

**CITY OF LAREDO
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
M2017-SC-10
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
1110 HOUSTON STREET
LAREDO, TEXAS 78040
August 30, 2017
5:30 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pete Saenz called the meeting to order.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Pete Saenz led in the pledge of allegiance.

III. MOMENT OF SILENCE

Mayor Pete Saenz led a moment of silence.

IV. ROLL CALL

In attendance:

Pete Saenz

Alejandro "Alex" Perez, Jr.

Alberto Torres Jr.

Norma "Nelly" Vielma

George Altgelt

Roberto Balli

Jose A. Valdez, Jr.

Horacio De Leon

Cynthia Collazo

Robert Eads

Kristina L. Hale

Mayor

Mayor Pro-Tempore, District III

District IV

District V

District VII

District VIII

City Secretary

City Manager

Deputy City Manager

Assistant City Manager

Acting City Attorney

Citizen comments

None

V. FINAL READING OF ORDINANCES

Motion to waive the final readings of Ordinances 2017-O-104, 2017-O-105, and 2017-O-113.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt

Second: Cm. Perez

For: 5

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

1. 2017-O-104 Authorizing the termination and release of interest of a 10' wide utility

easement identified as line "B", recorded in volume 189, pages 272-273, 277-278, Deed Records, Webb County, Texas and more fully described in exhibit "A". Utilities Department has determined the easement identified as line "B", is not being utilized and has been relocated along Black Diamond Street and Santo Tomas Street in the Las Minas Industrial Park Phase I. Therefore, it is being requested that the easement identified as Line "B" be abandoned and terminated.

Motion to adopt Ordinance 2017-O-104.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt
Second: Cm. Perez
For: 5

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

2. 2017-O-105 Amending Chapter 28, Article IX entitled "Public Right-of-Way Management" of the Laredo Code of Ordinances by adding Division 12, Section 28-243 through 28-253 regarding the siting of wireless communications facilities in the public rights-of-way; and providing an effective date of September 1, 2017. (As Amended)

Motion to adopt Ordinance 2017-O-105.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt
Second: Cm. Perez
For: 5

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

3. 2017-O-113 Amending the Zoning Ordinance (Map) of the City of Laredo by repealing Ordinance 2014-O-026, and authorizing issuance of a Special Use Permit for a Restaurant Selling Alcohol, on Lots 1A, & 1B, Block 1, San Isidro/McPherson Subdivision, Unit II, located at 9710 & 9720 McPherson Rd.; providing for publication and effective date. ZC-56-2017 District VI

Motion to adopt Ordinance 2017-O-113.

Moved: Cm. Altgelt
Second: Cm. Perez
For: 5

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

VI. STAFF REPORTS

4. Presentations by firms, designers/architects that submitted proposals in response to the Request For Qualifications for the Masterplan and Design of the Boulevard of the Americas, with discussion and possible action on a selection from among presenters for contract award and any matters related thereto. Listed alphabetically are the firms/presenters as follows:

Horacio De Leon, City Manager, explained that each group would give a 15-minute presentation followed with 10 minutes for questions and answers. Mayor Saenz added that each group will wait outside of Council Chambers when they are not presenting to avoid an unfair advantage to any group.

Abrazos Partners Joint Venture

Memo Cavazos of Abrazos Partners Joint Venture played a brief video highlighting the historical impact of Interstate 35 on Laredo's residences, citizens, economy, and aesthetics and how the green space in the first mile of the Interstate before entering Mexico can be renovated to memorialize the culture and prestige of Laredo. Mr. Cavazos noted that the Boulevard of the Americas is an important area because it is the first impression of the United States for northbound traffic and the last thing people see when they leave the country to enter Mexico. He introduced Frank Rotnofsky and Viviana Frank with Frank Architects, Mario Peña and Rick Soliz with Hickey-Peña Architects, Monica Guajardo with Slay Architecture, Robert Martinez with Howland Engineering, Victor De Anda with Synergy Structural Engineering, and Jim Carrillo with Half Associates.

Mario Peña recognized staff members who have contributed to this project.

Viviana Frank stated that many Laredoans have shared experiences of visiting Nuevo Laredo. She explained that the tenfold growth of Laredo in 1755 demonstrates that power of a port along a trade route. The four blocks must resonate on four levels, as requested by citizens: 1) connect the neighborhoods east and west of the interstate, 2) celebrate the whole city, 3) honor and celebrate the port while demonstrating global forethought, and 4) honor the generational connection.

Mr. Peña voiced his opinion that the Boulevard of the Americas should be implemented by Laredo's own citizens through an inclusive feedback loop.

Jim Carrillo displayed a video showing the contemporary artistic structures built by Weingarten Group, who are collaborating with Abrazos Partners, as an example of an interactive art structure for the Boulevards of the Americas.

Mr. Peña recalled a comment from a citizen at a previous public forum: "Make it great, but don't spend too much money." He noted that very few moments in a community's history have generational impacts. Laredo's Boulevard of the Americas has the ability to have a lasting beneficial impact to the city.

Cm. Balli asked what the group intends to design to discourage the area from being used as a home by the homeless population. Mr. Peña noted that bringing in native grasslands and plants, which are not comfortable to rest on, may be an effective solution.

Mrs. Frank added that by making the area more attractive, more people will walk through the Boulevards and convene near it. Active areas decrease the likelihood that they will be used for camping.

Cm. Altgelt noted that a consultant suggested accepting that the area will be frequented by homeless individuals and incorporating amenities that they can use, like showers and bathrooms. The consultant also suggested a contrasting approach like planting long stretches of agave, which are unhospitable.

Mr. Carrillo reported that the overwhelming desire for the area in question has been a boulevard rather than a park. An advantage of Abrazos Partners is that this space will

be created by Laredoans for Laredoans.

Mr. Peña confirmed that the wishes of the citizens who attended public forums is public information on the event Facebook pages, and the City forwarded the same information to all vendors during the RFQ process.

Cm. Vielma voiced her opinion that while she does not question the qualifications of this partnership, she expected to see a conceptual design of the Boulevards, which the group did not provide during their presentation.

Frank Rotnofsky clarified that the group intended to implement the desires of the public after gathering their opinion of designs moving forward. He voiced his opinion that given the collaboration, the group felt presumptuous to propose a design.

Mr. Peña added that the second phase of their project is a master plan for the Boulevards area. A design would be conceptualized at that point.

Cm. Torres voiced his agreement with Cm. Vielma's expectations.

Mr. Peña explained that the group is governed by the American Institute of Architects and the Texas Board of Architectural Examiners, which prohibit them ethically from engaging in an unpaid design competition. He projected a timeline of a few weeks to develop a design.

Mrs. Frank clarified that this project is a master plan project.

Cm. Balli confirmed that there is some TxDOT funding set aside for this project.

Mr. Rotnofsky clarified that the group will break the project down into affordable segments.

Asakura Robinson

Brendan Wittstruck of Asakura Robinson noted that two members of the presentation group were unable to attend due to the severe flooding in Houston. He explained that Asakura Robinson is a planning, urban design, and landscape architecture firm based out of Houston and Austin that desires to work with the public sector in less-impacted communities. He listed previous community engagement projects in Houston and Austin, notably the Southern Downtown Public Realm Plan and Washington Avenue Livable Centers Study in Houston and the South Central Waterfront Vision Framework Plan in Austin. These projects' objectives were to provide recreational and learning centers that also provide features like storm water management. The firm reviews the potential streetscapes and how the area will serve surrounding businesses.

Mr. Wittstruck reviewed previous urban design and landscape architecture projects in Houston and McAllen which included reconfiguring multiple transportation systems into a more cohesive system, parks, and community vision plans. He reviewed previous traffic engineering and management projects in California, like street markets.

The suggested steps for a successful project with Asakura Robinson are to start with engagement, rethink transportation, strengthen community connections, and promote

local use and community health.

Mr. Wittstruck outlined Asakura Robinson's plan for the completion of this project: build off of local community design efforts like the AIA charrette. The group highly prioritizes management of traffic demands, like removing through traffic from local streets, implementing coordinated signaling, and exploring alternatives to idling and queuing at the border crossing. Safe and comfortable spaces will be provided by connecting neighborhood residents and visitors to jobs and attractions. He explained that the streets can be made more pedestrian-friendly by shortening the crossing distances, adjusting signal times, and adding shade and moments of interest along the routes. Asakura Robinson will design the Boulevards for all users, including safe areas and activities for children and parents and serving the needs of all populations, ages, and abilities. The group will create a local destination, drawing users to the Boulevards, by encouraging shopping and local businesses to utilize the area, providing monuments and signage to celebrate Laredo's history, and making it easier to get to and from the parks from downtown and the surrounding neighborhoods. The increased local use will promote healthy lifestyles and improved air quality with added nature via trees and shrubs in the design.

Mr. Wittstruck reported that the next steps for Asakura Robinson are to develop a phasing strategy, identify funding sources, and identify regulatory and engineering hurdles to overcome during the project. A concept plan and architectural renderings have already been initiated. He voiced his opinion that a road diet would greatly connect the project area with the surrounding neighborhoods, removing some of the lanes on each side. He noted that the site is easy to miss, and a cross street can be closed to make the site more visible while keeping it intact.

Mr. Wittstruck stated that homelessness is a difficult problem because of the need for social services as well as the possibility of introducing criminal activity in the area. He noted that making the area more attractive and utilized by tourists and visitors will help decrease camping. He voiced his opposition to implement features that discourage homeless visitors, like metal bars in the middle of a bench. It is not the intention of Asakura Robinson to design projects to specifically discourage homeless occupation or exclude particular groups of people from using a site.

Munoz FR.EE

Ed Quiroga, Project Administrator for Metaform Studio, stated that the group's collaboration for this project centers on monuments.

Steven Tillotson of Muñoz Architects noted that the group thinks deeply about Laredo's border and the shared space between the United States and Mexico. He recalled a recent experience in which Muñoz assisted with the Laredo Master Plan. A brief video was presented in which Henry Muñoz emphasized the notion that Laredo should not be the backdoor to the United States but instead a centerpiece.

Mr. Tillotson reviewed a revitalization project the group is currently working on in downtown San Antonio in which they are turning an old drainage ditch into a new riverwalk. It is a flood control project that will also attract people and business to it. Mr. Tillotson noted that the Boulevards of the Americas project would address the need to cater to a critical transportation port while also providing a safe plaza for pedestrians. The serious traffic consequences must be addressed. He proposed that port of entry

traffic be subverted underground. However, the bus terminal inspection station may preclude that possibility.

Sergio Villarreal presented a museum built in Mexico City as an anchor project to transform the surrounding industrial area into a walkable attraction. The group also won the project to design and build the new airport of Mexico City, which is considered a revolutionary concept for airports. The design allows for natural airflow and sunlight for controlling the internal climate of the airport. Mr. Villarreal reviewed additional projects to progress their cities' economic development. He reported the estimated population growth of Laredo to be 79.4% by 2046.

Mr. Villarreal presented the group's plan for the Boulevards of the Americas. First the group would implement a shopping and relaxation environment for travelers when they first enter the United States after going through border crossing and processing. Next, the group intends to incorporate an area for trade and cultural appreciation. Past the trade and culture zone is an area to serve as a city plaza that connects City Hall, the District Court, and other governmental offices. While the fractions serve different purposes, the entire area is meant to be cohesive and connected.

Mr. Villarreal noted that lot sizes restrict the area's flexibility. Six lanes act as walls around the site, which will prevent pedestrians from enjoying the public space. He recommended reducing the number of lanes of traffic on each side of the space. He also suggested turning the four lots into one large plot for more possibilities.

Mr. Villarreal reported two proposals for the vision of the site. The first is to implement an iconic structure, like a large ring to welcome and unite travelers just before they cross the border, symbolizing a connection between the United States and Mexico. The second vision proposal is a unity tower made of bricks because of Laredo's historical reputation for manufacturing the best and cheapest bricks in Texas. The tower would be about the same height as the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C.

Cm. Altgelt voiced his concern that all of the firm's projects are very expensive. He asked if there is any assurance of best value for the work on the space. Mr. Tillotson clarified that the group proposes a range of small to large projects and uses of the land, many of which are modest ways to revitalize the area. He noted, however, that Laredo is approaching a crossroads which will require a larger vision which does not require the local population to bear the burden of recognizing the city's future needs.

Cm. Balli noted that three Council Members, Gonzalez, Rodriguez, and San Miguel, were not present to hear the group's presentations. He voiced his wish that they watch the presentations so that Council can take a vote on this item at the next Council meeting. Some funds have been earmarked from last year's district priority funds for this project. TxDOT also committed some funds, and all Council Members should be able to see the presentations.

Mayor Saenz voiced his agreement with Cm. Balli's idea and added that opening up the discussion to Council Members sharing their conceptual ideas for the area would be beneficial.

Cm. Altgelt countered that based on the presentations, Council can easily narrow down the candidates. Two of the three presenters directly stated that they intend to

gather public input, which makes the third candidate easy to eliminate. He suggested eliminating that candidate from consideration, noting that the remaining two candidates' visualizations appear to be within the City's budget.

Cm. Balli reiterated that some district priority funds were committed to this project, which can go toward the design. TxDOT monies can also pay for some of the work. He suggested that Council commit to a feasible design and then pursue remaining funding sources. He repeated that all Council Members should be able to see the presentations, as the ones absent may have had other commitments during this special called Council meeting.

Cm. Torres stated that while the Council Members should all view the presentations, those present made an effort to attend the meeting. Scheduling another presentation will not be necessary as the absent Council Members can watch a video of this meeting online.

Motion to take no action and place this item on the next meeting agenda in order to take action.

Moved: Cm. Balli

Second: Cm. Perez

For: 5

Against: 1

Abstain: 0

Mayor Saenz

Cm. Altgelt

Cm. Perez

Cm. Torres

Cm. Vielma

Cm. Balli

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn.

Moved: Cm. Torres

Second: Cm. Perez

For: 5

Against: 0

Abstain: 0