



Citizens Steering Committee (CSC) *February 18, 2009 Meeting Summary*

Pima Community College Downtown Campus, Amethyst Community Room, 1255 N. Stone Avenue; 5:30 PM, Conversation & Refreshments; 6:00 – 8:00 PM, Meeting

CSC Members Present: Charlie Wachtel, Chair; Jason Brown, Vice Chair; Dick DeNezza; Eunice Jacobsen; Bernadette Jilka; Darel Magee; Martina O’Brien; Bill Quiroga; Joshua Randell; Ken Scoville; Leon Solomon; Lois Roth; Gloria Townsend; Bob Wright; Vicente Zarate

CSC Members Absent: Erik Nielsen; Cathy Rex

Staff Present:

UPD OARP Team – Chris Kaselemis, Administrator; Rebecca Ruopp, Project Manager; María Gayosso, Lead Planner; Jennifer Burdick, Planner

Ward 3 Staff – Tamara Prime, Council Aide

Technical Advisory Team – Ron Thompson, Tucson Police Department; Karen Larkin, Parks & Recreation

Meeting Agenda & Discussions

Actions Taken/ Follow-Up Required

1. Welcome and Introductions

The CSC members introduced themselves by name and affiliation to the project area. Staff members and audience members introduced themselves.

Regular Business

2. January 22, 2009 CSC Meeting Summary – The meeting summary for the January meeting will provided at the March meeting.

3. CSC Announcements – There were no announcements from the CSC members.

4. Updates and Announcements

■ **CSC Memberships** – The CSC welcomed new member Eunice Jacobson. Eunice has actively followed the project and attended many CSC meetings since they began in fall 2007. Staff member Rebecca Ruopp shared that CSC member Tad Denton, owner of Oasis at El Corral Assisted Living, submitted his resignation from the Committee earlier in the month.

■ **CSC and Brown Bag Meeting Schedule Revisions** – A revised schedule of the Spring CSC monthly meetings and the Brown Bags has been created and will be distributed to everyone via mail and email. The Brown Bags will occur on the 2nd Thursdays of the month, with one exception in April. That Brown Bag will occur after the Lenten season is complete, on the 4th Thursday, April 23. The monthly meetings will occur on the 3rd Wednesdays of the month, with one exception in May, where the meeting will fall on the 4th Wednesday, May 27.

■ **Drachman/Oracle/Main Public Art Project** – Mary Ellen Wooten from Tucson-Pima Arts Council, and Dirk Arnold, the artist of the selected art piece, attended the meeting to provide an update on the project. The art piece, which is a neon sign silhouette of a saguaro cactus, was proposed for the island on Oracle Road, just north of the new Drachman/Oracle/Main intersection. The project has been inspected and met standard guidelines for legal and structural requirements. The

□ Staff will email and mail the revised meeting schedule.

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electrical and structural research for installation is currently being completed. The results of the research will help refine the project and help determine where the piece will be/can be located. How long the sign will be illuminated each day, as well as with what energy supply, is still being determined. Any changes, including textual changes, would require re-doing the entire public process; no changes are recommended or anticipated at this point.

■ **Gateway Business Alliance** – CSC member Bob Wright provided an update on the progress the business association is making towards organizing as an official organization. About 20-30 people are regularly attending the business association meetings. At the January meeting, the association voted to name itself the Gateway Business Alliance. A subcommittee was formed at that meeting to create a proposal for an organizational structure for the Alliance and will present that to the membership at the February 19 meeting, which will be from 6-7:30 p.m. at Executive Inn & Suites (333 W. Drachman). It is anticipated that the GBA will be up and running in a couple of months.

■ **Ghost Ranch Lodge** – As Vice Mayor Uhlich reported to the CSC at the January meeting, the redevelopment project slated for the historic site of the Ghost Ranch Lodge, which is located at 801 W. Miracle Mile, has received low-income housing tax credits from the State of Arizona and additional funding from Pima County. In follow-up to the announcement, two letters were written on behalf of the CSC and signed by Chair Charlie Wachtel to thank Governor Brewer and Arizona Department of Housing Director Fred Karnas for their decision to support this project. The letters referenced the vandalism endured on the site in recent months and emphasized the Committee's and community's interest in construction of the project getting underway soon.

Before construction can begin, permits must be issued to the developers. A site visit was conducted with the developers and three staff members from the State of Arizona, the City's Historic Preservation Planner Jonathan Mabry, Ward III Office staff and OARP Project Manager Rebecca Ruopp on February 12 (?). The historic elements to be retained and rehabilitated were clarified, and the security issues were pressed. It is possible that the developer will be working on getting the Lodge listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The developer agreed to have someone on-site 24 hours per day, 7 days per week once construction gets underway.

The developer will be invited to come to the next meeting to share plans with the CSC.

Questions and comments asked were as follows:

♦ *CSC Member:* I am concerned about losing the context of the property, and worried about what COPE is planning to do with their piece of the property. They tore down the historic gas station without much public notice. Do they have something planned for the front part of the property? Is there going to be someone from the City at the actual demolition of the buildings the developer is not going to keep? I'm also worried about the streetscape and the landscaping.

Chair's Response: The Miracle Manor Neighborhood Association, which I am part of, has received notices. The Phase II buildings are supposed to be torn down all at once.

Staff's Response: We will check on what is getting demolished. We can also work to get the City's Historic Preservation Planner Jonathan Mabry to attend

□ Staff will arrange to have the developer attend/present at the next CSC meeting.

□ Staff will ask the City's Historic Preservation Planner Jonathan Mabry to the next meeting.

□ Staff will verify if the garden will be protected from demolition.

the next meeting.

- ♦ *CSC Member:* Will all the new units be ADA accessible?
Staff's Response: Yes. They will be looking at how to use ramps while still maintaining the historic integrity of the buildings.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* Is the garden listed as something to be saved?
Staff's Response: We will double-check on that, but it is almost certainly identified in communications to date. We will also ask if it can be part of the nomination for a National Registration.

■ **2nd Annual Historic Open House and Tour** – A subcommittee of CSC volunteers will work together to help with planning for the event, which is scheduled for Saturday, May 9. CSC member Dick DeNezza volunteered College Place as the venue. CSC volunteers that will help coordinate the event include Ken Scoville (Chair), Charlie Wachtel, and Dick DeNezza.

Questions and comments asked were as follows:

- ♦ *CSC Member:* Will this be like a carnival?
Staff's Response: That will be up to the subcommittee. An idea was suggested to block off Drachman for part of the day.
Chair's Response: There is also the possibility of involving historic cars in the event. There is a group in Green Valley – and here in Tucson – that enjoys opportunities to bring out their old cars.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* What kind of funding is there?
Staff's Response: The subcommittee will have to work on that. We can probably provide some posters/boards. The Blue Chip students can present the oral histories they've collected.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* We should be sure not to disappoint people. At the last event, people were turned away because we didn't have enough buses to accommodate them for the tours.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* Are we going to put an announcement in the newspaper?
Staff's Response: As we get closer to the date, we will definitely use all methods of advertisement that we can.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* This year also marks the 40th anniversary of Pima Community College. I could see a real tie-in from PCC to this event.

■ **UA Blue Chip Leadership Program** – The students of the UA Blue Chip Leadership Program will be doing a site visit to the Tucson House on February 21, from 9 am – 2 pm. A copy of the students' flyer was shared with the CSC. The students are working on an oral history project for the Oracle area, collecting people's memories of the project area over the years. They started in November 2008 as part of the Tucson-Pima Arts Council's Open Studio Tour, where they took people's stories through video-taped interviews. This session at the Tucson House will add to those stories.

5. Historic Preservation: Issues & Opportunity Highlights

Historian and consultant Demion Clinco provided an overview of the historic resource context study he was hired to do for the Oracle area. He highlighted various opportunities that exist, including pursuing a National Register designation for the Oracle corridor and developing a local neon sign district for the area.

Meeting Agenda & Discussions

Questions and comments asked were as follows:

- ♦ *CSC Member:* What about signs that have been painted over? Are there many.
Clinco's Response: Yes, there are quite a few that have been painted over.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* It would be nice to have something sooner rather than later for a sign district.
Staff's Response: One of the OARP Project Staff Team members is working on a project with the Historic Preservation Planner and other City staff that aims to preserve historic signs in eligible areas around Tucson. The project is still in the early phases of development but staff plans to present information to the CSC as soon as it is ready to go public.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* What about the vacant buildings in the area? There are a lot vacant properties that need fixing up.
Clinco's Response: Putting together a nomination for the area would allow for more analysis of which buildings to focus on. With the historic designation comes tax incentives, and its been proven that economic viability follows suit. Property values increase and more investment occurs.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* I am concerned about the neon signs. Will they be on all the time? That can be really hard on people with sensitivity to light or for sleeping at night. Also, flashing lights can trigger seizures. What are we talking about when we say "neon sign district"?
Staff's Response: The "neon sign district" symbolizes an effort to retain and maintain the existing historic signs along Oracle and in the rest of the area. Currently, the sign code makes it difficult for property owners to maintain these older signs, which provide a visual reminder of the area's history. Issues, such as the blinking lights, will be addressed in the project to put in place this historic sign preservation program.
Clinco's Response: Allowing the neon sign's gives the area something that makes it really unique. Having a "neon sign district" will be an incredible opportunity to stand out.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* Will there be blinking lights on the Drachman/Oracle/Main public art piece?
Staff's Response: No, there are no plans for blinking lights.
- ♦ *CSC Member:* When are we going to get the word out to the public about the benefits of historic preservation and the history of the area?
Clinco's Response: Tonight is a great start. Just this discussion, and the fact that there will be the context study, which everyone should have a copy of, begin to make people aware. It will be important to educate the neighborhood associations and the businesses, ideally through the Gateway Business Alliance, with presentations and information.

Break (10 minutes)

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Actions Taken/ Follow-Up Required

6. Historic Preservation Key Objectives: Discussion

OARP Project Manager Rebecca Ruopp provided an overview of the discussion held at the Brown Bag on Feb. 12, 2009. The policies developed based on that meeting were shared with the CSC and audience and discussion ensued.

7. Call to the Audience

There were no questions or comments by the audience, however a CSC member raised the question about what was happening to the City of Tucson's Urban Planning & Design Department and if there would be any impacts on the Oracle Area Revitalization Plan project. OARP Project Manager Rebecca Ruopp responded that the Department was going to be reorganized, with a section going to the City's Development Services Department and another to the City's Community Services Department. The Comprehensive Planning Division, through which the OARP project is managed, will be going to the Community Services Department. At this time, it has been made clear that the project will continue to be supported.

A motion was made by Leon Solomon and seconded by Jason Brown to write a letter to the City Council from the CSC. The vote was unanimous in favor of a letter being written to encourage continued support of the project and in favor of preserving the Department of Urban Planning & Design. Leon Solomon indicated that he would attend the Feb. 24 Mayor and Council meeting and read the letter during the Call to the Audience.

- A letter from the CSC will be sent to the Mayor and Council in support of keeping the Urban Planning & Design Department intact and to encourage continued support for the OARP project.