approximately 25 acres not designated for public uses

After a break, the facilitator opened the floor to additional questions, comments, and discussion from the CCAG, on topics including Traffic and Transportation, and also the topics of the previous meetings: Flood Control, Market Factors, and a Sense of Place. Members of the CCAG had the following comments and questions:

- In another city, I have seen that they have taken old school buses, painted them as trolley cars, and use them to offering shuttles to and from other areas of town like the movies, shopping area, and park, This would be a way to link the revitalized downtown through public transportation to other areas of the city.
- Decisions made under the plan should have an expanded time horizon and focus on the long term. For example, the shorter-term desire to impact fewer properties should be weighed against the long-term goal of creating the best possible arrangement of roads. BL responded that scope of work in this phase II plan was to package the work in a series of doable projects with considerations costs and likelihood of being achieved, including political realities. However, it was noted that the group was expressing the need for flexibility, and keeping the door open to act on opportunities when the long-term benefits begin outweigh short-term costs.
- Keep in mind the opportunities south of East Main – change is happening there, and there are definitely long-term opportunities there.
- Will the reconfigured streets be large enough to handle the anticipated growth in the area? Geoff responded that these considerations were being incorporated in these recommendations.
- We need to make sure that the roads are not only functional, but attractive and have character. For example, on West Main Street, in front of the Police Station, the road is

wide and the sidewalks are wide and distinctive. Our new roads should have an attractive character, as well.

- What about the names of roads? I think this is an opportunity to add character to the city – give the roads new names reflecting our racial and ethnic diversity. This is a link to the sense of the group that Meriden’s Sense of Place should be linked to the great asset of its diversity.
- I like the plan to streamline movement through the city, but what about parking? We want people to stay in the city, not just pass through. Wayne explained that parking is incorporated in the plan overall, from both the phase 1 version and this version.
- What about safety for pedestrians, particular along the areas of rail crossings? Geoff replied that this was definitely considered in the plan, and several rail crossings were being recommended to be closed, with some overhead crossings developed. It was noted that it wouldn’t be feasible to eliminate all at-grade crossings, but they could be made more safe.

The facilitator noted that the group seemed to voice a theme that decisions made now for implementing shorter-term recommendations should not foreclose opportunities for future projects with greater benefits from occurring at a later stage, when those benefits are seen to outweigh costs.

Wayne D’Amico offered closing comments on next steps for this plan, including highlighting that the Phase II Plan, inclusive of the input of this Advisory Group, would be presented to the City and the general public at a forum on April 27<sup>th</sup>, with the time and location to be announced. The CCAG was specifically invited to attend, and to join in the presentation, since in many ways the plan is now their plan, too. It was noted that there was also still opportunity for CCAG members and the public to offer additional comments and input between now and then, by sending them to Wayne or Geoff. Once received by the city, it would be up to members of the CCAG and the public to advocate to make development decisions for the city center in accordance with the recommendations of the plan, as such decisions became available to make.

There was a request that a summary of the plan – and if possible, the whole plan text – be made available to members of the CCAG in advance of the April 27<sup>th</sup> meeting. BL and MERG offered to do their best to make this happen, but could not promise how the timing would play out in the end.

Time was taken for public questions and comments, and the meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.