



Long Range Planning Committee

Semi-Annual Report

August 2015

Submitted by Kathie Legg and Grant Davies Interim Co-Chairs

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to provide the residents of The Town of Chevy Chase (TOCC) with a summary of the work of the Long Range Planning Committee for the period May 2015 through August 2015.

Responsibilities of LRP: The members of the LRP are appointed by the Mayor. The role of the LRP is to identify, monitor and analyze emerging trends and local, county and state activities that could affect the Town's quality of life and recommend appropriate Council actions. It also monitors implementation of the Town's Strategic Plan.¹ The specific areas of focus for the period under review were the Downtown Bethesda Sector Plan and the Purple Line. In addition, because of resignations there were a number of administrative matters that were addressed.

Administrative Matters: Post the May elections the Chairs of the LRP resigned. After being asked by the Mayor, Kathie Legg and Grant Davies agreed to take over the roles of Co-Chairs (subject to a condition noted below). They indicated to the Mayor and the new Council Liaison, Fred Cecere, they would take on the co-chairmanship on condition there was a new commitment to open, honest and transparent discussions within the LRP and between the LRP, the Council and the Community. The Mayor and Council Member Cecere agreed with the Legg and Davies' request. Since May the LRP has operated in an open, honest and transparent manner even when there were differing viewpoints.

Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan (Sector Plan)

Immediately following the interim appointment of Legg and Davies, the Montgomery County Planning Board (MCPB) Staff issued their draft report entitled "*The Bethesda Downtown Sector Plan*" (Staff Draft). Prior to the dissemination of the Staff Draft, the Council had prepared a

¹ <http://www.townofchevyCHASE.org/138/Committees>

plan for the parking lots running between Elm Street Park and Walsh. This was referred to as the Bethesda Commons Plan (BCP). The BCP was not included in the MCPB Staff draft.

The Council asked the LRP to provide advice on four Bethesda Sector Plan issues:

1. To make a recommendation as to whether the Town should continue to seek advice from a real estate attorney and if so which one. The LRP members were unaware that approximately \$100,000 had been committed by the Town to hiring a real estate attorney and a land use consultant. Based on the limited affect the BCP initiative had on the Sector Plan the LRP determined a different approach should be adopted. Accordingly, the LRP recommended that the real estate attorney contract not be renewed. (*The Council did not renew the contract.*)
2. To develop a different approach that would broaden the Town's outreach to other stakeholders in the Downtown Bethesda Sector Plan. The LRP recommended adopting an approach that involved meeting with MCPB members and staff, business leaders, developers, attorneys, and community representatives -- the LRP believed this approach would increase our leverage in the planning process. (*The Council adopted the new approach and has broaden the Town's outreach*)
3. To provide additional background and insights on the role of the Coalition of Bethesda Communities (CBC). The LRP, with support from the Town Manager and his staff, identified the members of the CBC. It is the LRP's understanding that the CBC was initially created to address Chevy Chase Lake development issues. The LRP understood that the Coalition continued to be involved in the Sector Plan. The LRP concluded that the mandate of the CBC and who the members represented (apart from their own views) was not clear. In light of the new approach, the LRP recommended the Council or representatives meet with the CBC to better understand their mandate and the CBC members' authenticity and accountability. (*The Mayor and Council Member Cecere have met with the CBC. The role of the CBC in the broader Sector Plan issues is not clear.*)
4. To support the development of testimony to be given by Council Member Cecere to the MCPB. The LRP developed drafts of testimony. (*Testimony was given to the MCPB on June 24, 2015.*)

Recommendations for LRP related to the Sector Plan: The outgoing LRP leaders recommend the incoming LRP:

1. Reconfirm the Town's priorities regarding the Sector Plan.
2. Continue, as part of the LRP outreach, working to engage stakeholders who will help achieve the center of activity goals set out in the Sector Plan and the BCP. To that end, the LRP should meet with the MCPB, MCPB Staff, and other stakeholders.

3. Reach out to residents on 46th Street (across from the Parking Lots) to understand their perspectives.
4. Continue to make transparent recommendations regarding hiring of outside experts including disclosing the professional fees and expenses budgeted/expended.

Purple Line

When the new leadership took over the chairmanship of the LRP the status of the Purple Line was unclear because of Governor Hogan's concerns about the cost of the line. Initially, the Council asked the LRP to make a recommendation concerning the continued engagement of an outside attorney and lobbying firm. The mandate of the firm had been to put in place language or other requirements that would block the construction of the PL.

In the process of determining how to address the Council's request the LRP learned the Town had expended approximately \$1 million on opposing the proposed PL route and need. The LRP could not identify where any legislative language had been put in place that would accomplish the goal of stopping the PL. The LRP recommended that the legal and lobbying firm be retained for one or two months until the Governor made a decision with respect to the PL. In addition, the Council requested the law firm provide a copy of the 200 page report that had been provided to the Governor on behalf of the Town and the Town hold a public hearing to hear the views of the residents. *(The Council decided to hold a public hearing and determined the contract would not be renewed.)*

Further, while a sub-committee of the LRP, the Mitigation Advisory Group, had spent hundreds of hours trying to gain commitments from the Maryland Transportation Authority (MTA) to put in place public safety, environmental, health, etc. mitigation initiatives, the results (1 addition to the Record of Decision – 4' noise walls and 1 addition to the Request for Proposal (Access bridge to BCCHS) were not be commensurate with the effort.

Governor Hogan issued his decision on June 25, 2015. The Council asked the LRP to develop a matrix of potential actions the Council could take given the Governor's decision. The matrix was developed and provides the Council with options (see TOCC website). Initial briefing sessions were held with the Mayor and Council Member Cecere. A work session was held with the Council on September 1.

Recommendations to Council regarding the LRP: At its final meeting (August 17, 2015) the LRP recommended the following:

1. The LRP responsibilities should be split as follows:
 - a. The LRP should continue to have responsibility for the Bethesda Sector Plan and the long range plan.

- b. The existing LRP responsibilities for the Purple Line should be carved out and made the responsibility of a new Town Committee whose sole focus is the Purple Line and related mitigation activities.
 - c. There has to be continued coordination between the Sector Plan and Purple Line to address common issues. The coordination will be established once the Committees have been formed.
- 2. The new Purple Line Committee should have its own Council Member Liaison and not the same liaison as the LRP.
- 3. There should be an Information Session/Workshop held (open to all) on the environmental suit filed by the Friends of the Crescent Trail. This session should be held soon (Suggestion: no later than September 10).

The LRP would like to thank Tina Copland and Stephen Seidel, prior Co-Chairs, and the Town staff for their support.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathie Legg and Grant Davies