

Raccoon River Neighborhood Association  
3530 Commerce Drive  
West Des Moines, IA 50265

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June 5, 2006

Kara Tragresser  
4200 Mills Civic Parkway  
West Des Moines, IA 50265

Dear Ms. Kara Tragresser:

The Raccoon River Neighborhood Association has the following questions for the City after attending the May 24, 2006 Plan & Zoning Commission meeting:

- The Raccoon River Neighborhood Association received an email from Kara Tragresser on April 21, 2006 stating that the Citizen's Advisory Committee did not meet from November 2003 to December 2005. Commissioner Gear was a member of the CAC and stated during the May 24, 2006 meeting that the CAC met during that time and that she has meeting minutes. Did the CAC meet during this time? If so, we would like the City to be provided with copies of the meeting minutes and copies to be forwarded to us as per our original request.
- Duane Wittstock estimated that a bridge across the Raccoon River wouldn't be needed for at least 15 years. Clyde Evans estimated that a bridge wouldn't be needed for longer than that. If we plan to update the comprehensive plan approximately every 7 years, then why do we need the bridge on South 35<sup>th</sup> Street, which clearly has huge heartburn for neighborhoods in this area? Why not remove the bridge on South 35<sup>th</sup> Street from the plan until there truly is a need?
- Duane Wittstock stated that when South 35<sup>th</sup> Street was being paved the City Council at that time assured residents in multiple instances that South 35<sup>th</sup> Street wouldn't become a major street. Was there a vote of record at that time stating this fact? Is this documented in meeting minutes during that time? Is there a system of accountability for the current Council to maintain this position?
- Commissioner Schemmel asked questions related to traffic modeling and counts if no bridges were built on South 35<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup> Streets. Kara Tragresser was going to check on that information. What are the answers to Commissioner Schemmel's questions? Can we trust this data knowing that Mr. Wittstock already explained that the MPO data is unreliable?

- Duane Wittstock explained that there was something in the MPO traffic modeling in 2003 that resulted in incorrect traffic data. The implementation chapter of the comprehensive plan discusses the need for substantiating traffic data when an amendment is introduced. Can the City use incorrect data to substantiate the need for a bridge crossing?
- Prior to May 24, 2006, the Ultimate Streets Map dated 2/2/06 in the comprehensive plan showed South 35<sup>th</sup> Street as a minor collector. The “baseline map” introduced on May 24, 2006 shows South 35<sup>th</sup> as a major collector. If residents had reviewed the map dated 2/2/06 online or in the hardcopy draft and saw that South 35<sup>th</sup> Street was a minor collector and were okay with that, they may not have commented to the Commission. This doesn’t seem like a fair depiction of the Ultimate Streets data in the comprehensive plan. How can better version control practices be used in the future, so the residents are provided with the most current information in the future?
- It is important to point out that the 2/2/06 Ultimate Streets Map is titled Preliminary Draft, which could mislead residents into believing that changes were depicted on the draft. Why does the City include the current map and not the proposed map with the comprehensive plan draft? This practice doesn’t seem to make sense. For instance, the City wouldn’t provide the current comprehensive plan and then the suggested revisions on the day of the Commission’s discussion.
- The current “baseline map” was only produced May 2006 (only days before the P&Z meeting), and posted to the website shortly thereafter. The City knew that there was going to be concerns with the Ultimate Street Map yet they never informed the citizens or the Commission that the map in the draft version of the comprehensive plan was not the correct map. Was there a reason this map was not shared with the citizens and the commission or was this a minor oversight in the future plan of the City?
- In a Des Moines Register Article, dated April 1999, about the initial attempt to add the South 35<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge to the comprehensive plan Clyde Evans was quoted saying that the issue is so controversial that all residents within 370 feet of the proposed roadway between Mills Civic Parkway and relocated Highway 5 should be notified in writing. That proactive, precedent setting action was completed, and the residents were notified accordingly in response to Mr. Evans request. In the public hearing that followed staff asked the commission for time to provide the commission a complete traffic study. The agenda item is listed in the minutes as “postponed indefinitely”, and citizens were never given the opportunity to comment. Years later in 2003 and 2004 when the subject resurfaced, with Clyde Evans still Director of Planning, why weren’t letters sent to concerned citizens as they were originally? Also, knowing that the bridge crossing would be a “controversial issue” why was it simply a small part of a larger comprehensive plan amendment with notices only going to those citizens south of the river (most of whom will benefit from a crossing).

- Why is it important that two Raccoon River crossings between 1<sup>st</sup> Street and I-35 be listed on the comprehensive plan? Planning processes in other areas of life and business require integrity or they do not work. Has there been any correspondence with developers that the bridge plans are being used to promote growth and development south of the river?
- Why is the City concerned about the slow growth south of the Raccoon River? A consultant was hired to see if incentives should be given to developers in order to start the development in the area. Were there costs incurred by the City of WDM in the relocation of the Highway 5 and associated infrastructure? Was IDOT guaranteed anything to justify any of the access points to Highway 5?
- Can the City start a proactive relationship with IDOT to solve the crossing issue with shared funds for infrastructure during their redesign of I-35 south of Mill Civic Parkway? A wider roadway and bridge or an additional exit could save considerable money and allow the City to mitigate future pressure from IDOT for a bridge crossing.
- Why did Mr. Wittstock write in his memo dated May 12, 2006 that “the crossings need to be of sufficient capacity to accommodate anticipated traffic or be capable of being expanded in the future,” yet he told the commission that it would only need to be a two lane facility?
- In Mr. Wittstock’s explanation of fiscal responsibility only building a two lane road initially then widening the road when necessary he did not mention this idea’s relationship to right of way. For example: if the South 35<sup>th</sup> Street bridge was left on the comprehensive plan as a 120 feet of right of way minor arterial street and it is eventually built, would the entire 120 feet of right of way be purchased when the road is initially constructed? This appears to be the case on 50<sup>th</sup> Street and other streets across the City. The addition of the mitigations and studies that would be required adds support to this idea. If this is true than would it not be important to tell the concerned citizens how much of the right of way will be purchased and the total roadway width be shared when discussing this important matters, not just using rhetoric to say it will only be a two lane facility?

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these questions. This is a very important time for our City, and we are pleased to be a part of the planning of its future. We look forward to the City’s answers to these important questions by June 16, 2006.

Sincerely,

Thomas & Danielle Stull  
Co-Chairs  
Raccoon River Neighborhood Association