

OCL *Rethinking I-81* Study
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
University College
Jan 21, 2009

Present: Joe Ash, Emanuel Carter, Rich Landerkin, Rebecca Livengood, Chris Capella-Peters, Steve Kearney, Karen Kitney, Sarah McIlvain, Donna O'Mahoney Rohde, Benjamin Sio, Mike Smithson, Doug Sutherland, Sandra Barrett, Rachel Pollack

Meeting Topic: Presentation by landscape architect Steve Buechner who has independently developed a vision of a replacement for I-81.

Rich Landerkin reports Centro will begin a Systems Planning Effort regarding light rail and bus rapid transit with monies from SMTC. This is a first step, before the more costly Alternatives Analysis, in an inquiry into whether rapid transit is feasible here. What will be looked at: Do we have the density? Enough ridership to justify the investment? Are policy makers determined?

Steve Buechner displayed graphics of his proposed I-81 alternative. Steve's former firm, Riemann-Buechner, did extensive work on projects in downtown, Syracuse, Franklin Square and other cities. Buechner's vision involves a tunnel that would carry all local traffic along the former viaduct route while thru traffic would be diverted to 481. East and west streets that cross 81 would also be placed in a tunnel so that reclaimed land could be parceled into a 32-acre city park. Buechner calls the park "Central Park" and it includes recreation sites, a pond or some time of water feature, and playgrounds near the Children's hospital. Buechner said the park vision is in its early stages, would involve great cooperation between the city and landowners who might be asked to donate land parcels, and would help to draw families interested in living in the city. He also foresaw introduction of various green features in the surrounding area, such as green roofs, green facades, filtering systems for rooftop water which could then collect and be diverted to the water feature within the park.

Points:

The tunnel would not maintain thru traffic (east-west streets would traverse it in tunneled ramps).

Does current density of city allow for this level of open space? For instance, would the "eyes on the street" approach (which creates a sense of safety and comfort for urban dwellers) be maintained?

Would the park really create pedestrian access and connectivity between downtown and the Hill or actually have the opposite effect, similar to NYC's Central Park Eastside-Westside divide? (Safety at night, lack of vehicular traffic.)

Would city parks department have capacity to take over the park?

Would the park be better aligned with Onondaga Creek, which seems more appropriate for the more "suburban" recreation uses (e.g. fishing, skiing) and is already under development?

NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, January 28, 2009, 3:30 – 5 PM, 307 UC