

Senate Community Relations Committee meeting
12:00 – 1:30 p.m., Room 272, Hillman Library
April 17, 2012

Attendees: Whitney Bosnyak, Oakland Planning and Development Corporation; G. Reynolds Clark, Vice Chancellor for Community Initiatives; Laurie Cohen, ULS, Co-Chair, CRC; Mary Davidson, Oakland Business Improvement District; Maggie Folan, Pharmacy; David Givens, GPSA; Marian Hampton, ULS; Peter Hart, *University Times*; Linda Hartman, HSLs; Patrick Loughlin, Bioengineering; Tara Sherry-Torres, OPDC; Trevor Smith, CHS; Martha Ann Terry, GSPH, Co-Chair, CRC; Patricia Weiss, HSLs, Senate Liaison; Gwendolyn Watkins, Community Relations; John Wilds, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Community Relations.

Old Business: The minutes were approved as read.

Guest Presentation: David Wohlwill from the Port Authority spoke to us about Bus Rapid Transit. Sustainable Pittsburgh began a study in August, 2011 in collaboration with over 30 organizations to look at improving the quality of transit service. BRT would go from Downtown to Oakland, and possibly beyond, to Squirrel Hill, Shadyside, East Liberty, and the Hill District, though this is still just in the discussion phase. BRT will be tailored to each unique corridor.

BRT aims to reduce travel time, reduce gaps in use, and ease overcrowding. Key intersections are being identified, and one option is to extend bus lanes in targeted areas. Other options include using articulated buses, with three entrances, and bus stops that would be nicer than the current ones with accurate ETA information available. There may also be a way to coordinate traffic signals with bus travel.

Site visits have been made to New York City where they are trying to implement a similar system. Mr. Wohlwill emphasized that none of these changes have to be implemented all at once, but can be phased in in stages, as funding allows. At this point, costs have not been determined and funding is still being identified for the implementation.

There will be a series of public meetings later this month to discuss BRT and alternatives. They are in the Hill District on April 24, Oakland on April 25th, the East End on April 26th, and Uptown on May 8th.

Peter Hart asked if PAT has expectations of acquiring the funding for BRT. David said that one potential source of funding is an FTA program called Small Starts (for projects under \$250 million), along with state, local, and private money. Martha Ann Terry asked about the BRT routes to the East End. Forbes, Center, or Baum, and Fifth Avenue through Shadyside to Homewood are possibilities. John Wilds asked how soon after the public meetings decisions will be made and David said that the study ends early next year.

Community Partner Report: Tara Sherry-Torres from Oakland Planning and Development Corporation gave us an update on the Oakland 2025 plans. One recommendation is to create an umbrella group to bring together all of the groups affected by the plan to function sort of like an Oakland Community Council. They would review development project documents, and allow all of the constituents to be represented. There are already similar groups, like the South Side Community Forum and Uptown Partners. The goal is to make residents feel more engaged in the process and keep them informed. Residents would be able to build their own relationships with the developers.

The various action teams from the Oakland 2025 planning process are still working on projects, such as the Rock Alley group which expanded into the Oakland Green Team, working on the connection down to the Eliza Furnace trail on Second Avenue and other greening projects. Oakwatch: The Oakland Code Enforcement Project is another one of the action teams. They maintain a Top Ten list of the worst properties and are working with the Student Government Board on this endeavor. One of the goals of the Oakland 2025 plan is to make Oakland a high-tech destination, and the group is looking to the state government to create partnerships. Innovation Oakland is working on smart technology applications in signage and way-finding systems, along with public art projects in Oakland, which will dovetail with the 2025 plan.

University Update: John Wilds updated us on construction projects around campus. Construction continues on the ten-story dormitory being built on Fifth Avenue, across from the Book Center, and a five-floor addition is underway at the Graduate School of Public Health. The addition to the labs in Salk Hall is proceeding, now that soil stabilization has been addressed, and there are smaller projects taking place, such as those at the School of Engineering, floor by floor.

In the Oak Hill area, there is an ongoing issue with the contractor falling behind on constructing a building planned as a community center. When the university purchased land for the Peterson Events Center to be built upon, cash was given to the Oak Hill community for an office building to be constructed. All of the floors would be devoted to community undertakings except for one section, to be used by the Health and Physical Education Department for research use. The building was never constructed because the developer's financing fell through, and now the HPA Department and the community are unhappy with the state of things. The University is trying to accelerate the process and resolve the issue, but it is taking time. Articles in the *Post-Gazette* have not accurately portrayed the situation, and some in the community believe that the University has reneged on its commitment.

As an update to the situation with the bomb threats, Renny Clark said that the situation was unprecedented and the University's number one priority was for everyone's safety. The Chancellor stated that he was humbled by the way in which the Pitt community has stepped up their support. At the last Senate Council meeting a law school student commented that the bombers, rather than trying to destroy Pitt, failed, and instead made the university better and more supportive.

Community Service Update: Gwen Watkins reported that April is Pitt Partnership for Food month, and there are collection bins all over campus. Because there are fewer students around now, less is being donated, but the Virtual Food Drive is an alternative way to donate. Peter asked if the University has contingency plans if or when PAT cuts transit routes. The activities associated with the 225 Acts of Caring project are still going on, and even with security issues due to bomb threats, there are blood drives on campus today. The blood drive group was lauded for continuing their efforts in spite of the logistical barriers. The sock drive netted a record number of 3000 pairs of socks, and there are more activities on the Pitt 225 web site at <http://www.commrel.pitt.edu/ActsofCaringProjects.html> .

Student Government Update: David Givens announced that he will be leaving the committee to take up his position as president of GPSA. He was congratulated and told that he would be missed by all. In his report, David told us that Governor Corbett spoke to the students at Pitt in March, and they met with Senator Jay Costa the following week. Both SGB and GPSA are working with Senator Casey on trail refurbishment on the Eliza Furnace Trail. Pittsburgh Student Government Council is working on transit issues with PAT. CCAC in particular is in danger of severe cuts to bus routes for their students.

Our next meeting will be the field trip to UCSUR. We will tour the neighborhood and learn more about the neighborhood information system, PNCIS. Details will follow on e-mail. The meeting will be held from noon to 2:00 on Tuesday, May 15th.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

Submitted May 9, 2012

Laurie Cohen and Marian Hampton