

ENGINEERING MEMO

To:	Mayor and Members of City Council	
From:	Sue Nelson, P.E. City Engineer	
Date:	16 June 2021	
Subject:	Background Information for the S. 1 st Street Alignment Alternatives	

Background –

To help guide the conceptual alignment alternatives of the S. 1st Street extension through the waterfront property and better understand the features, improvements, and potential amenities that would be desirable to developers, the City's consultant, Otak, coordinated and facilitated interviews with four prominent development firms. The interviews included participation from members of the Otak design team and City staff. Each Developer was asked the same five questions:

1. What are your initial thoughts on development opportunities for the site?
2. What are your initial thoughts on development constraints for the site?
3. Do you think there is potential for commercial and mixed-use development that would complement the proposed residential for the site?
4. What demographic would most likely be served by the site? What housing types make the most sense?
5. What can make the site development unique to St. Helens and how can it compliment the surrounding neighborhood?

The results of the interviews included a few reoccurring themes, including connectivity to existing and future trail systems, maintaining views and access to the waterfront, and the need for density of development to have a successful project and a revitalized downtown. Minutes from the interviews are attached.

Attachments ~

Meeting notes from interviews with:

- Wishcamper
- Jim Atkins and Dike Dame
- Tokola Properties
- Central Bethany Development Co.



Meeting Minutes

To: City of St. Helens: S. 1st/Strand Streets Project Design Team

From: Kevin Brady

Copies: Don Hanson, Kevin Brady, Keith Buisman, Sue Nelson, Mouhamad Zaher, John Walsh, Jenny Dimsho, Mandy Flett

Date: 5/10/2021

Subject: Developer Interviews – Justin Metcalf, Wishcamper

Project No.: 19823

1. What are your initial thoughts on development opportunities for the site?
 - Justin provided introduction to Wishcamper and referred to a recent mixed-use project in Beaverton.
 - Pedestrian connections should be the focus for the development.
 - Advocated bringing in partners on projects.
 - Focus should be laying a framework with utilities and streets.
 - Open space and trails system are a priority, with focus on connection between Waterfront and Nob Hill. Also focus on connecting with Plymouth, including potential N/S connections.
 - Affordable housing will play important future role with St. Helens, a big priority for affordable developers (this will take pressure off subject parcel for doing affordable, as affordable can be done elsewhere, with some affordable built on subject site).
 - Residential should be focus, with some mixed-use likely.
 - Should focus on highest density with highest revenue – Don acknowledged this point as valuable perspective.
 - Less focus on design compatibility with adjacent neighborhood (design can be faded). The design on these parcels can be its own thing and complement the surrounding existing buildings.
 - Definitely do not build low-density.
2. What are your initial thoughts on development constraints for the site?
 - Some environmental constraints, but relatively few.
 - Generally good ingress/egress relative to existing street system.
 - Need to determine if Plymouth will be viable access, will depend on TIA.
 - Overall a great site.
3. Do you think there is potential for commercial and mixed-use development that would complement the proposed residential for the site?
 - Don inquired about ratio of commercial/residential. Justin indicated that St. Helens is at the edge of being civic/commercial destination, could inform mix of commercial.

- May be good to expand parking at Columbia View Park and expand commercial parking on Strand. Avoid \$300k Master Plan that no one can build. Use locational aspects but keep flexible.
 - Bring in developer with flexibility, willingness to collaborate.
 - Designate commercial areas in advance. Public agent responsible for mandating commercial areas (for assurance).
 - Portland has a lot of mixed-use (zones) that do not always work. Developers often not competent at doing both residential and commercial – set up development for independent core competencies of both residential and commercial.
 - Focus on defining locational aspects of Concept Plan.
 - Don indicated that Master Plans can be too specific, flexibility is better.
4. What population (demographic) will most likely be served by the site? What housing types make the most sense?
- One year ago, is very different from today – is remote work here to stay? If so, development should reflect new trends/demands.
 - There is still significant influx from California, more people going to live in places like St. Helens, leaving urban core.
 - Things are changing fast – need flexibility.
 - Need family units and need an office as part of the program.
 - Stacking flats is becoming more common and in demand. Elevator fits with this design. Oregon and State may mandate this design in future legislation.
 - Advocate using the Universal Design Handbook (UDH) as a resource. Don indicated the UDH has really informed past projects, can provide to City staff.
5. What can make the site development unique to St. Helens and how can it compliment the surrounding neighborhood?
- Open space and meandering pathways are key. Civic opportunities for ‘cool stamp’ or civic feature(s) are important aspects of ‘gateway areas’.
 - Be leery of ‘triangle’ shape of new development relative to vicinity, i.e. western edge.
 - Key for concept plan is trails, including significant marking for crossings of driveways, etc.
 - John Walsh indicated the subject area is part of both an Urban Renewal District and Economic Opportunity Zone.
 - Don agreed with Justin that although, the Columbia River is the main feature, the trails are the key. Don further indicated the need to avoid a wall of buildings along the river, with focus on ‘porous pattern’ of buildings.
 - Again, create certainty for location of commercial, which can inform parking, too.
 - Be careful of developer that is pushy it will be bad start – need to find a collaborator.
 - Otak best firm I have ever worked with ...



Meeting Minutes

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From: Kevin Brady

Copies: Don Hanson, Kevin Brady, Keith Buisman, Sue Nelson, Mouhamad Zaher, John Walsh, Jenny Dimsho, Mandy Flett

Date: 5/13/2021

Subject: Developer Interviews – Jim Atkins and Dike Dame

Project No.: 19823

1. What are your initial thoughts on development opportunities for the site?
 - Don provided introduction of the project to the interviewees.
 - Jim indicated the site is really an extension of downtown.
 - Jim indicated that jobs and industrial park are important aspect of planning, as jobs will inform housing types and parking needs.
 - Dike inquired about extension of existing marina, and that this will be important aspect of the overall development. During this conversation Dike referenced the older development in Portland on Macadam which is still successful today and included access to a marina.
 - Jim indicated that other water sport and recreation opportunities related to the marina will benefit the subject site the overall community.
 - John indicated the marina is busy, though a better location to the south with existing pilings provides best opportunity for another marina, with better protection and still walkable from subject site. Anywhere else and you run into unpredictable depths, speeds of the water, and high winds. It was further indicated by the group that this marina could act as a southern anchor and another touch point on the river for the city.

2. What are your initial thoughts on development constraints for the site?
 - Dike indicated that finding the site is a challenge, and people will weigh the commuting time.
 - Jim questioned whether there are any traffic and intersection constraints.
 - John indicated City purchases of properties for roadway improvements, and that Urban Renewal project funding and SDC credits are also potential cost-sharing mechanisms.
 - Don indicated cost-sharing would also be informed by traffic analysis.
 - Mouhamad indicated need for this traffic analysis to inform needed roadway improvements.
 - General group discussion on commuting trends, especially with changes in remote work.

3. Do you think there is potential for commercial and mixed-use development that would complement the proposed residential for the site?

- Dike indicated that restaurants on the river are always the desire, but rarely successful. This issue was discussed in a project in Eugene and Atkins/Dame indicated to City that they were not interested.
 - Jim and Dike both indicated that one option is to focus on expansion of existing retail in downtown, with new residential supporting existing retail. They feel that there are no particularly strong commercial opportunities for this site.
 - Jim indicated that for Eugene project, they reduced retail from 50k to 20k, all within 3 stand-alone buildings. The intent is to not complicate residential buildings. Jim echoed comment that best thing is for new residential to augment exist growth in downtown, not provide competition.
 - Jim and Dike also gave the example of the Pearl District in Portland, it took years before the retail portions of the development were successful. You need the people before you can have the commercial; people create the demand.
 - Dike indicated that for Eugene project, economics revealed that it was better to lease than to purchase. Jim added that this also helps in garnering a more local tenant, due to access to finance.
 - Don mentioned Zipper building on NE Sandy Blvd. in Portland as example of food court, other examples mentioned by Jim/Dike and group.
 - Group discussed the food court concept as being a development paradigm that is 'scalable'. Jim conveyed that the worst thing for new commercial is lease signs and empty space.
4. What population (demographic) will most likely be served by the site? What housing types make the most sense?
- Dike indicated the development would draw a mix of people, with some existing residents and some commuters, especially to/from manufacturing jobs.
 - Jim indicated that remote work would allow limited commute days, and also potential longer commutes. Remote work also fits with increased recreation opportunities in a community.
 - Dike indicated more common-sense regarding lifestyle becoming more prevalent, with more people looking towards other communities outside Portland.
 - Jim echoed the notion that the draw would be a mix - young, mid-career and retired.
 - Dike added the desire to appeal to a general population, not a specific target.
 - Jim commented on the urgent medical care nearby as another asset.
5. What can make the site development unique to St. Helens and how can it compliment the surrounding neighborhood?
- Jim commented that design guidelines should ensure new development is compatible with existing downtown style, i.e. colors/materials, streetscape, window styles, streetlights, etc.
 - Jim indicated that the new marina to the south is the other end of downtown community, acting as other end of overall downtown community.
 - Don asked about tradeoffs on bluff base development and Jim indicated the street needs to be double-loaded. Jim added that there is also a need for adequate space for waterfront side of subject site.
 - Jim commented that plan could include rear entry alley option at base of bluff, also tuck-under parking. Plan could also include option for future parking structure.

- Jim asked if consideration should be given to a raised roadway that could potentially facilitate more efficient tuck under parking on adjacent future development sites.
- Jim added that small live/work offices could also be option and be potentially viable.

Other discussion:

- Jim commented that there should also be some thought about the 500-year flood plain vis-à-vis finance issues, could assist with underground parking.
- Dike commented that BOLI issues were looming large on development projects everywhere and asked if the City could potentially assist with BOLI labor issues and prevailing wages.
- Jim echoed the comment vis-à-vis the Eugene project, i.e. issues with BOLI.
- Dike suggested communicating with City Attorney to vet BOLI issues in advance.
- Jim indicated that there was up to 20% increase in cost for commercial development, and also reduces contract pool.
- Dike shared a conversation with this wife and antidote about the charm and value of the St. Helens downtown.



Meeting Minutes

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From: Kevin Brady

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Date: 5/7/2021

Subject: Developer Interviews – Dwight Unti, Tokola Properties

Project No.: 19823

1. What are your initial thoughts on development opportunities for the site?
 - Dwight indicated that predominant uses envisioned will be housing and hotel, with some mixed use and ground floor retail – these uses would be most potent and site-activating, acting as catalyst for downtown.
 - Development would be based on combo of both tourists and residents.
 - Regarding hotel, Don asked if hotel was envisioned because of river views? Dwight responded in the affirmative and also indicated that it is a very well-positioned, excellent site.
 - Dwight cautioned the economic challenge and risk of hotel, especially due to COVID.
2. What are your initial thoughts on development constraints for the site?
 - Risks related to hotel, especially with COVID.
 - Site is large, but also narrow, and is ‘pinched’ by both the river on the east and embankment to the west. Careful thought needed for concept planning.
 - Area is hard to find (from highway), destination resort hotel will help. Destination resort hotel (lodge) is envisioned, with waterfront and marina as the most valuable assets.
3. Do you think there is potential for commercial and mixed-use development that would complement the proposed residential for the site?
 - Primarily residential and hotel are envisioned, with some ground floor commercial. Hotel and residential would activate downtown – storefront rehab would follow, as well as new development in other portions of downtown. Dwight used Independence, OR as an example.
4. What population (demographic) will most likely be served by the site? What housing types make the most sense?
 - Tokola is a long-term investor, building and managing over long term. A speculative developer would look at who is moving in and get leases wrapped up. Long term vision and program needs to include a diversity of floor plans for future flexibility and growth, which is more sustainable over time.

- Dwight envisions a diversity of ages with new residents. Also sees strong component for seniors, with elevator serviced apartments. Also envisions younger folks with recreational opportunities.
 - Don indicated Wilsonville as example – people wanted to stay in community, close to grandkids, and not just in- migration. Dwight believes both in-migration and existing residents will share the demographic.
5. What can make the site development unique to St. Helens and how can it compliment the surrounding neighborhood?
- Historic fabric will be valued by good architects. Though honoring existing architecture is important, there is a need to point to the future – need thoughtful architects.
 - Main thrust of project will be to re-engage the community with the river, as well as a connection with other parts of downtown.
 - Biggest challenge for developers will be to identify realistic timeframe for infrastructure build-out as turnkey for private development. Developers are constantly looking at opportunities, Tokola really likes this opp. Timing will be key and critical in determining commitments from developers.
 - Need to get people to discover St. Helens – hotel will help significantly. Need to get people there ...



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Date: 5/20/2021

Subject: Developer Interviews – Roy Kim, Central Bethany Development Co

Project No.: 19823

1. What are your initial thoughts on development opportunities for the site?
 - Roy indicated that waterfronts are special, with people having a natural desire to be close to the water. He further indicated that the site provides access opportunities and potential for a special experience. Site size is big enough to create a sense of place on its' own, and it is unusual to find large sites, especially close to a large river.
 - Roy indicated that the existing downtown should also be considered a significant opportunity, and that new development should be complimentary to/with the existing downtown.
 - Don agreed and commented on a few of the nice components of downtown.

2. What are your initial thoughts on development constraints for the site?
 - Roy thought that more research needed on the typical demographics necessary to inform a development project. These typical demographics include numbers for both employees and employers, as well as retail needs of the community.
 - Roy indicated that distance is a significant factor, both the distance between the site and Highway 26, as well as the distance from St. Helens to downtown Portland and employment areas.
 - Don confirmed distance as a constraint and indicated a potential need for a wayfinding signage plan.

3. Do you think there is potential for commercial and mixed-use development that would complement the proposed residential for the site?
 - Roy indicated 2 separate strategies for commercial character – one strategy is to serve the existing community, while the other is to serve tourism. Both can be used, but the focus will inform the specific type of commercial uses. Roy used the example of a locals frequenting a restaurant a couple of times a week, while a tourist would be much less frequent.
 - Don asked Roy what he thought about a hotel, and Roy indicated he thought it was a good idea and fits with a tourism focus. He further supported the idea of a hotel, especially on the waterfront, and that there was definitely a market for a hotel. Don indicated it's currently included in the concept planning.

4. What population (demographic) will most likely be served by the site? What housing types make the most sense?
 - Roy referred back to need for more demographic data, but that in order to create a sense of place and have the area be as active as possible, as much density as possible is needed. There are limits on density, obviously, but the more the better (within reason).
 - Don agreed. Don asked Roy about the current concept planning that included 3-4 story vertical development, and Roy confirmed that the scale was appropriate. Roy further indicated that the community needs to be based on St Helens, not the Pearl District.

5. What can make the site development unique to St. Helens and how can it compliment the surrounding neighborhood?
 - Roy indicated that in terms of complimenting downtown, he had no direct or specific ideas on unique development features. He indicated that it is important to have a clearer understanding of the needs of the existing community, which includes identifying any future needs for additional retail commercial.
 - Roy indicated the need for more 'mom & pop' business, which would be more connective with the community and downtown (as opposed to chain retailers).
 - Don agreed that chain retail commercial does not fit.
 - Roy indicated that the key is to find what is uniquely St. Helens, and that you cannot transport existing development and building designs. Roy further indicated the need to reflect the history, location and views (islands, mountains, river, etc.) inherent with the site. The development needs a 'St Helens personality', and this idea will be important for architects to understand and reflect in the proposed designs. Roy further indicated that the concept planning also needed to include educational components for visitors and citizens.
 - Don agreed and conveyed that this is a great opportunity to re-connect the community with the river, which has been blocked for generations.

Other discussion:

- Don discussed the need to establish road alignment certainty and explained the current concept planning process.
- Don explained next steps with the process, including timelines (June 16 as date for CC review of concept plans and alignments).
- John indicated that the City is currently vetting issues related to BOLI labor and associated construction costs.
- Jenny discussed the process for the community survey, with results available in the next month to the general public.