

Minutes
Planning, Development and Real Estate Committee
January 10, 2008

The meeting was called to order at 12:20 p.m. Present were:

Committee Members:

Mr. Christopher Zimmerman (Chair)
Ms. Elizabeth Hewlett
Mr. Jim Graham
Mr. Peter Benjamin
Mr. Emeka Moneme
Mr. Marcell Solomon
Mr. William D. Euille
Mr. Gordon Linton
Mrs. Catherine Hudgins
Mr. Anthony Giancola

Mr. Jeff McKay, who will be joining the Board on January 24, 2008, was also in attendance.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Graham moved that the Joint Development Guidelines action item be moved to the February 28, 2008 Planning, Development and Real Estate Committee meeting with Mr. Solomon seconding. The agenda was amended to reflect that change.

Mr. Graham and Mr. Zimmerman directed staff to provide an analysis of the differences between the current and proposed guidelines in relation to the problems identified by the Joint Development Task Force. Mr. Solomon requested staff to engage in dialog with Prince George's County to address the County's comments before next month's meeting.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the December 13, 2007 meeting were approved as submitted.

Action Item

A. Silver Spring Transit Center

Mr. Bottigheimer sought Committee concurrence and approval to forward to the Board, approval of the Amendment of the Silver Spring Station General Plans to accommodate a minor change resulting from the land use review process and related Memorandum of Understanding with the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and Montgomery County, Maryland.

Mr. Benjamin moved approval of the motion with Mr. Graham seconding.

Information Item

A. 7000 Series Rail Car Report

Mr. Zimmerman commented that the age of WMATA's rail fleet is one of the possible sources of recent rail car problems. The oldest cars are 30+ years old. In the past, it was planned that rail cars should last about 35 years, with a mid-life overhaul. It had been anticipated that the 1000 series rail cars would be ultimately replaced. Mr. Zimmerman further stated that the 7000 series rail cars will be one of the largest capital items on which the Board will make a decision.

Mr. Kubicek provided the Committee with an update on the 7000 series Rail car concept status. He stated that staff has been reviewing the different fleet configurations, train line compatibility issues, life cycle costing for maintenance of rail cars, etc. The 7000 series Rail car is the next-generation fleet in development for use in WMATA's rail network. This fleet design is focusing on improved amenities for passengers such as redesigned seating, changes to the exterior such as retractable electric coupler heads, and more reliable service equipment platforms. The data network being reviewed will improve reliability and performance of the equipment overall and will place more information at the operator level to evaluate and resolve equipment operation issues.

Mr. Graham asked who initiated a re-design of the rail cars as a project. Mr. Catoe responded that since WMATA is looking to purchase new rail vehicles, staff reviewed the current rail car issues from passenger comfort to operating issues. Mr. Catoe informed the Committee that he has asked WMATA's engineering staff to put together changes to the rail cars that have a direct impact on the issues the Authority is currently experiencing. WMATA has not used a consulting firm to assist with concept development.

Mr. Zimmerman stated that this is the first time the rail car has been re-designed since the original design in the seventies. Mr. Catoe stated that he believes it is his responsibility to bring to the Board issues that staff sees with the interior and exterior of the rail cars and the power systems, and to bring recommendations on the best next step.

Mr. Zimmerman asked if the 7000 series rail cars were purchased and placed in operation, would they be compatible with existing rail cars. Mr. Kubicek responded that staff is exploring the compatibility issue of the rail cars; however, there are some differences that cannot be engineered because retrofitting has been rendered obsolete due to changes in technology. Mr. Zimmerman stated that staff will need to determine whether the benefits of the 7000 series rail cars compensate for the inoperability with the rail cars currently in service.

In response to a question from Mr. Moneme regarding interoperability, Mr. Kubicek responded that the 7000 series platform is about five or six grades above the 6000 series. Mr. Kubicek and Mr. Francis explained that the 6000 series rail cars were designed to be compatible with older-series rail cars, including the 1000 series. The prior 6000 series rail cars were not designed to take advantage of the increasingly advanced technology available at that time.

Mr. Moneme asked how many 7000 series rail cars are anticipated to be purchased. Mr. Kubicek responded that 128 are planned with the Dulles project and 300 in the Rohr fleet. Staff is putting together schedules for when future rail cars will need to be purchased.

Mr. Benjamin stated that he appreciates the early notice and that it is important to understand the implications of the mixture of rail car series. The new rail cars will engender discussion about on which lines the new cars will be used and in what proportion. Also, the new rail cars will require investments in terms of employee training, equipment needed to maintain the new rail cars, etc.

Ms. Hewlett stated that she was pleased that the new Rail car design eliminates the poles that are a problem for passengers who are blind or have low vision.

Mr. Zimmerman commented there was a forum in July 2006 that produced recommendations for the rail cars to be funded from the Dulles project. Mr. Kubicek stated that a response had been provided to the Riders' Advisory Counsel (RAC). Staff evaluated the recommendations, some of which were incorporated in the design concept for the 7000 series rail cars.

Mr. Catoe stressed that the staff would have to do a lot of work quickly. If the federal government approves the Full Funding Grant Agreement for the Dulles Project, a few months lead time will be required to purchase the vehicles for the system. He also stated that staff will have to bring this item back to the Board, rather quickly, in different phases for their input.

Meeting was adjourned at 1p.m.