

**Mt. Pleasant Planning Commission &
Downtown Development Authority – Mission/Pickard
Minutes of the Joint Meeting
March 7, 2024**

I. Call to Order:

Hoenic called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

II. Roll Call:

A. Present (Planning Commission): Devenney, Friedrich, Haveles, Hoenic, Irwin, Kingsworthy, Liesch, Ortman
Absent: Nicholas

B. Present (Downtown Development Authority – Mission/Pickard): Desentz, Jaloszynski, Krapohl, Smith, LaBelle II, Powers, VanDorin
Absent: Embrey, Holton, Hunter, Roberts

Staff: Manuela Powidayko, Michelle Sponseller, Stacie Tewari, Jason Moore (City), Jack Hofweber (MDOT)

III. Additions / Deletions to Agenda:

Motion by Ortman, support by Irwin to approve the agenda.

Motion approved unanimously.

IV. New Business:

A. Introduction by Staff about the Mission Street Corridor Plan

Powidayko introduced the topic of discussion and agenda for the evening, welcoming the Planning Commission and DDA to engage in a discussion and Q&A at the end of the presentation by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Powidayko reviewed the City’s Master Plan goals and objectives for Mission Street, including the Plan’s next steps, which calls for the Planning Commission and the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to partner with MDOT and Central Michigan University (CMU) to reimagine Mission Street as a vital business district and front door to the community and university.

Powidayko provided a brief history recap about 2008, when MDOT approached the City with a Boulevard proposed design to improve Mission’s traffic flow and safety. Powidayko explained that MDOT had harder design standards that created a design that was too wide for the corridor with several truck loons that encroached private property. Powidayko provided information about the City Commission’s decision to turn the project down at the time as it failed to achieve the City’s goal for a more walkable Mission Street. Powidayko concluded that the narrow Boulevard concept that the city wanted at the time is now possible due to changes at MDOT’s rules and design parameters.

Powidayko summarized the improvements that happened along Mission Street since then, including the addition of five new “grid streets”, cross access connections between businesses, and a new zoning ordinance that requires a building form and landscaping improvements that help support a more walkable and bikeable environment.

Powidayko reviewed the current conceptual design for Mission Street that was adopted in the 2020 City Master Plan and the issues with it (the plan does not include space for bikers and cannot fit within most of Mission Street available rights-of-way, making the project unfeasible. Powidayko also shared the concern of the proposed design potentially rerouting traffic and impacting economic development along the corridor.

Powidayko summarized the City and MDOT’s efforts since the Master Plan adoption and presented a design alternative that could be more easily implemented, and introduced MDOT’s presentation, which would include findings regarding traffic flow and safety if such alternative design would to be implemented.

Powidayko provided examples of different boulevard designs across the State in Mt Pleasant, East Lansing and Traverse City. Powidayko ended with information about the City Commission’s approval of Progressive AE as the consulting firm who will be assisting us with the development of a Mission Street Corridor Plan throughout 2024, after the City’s release of a Request for Qualifications. Powidayko also confirmed that the City was able to successfully secure funding through the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the Mission/Pickard Downtown Development Authority who will share the cost for the project at a 75/25 ratio, respectively.

B. Update by the Michigan Department of Transportation

i. MDOT’s presentation: new data collected on traffic patterns along Mission Street & boulevard feasibility analysis

Jack Hofweber, MDOT’s Mt Pleasant Transportation Service Center Manager, introduced himself and Brian Atkinson, MDOT’s Operations Engineer as the back-up for questions.

Hofweber summarized new traffic count data collected during the fall of 2023 showing a decrease in average daily traffic counts from 26,500 in 2007 to 21,100 in 2023. Hofweber also provided information about an expected 0.5% growth onto the projected 2043 traffic count, which would reach 23,200. Turning directions were also captured. Hofweber summarized the three options tested by the Lansing Office for Mission Street: 5-lane section (as-is), boulevard (as narrow as possible), and 2-lane roundabouts at intersections. The study area was the south section of Mission Street, from Blue Grass to High Street.

Hofweber shared delay data for each intersection comparing how the three options would perform in 2043, when compared how the current conditions perform today. Hofweber concluded that if Mission Street is left as-is, delay times would go up, while the boulevard design would reduce delays in the future, even when compared to the current scenario. Hofweber also shared that roundabouts would reduce delays even further, significantly improving traffic flow during rush hours.

Hofweber provided information about average speeds comparing how the three options would perform in 2043, when compared how the current conditions perform today. Average speeds include when cars stop at intersections, therefore the expected average speed is currently 25 miles per hour. As-Is scenario would increase congestion, whereas the boulevard option would keep traffic flowing generally at similar average speeds as today. Roundabouts could not be analyzed due to program restrictions, but it could be assumed that it would perform similarly as the boulevard.

Hofweber shared delay data from Blue Grass to High Street, concluding that the boulevard option helps keep delay times close to current numbers in the future with increased vehicular traffic.

Hofweber presented a Crash Heat Map illustrating the location of all crashes from High Street to Blue Grass Road from 2018 to 2023, totaling 818 crashes, six of which were incapacitating injuries (suspected serious injury which prevents normal activities and generally requires hospitalization). He also added that there were seven crashes that involved pedestrians, two of which were serious), and one pedestrian fatality, which happened in January of 2024. Hofweber provided a zoomed in information about the intersection of Broomfield and South Mission, which had 185 of those crashes, two of which were incapacitating and two of which involved pedestrians (one serious).

Hofweber also mentioned that MDOT had received in 2008 \$4.4 million in FHWA Safety Grant to rebuild South of Mission Street, from Blue Grass to Appian Way, and that the City voted it down during the Oct 7, 2009 City of Mt Pleasant Council meeting. He added that at that time, the City had to contribute with a Match of \$38,500, however, Hofweber clarified that since the population decreased from being above 25,000 people to now 22,000; that the City would not be required to pay a match if there was funding available for a project today. Hofweber said that at such time, it was a State project, but

now, the project would be led by the City, which in his opinion has a greater chance of success.

Hofweber discussed how the Federal Highway Administration now provides greater flexibility with Gold Route Requirements (routes designated as the “National Truck Network”), which now allows MDOT to be more flexible with the redesign of Mission Street. He also mentioned how narrow boulevards have become more common elsewhere and that this will be a City-led project.

Hofweber showed a slide that summarizes the potential next steps to MDOT and the City as it relates to Mission Street, highlighting that in 2026 and 2027, MDOT is aiming to resurface from Old S. Mission to High Street and then from High Street to Corporate Drive, respectively, which will give Mission Street another five or six years. This is an effort to try to extend the life of the road as much as possible before there will be a need for a full reconstruction, which will likely may within the next 10 years. Hofweber concluded with the importance to know exactly what the City wants before that, so MDOT can program such reconstruction according to the local plan. He listed that the City has options at this time, such as leaving as is, a boulevard and/or roundabout, and that if the City choses a route that improves safety along the corridor (not the as-is option, but either the boulevard, the roundabouts, or both), then MDOT will be able to seek safety funds to supplement the construction costs. Hofweber also noted that in addition to safety funds, there are the “TAP” grants (Transportation Alternatives Program), which is an opportunity to fund landscaping, street lighting, plantings, street furniture, etc. For the TAP grant, MDOT would help the City with the application and help sponsor and with the required match.

ii. Q&A and Discussion

Commissioner Irwin asked what lane widths are allowed by MDOT. Hofweber replied that MDOT technically requires 12-foot lanes, but MDOT have already marked 11-foot (perhaps even 10-foot) lanes in the model and that MDOT has more flexibility now with lane widths. Commissioner Irwin asked if wider is better, especially for snow removal and larger vehicles. Hofweber replied that wider is faster, not necessarily better, as that depends on the context (with the example that in urban environments, MDOT uses lane widths to control speeds, and 11-feet is very common in County and City roads). Hofweber concluded that it will be up to the City to decide what kind of lane widths the City wants.

Commissioner Irwin asked for a clarification, if Mission Street will be redone anyways in 10 years. MDOT said that yes, they will be looking at programing this work in 10 years, as they believe that ten years is the life-expectancy for Mission even with the resurfacing work. Commissioner Irwin asked if this work would be done in the near-term such as three years and Hofweber answered that the reconstruction in three years would not be possible with the current funding situation.

Commissioner Friedrich asked how much the boulevard and roundabout concepts could reduce crashes. Hofweber said that there are programs that could run the analysis on the boulevard and roundabout, but MDOT has not done that yet. Atkinson provided the additional comments, stating that you may still have crashes in roundabouts but there would be much less crashes. Hofweber added that roundabouts are very effective in reducing severity crashes (up to 80 and 90%), and MDOT has seen that happen in Claire and north Midland, so they have a very good idea of what roundabouts can do.

Commissioner Ortman shared that she liked the data but highlighted how while there was a student population loss in the past, the previous year data has shown an increase close to the population from five years ago, therefore traffic patterns would be more similar this year to what it was in 2023. MDOT said that they gather traffic count data every year and could look into the history and compare 2024 data (once gathered) to the 2023 data. There won't be the same level of detail as the 2023 analysis that MDOT did for this design analysis exercise, but it will still be able to show a traffic volume comparison.

DDA Member VanDoren asked for a clarification regarding the “Gold routes” and if the designation comes from having trucks on the road. Hofweber explained that such designation came from Congress nationwide and that once it is designated as a gold route it is impossible to remove it. DDA Member VanDoren follow-up with the question asking what such designation do to Mission street, and if semi-trucks can come into it. Hofweber said that the designation does make design considerations a bit tighter, such as how thick the road pavement must be, how wide lanes, radiuses, etc. DDA Member VanDoren asked how large semi-trucks will be able to travel if we consider boulevards and roundabouts. Hofweber replied that the City, through this work, will indeed need to understand how such vehicles will be handle with the chosen design: where such vehicles will go, how they will make turns, etc. MDOT concluded though that roundabouts can be designed to allow such vehicles to turn, and that specific streets could be designated for the movement and turning of such vehicles. Hofweber added that there is enough right-of-way for a two-lane roundabout on Blue Grass, but that is more challenged on the other intersections, so it will be something that the City will need to consider specially as it relates to corners.

DDA Member VanDoren asked if lane widths are typically used to reduce speeds and how people who wants to cross the street are challenged by such speeds. Hofweber said that sometimes MDOT has designed 10.5-foot left lanes and 12-foot right lanes to help balance pedestrian and trucks needs as an example of a design solution that helps with multiple traffic flows. The tested design currently has all lanes as 11-foot lanes.

Hofweber invited everyone to an open house on March 18th at the MDOT's office for learning more about phase two of the Pickard project.

Tewari clarified that traffic counts were collected in September of 2023 which would have accounted for the student population as it is now. Commissioner Irwin mentioned

that the Central Michigan University freshman/incoming class used to be around 5,000 and asked if such number has rebounded this year. DDA Member VanDoren said that it hasn't and clarified that 5,000 was 10 years ago. Commissioner Irwin follow-up that he does not believe that the student population has been back to the pre-COVID levels. Commissioner Hoenig said that not even before COVID it was that high. Commissioner Irwin clarified that 5,000 was the number of incoming students 10 years ago and Commissioner Hoenig said that it wasn't in 2019. Commissioner Irwin said that last time he looked as 1,500 and asked if anyone had the numbers. DDA Member VanDoren said that the goal for next year is 2,080.

Commissioner Haveles asked how much roundabouts and boulevards reduce accidents. Atkinson used the example of M-20 by Lincoln Road, the reduction was about 35 percent. Commissioner Ortman asked if a similar reduction could be expected for a boulevard that has wider (12-foot) widths and if the increase in safety is mostly attributed to the overall design with a landscape median, etc or to lane widths being reduced. Atkinson responded that the median is the main driver of the increased safety as it separates traffic. Tewari said that it does change the types of crashes that may occur, such as turning conflicts with the left-turn movements, as well as head-on crashes, aside from making it much easier for pedestrians to cross as they would just need to look at one-way traffic when crossing a boulevard making it much safer. Commissioner Friedrich asked if the City has data on accident reduction for Broomfield by campus. Tewari said that the City does not have that data since the project was done by the Road Commission but she will look into it. She added that the Road Commission first turned Broomfield into a boulevard and later introduced the Michigan lefts so it may not be a perfect comparison, but she will try to get data on it or another precedent.

DDA member Krapohl asked if Mission is left with the design as-is, customers can more easily come in from any direction and questioned how businesses will feel about a boulevard concept. Tewari said that this will be a discussion with the Steering Committee and added that the group will likely want to have enough turn options to keep an easy access to businesses, so drivers can turn back and approach the businesses. Tewari added that boulevards have been seen in many communities and that businesses have been successful. DDA member Krapohl follow-up clarifying that in that situation, drivers would go one block forward, turn and come back to access the business. Tewari added that with this approach, traffic volumes would not be reduced and would not lead to traffic being rerouted. Tewari added that the City wants to keep that traffic volume and keep it moving so that traffic can continue to go to those businesses. DDA member Krapohl added that businesses will want Mission to continue to be a business corridor and a safer corridor. Tewari concluding that by promoting the safety of the corridor and adding aesthetic improvements with landscaping, wider sidewalks, will help contribute to the business community, especially as it will increase walkability scores which is highly used by businesses that want to come in a community. She then highlighted how much reducing crashes from 800 to a much lower number would help better market Mission Street, especially to younger populations. Commissioner Ortman has heard the feedback consistently how students would shop more, especially the south portion of

Mission street, if the corridor was safer and more walkable. Commissioner Ortman shared how recently there was a student that shared in a presentation to the City how she had found an apartment on the east side of Mission street but could not get a roommate who would want to share the unit due to the need to cross Mission to go to class. She then added that changes are much needed and will improve the community as a whole. Commissioner Haveles added that there are already people crossing Mission Street and how important it is for the City to make it safer and have more people walking along and across Mission Street. Tewari added that this project could also help attract more students to come into the community and stay in the community.

C. Steering Committee Selection & Next Steps

Powidayko reviewed the job description for the Mission Street Corridor Plan Steering Committee and provided an overview of the draft Steering Committee's composition.

Hoening opened nominations for two Planning Commissioners to be a part of the Steering Committee.

- Commissioner Kingsworthy nominated Commissioner Irwin.
- Commissioner Friedrich nominated Commissioner Ortman.

There being no other nominations, nominations were closed and there was a majority vote to elect Commissioner Irwin and Commissioner Ortman for the Steering Committee.

VanDorin opened nominations for two DDA members to be a part of the Steering Committee.

- DDA Member VanDorin nominated DDA Member LaBelle.
- DDA Member LaBelle nominated DDA Member Smith.

There being no other nominations, nominations were closed and there was a majority vote to elect DDA Member LaBelle and DDA Member Smith for the Steering Committee.

Powidayko asked the Planning Commission and DDA Members for suggestions on business owners who are not part of a Commission or Board to also be a part of the Steering Committee.

Discussion took place.

DDA Board Member VanDorin asked if the meetings will be open to the public. Powidayko said that the City would discuss with the consultants and that the City would prefer to have consistency with the Steering Committee members. VanDorin clarified that he wanted to know if other members of the public could come to watch the meeting

and not necessarily be active participants. Powidayko said that the City and consultants will consider making the Steering Committee meetings open to the public.

Commissioner Haveles suggested Brian Hansen from B's Music Shop. Commissioner Hoenig highlighted that there should be a business representative from the north part of Mission Street as well. Commissioner Devenney asked who will be the CMU representative. Powidayko replied that CMU was going to make that decision soon.

Powidayko welcomed recommendations of businesses owners by email and asked that such names or businesses needed to be shared by Monday, March 11 by the end of the day so the City and the Consulting team could start preparing the first Steering Committee meeting.

V. Public Comment:

Chair Hoenig opened the public comment. Powidayko noted that there were no public comments submitted via zoom or electronically. There being no one who wished to speak, public comment was closed.

VI. Adjournment:

Motion by Haveles, support by Friedrich to adjourn.

Motion approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 6:31pm.

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