

For Council Meeting: November 9, 2009
Agenda Item: 11.2 (b)



CITY OF SALEM,
OREGON
City Council
555 Liberty Street SE, Room 220
Salem, Oregon 97301
503-588-6159

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Council
From: Councilor Diana Dickey, Ward 5
Subject: Traffic mitigation on Columbia Street NE

Motion:

I move to direct staff to return with information on the process for engineering Columbia Street NE, at the residential portion of the street beginning at the alley adjacent to 1240 Columbia Street NE and going west, in order to physically prohibit the infiltration of commercial and industrially oriented traffic and still provide local access to the alley adjacent to 1240 Columbia Street for local residential traffic, as many residents have garages and driveways that are accessed by the alley.

Discussion:

On June 22, 2009, City Council held a public hearing to consider granting a Conditional Use Permit at 2303 Fairgrounds Rd. NE, to allow a drive-up window for the Subway Sandwich shop that was proposed to be built at the site, and has since commenced construction. At the time, City Council voted to approve the Conditional Use Permit with certain conditions. One of the conditions was to require the driveway for the restaurant and adjacent business to be accessed from Fairgrounds Rd. NE, instead of Columbia St. NE, as indicated in the Site Plan. Many residents expressed their concerns to the Council about the ability of their residential street, immediately to the west of the site, to handle the additional traffic that would be generated by the retail business being proposed for the site. The intent of the decision, as I understood it, was to protect the residential neighborhood from the effect of the increase of traffic on their quiet, somewhat narrow street. The applicant subsequently withdrew the Conditional Use Permit application, therefore removing the condition of siting the driveway on Fairgrounds.

The rationale for siting the driveway for this lot onto Columbia Street comes from the Salem Transportation System Plan which states "Properties with frontage along two streets shall take primary access from the street with the lower classification." (Transportation System Management Element). However, this site is located in the North Gateway Urban Renewal Area. The Urban Renewal Plan for this area states one of its objectives to be, "E. To manage traffic in the Urban Renewal Area so that residential neighborhoods will be protected from the infiltration of commercial and industrially oriented traffic."

It appears that The Transportation Plan is in conflict with the Urban Renewal Plan. However, those with a vested interest in the Urban Renewal Area are likely to look to the Urban Renewal Plan as the City's and/or Urban Renewal Agency's guiding principle. Additionally, Section 404 of the North Gateway Urban Renewal Plan states, "This plan has been prepared in conformity with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan."

As the objectives of the Urban Renewal Area Plan are clearly stated and it is also clearly stated that the Plan conforms with the Salem Area Comprehensive Plan, then it would lead one to a logical conclusion that the Urban Renewal Area Plan would be the guiding principle for development within the Urban Renewal Area. To present the Transportation Plan as the guiding standard for siting the driveway on Columbia Street after the parcel is well into the planning stage for development when most changes are difficult, if not legally impossible, is unfair to the residents, and also unfair to a developer who may find himself in the middle of a controversy when he has followed all the rules according to City codes. It creates the impression that the Urban Renewal Area Plan was not followed in this situation.

From a layman's perspective, when looking at the site, it is easy to see how even a small increase in traffic will have a major effect on this narrow street that travels through a well-established neighborhood and directly adjacent to a school. At that juncture there is also an awkward 3 way intersection that could cause difficulties for motorists unfamiliar with the neighborhood. The new building is located toward the front of the lot near Fairgrounds Rd., it is extremely difficult, to have good visibility to turn left from Columbia onto Fairgrounds Rd., increasing the possibility that patrons of the businesses will use Columbia Street to go around the block so they can access the traffic light at Highland St. and Fairgrounds Rd. Therefore, I would like to proceed with asking staff to bring back the information for the process of prohibiting commercial and industrially oriented traffic from infiltrating the residential neighborhood, as stated in the North Gateway Urban Renewal Plan, which conforms with the City's.