

Work Session Meeting of the Sandy Springs City Council was held on Tuesday, May 3, 2016, at 6:54 p.m., Mayor Rusty Paul presiding.

Councilmembers present: Council Member John Paulson, Council Member Ken Dishman, Council Member Gabriel Sterling, Council Member Tibby DeJulio, and Council Member Andy Bauman.

STAFF DISCUSSION ITEMS

City Management

1. 16-162 T-SPLOST Update

FULTON COUNTY TRANSPORTATION SPLOST (2017-2021)

Todd Long, Office of Fulton County Manager, gave the Fulton County Transportation SPLOST PowerPoint Presentation.

Mayor Rusty Paul asked what will happen if a municipality does not participate in the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA).

Mr. Long stated he has a slide on that information that he will review shortly.

Council Member Gabriel Sterling asked if for this referendum to pass the vote will need to be 50% plus one of all of the areas of unincorporated Fulton County or if the vote is jurisdiction by jurisdiction.

Mr. Long responded it will be 50% plus one of all the jurisdictions outside the boundary of the City of Atlanta.

Council Member Sterling stated this could fail in Sandy Springs, but pass in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Long stated there would be no boundaries for this vote.

Council Member John Paulson stated the projects don't have to be completed in five years, but the taxes will be collected for five years. There is information in the presentation on how long the projects will take.

Mr. Long stated with other SPLOST taxes in other counties, the projects are required to be underway or nearly underway.

Council Member Sterling stated there are some areas where Sandy Springs shares zip codes with the City of Atlanta. There have been issues with taxes that are collected in Sandy Springs, but are charged the higher rate of Atlanta.

Mr. Long suggested Sandy Springs speak to Georgia Department of Revenue Commissioner Lynne Riley.

Mayor Paul stated it is an issue in Sandy Springs, because the postal service has continued utilization of the Atlanta address for zip codes. It is confusing, unless you know exactly where the City boundaries are. The point of sale issues are significant and will need to be worked out with Ms. Riley.

Council Member Andy Bauman asked if every item on that list qualifies for transportation improvement and congestion reduction. There is the question of whether to use the word "and" or the word "or".

Mr. Long stated in South Fulton the complaint is not about congestion, but instead there are complaints about the condition of the roadways.

Mayor Paul asked what happens to a municipality that decides not to sign the IGA.

Mr. Long stated because there are reporting requirements and money being selected and spent, the requirement will be that every municipality will need to sign the IGA. If a municipality chooses not to sign the IGA and the threshold is still met, the projects will move forward and the collections will be redistributed to other jurisdictions.

Mayor Paul stated if a City does not sign the IGA, the money for that jurisdiction is split among the other jurisdictions. He suggested that the City sign the IGA.

TSPLOST 2016 SANDY SPRINGS

City Manager John McDonough stated this presentation is about the Sandy Springs portion of the TSPLOST. The larger transportation projects will be discussed and then the suggested local projects. Assistant City Manager Bryant Poole will discuss the regional mitigation and safety projects, local projects and the identification process.

Assistant City Manager Bryant Poole gave the TSPLOST 2016 Sandy Springs PowerPoint presentation.

Mayor Paul stated in addition to the larger County Mayors meeting, the Mayors in North Fulton have been meeting to review this particular area to see what can be done from a cooperative view. The agreement among the Mayors was that congestion in this region is not bound by the jurisdictional boundaries, but it spills over into other areas. The Mayors have tried to look at projects that would have some regional impact. Kimley-Horn was used to look at all the various projects that have been identified and pull from those. There has been a lot of conversation to look at what can be done to mitigate traffic on a regional basis. The Mayors tried to look at projects that will have impacts on Fulton County and looked for solutions for the North Fulton area.

Assistant Manager Bryant Poole stated these projects are already started and should be completed within the next five years.

Council Member Gabriel Sterling asked about the SCOOT system and taking it to Vernon Woods Drive. It already exists from Abernathy up to the river.

Assistant City Manager Poole stated the City is currently working on installing that now.

Council Member Andy Bauman asked by doing this project locally and more quickly, does it also give the City more flexibility in the designs.

Assistant City Manager Poole responded yes.

Council Member John Paulson asked how many months would this project be advanced.

Assistant City Manager Poole stated if approved, the project may start construction within two years from now, versus the Federal process of three to five years. The right-of-way will still need to be purchased.

Mayor Paul stated the T-0011 Johnson Ferry project is an important part of the entryway to the City Springs project.

Council Member Bauman asked if the City can purchase right-of-way under the TSPLOST and use Federal funding for construction.

Assistant City Manager Poole stated that can be done. He is not sure the Federal agency will look too favorably if the City circumvents the process.

Mayor Paul stated there are also restrictions from the Federal government. If the City goes ahead and buys the right-of-way, that would make the Federal process difficult. Regarding the Traffic Operational Improvements, it is the City saying improving Traffic Efficiency with these projects.

Council Member Bauman asked if the projects on this list are examples or straight from the order of the scoring of projects.

Assistant City Manager Poole stated this is not necessarily in the ranking order.

Director of Public Works Garrin Coleman stated the projects are currently ranked in order. The projects were scored by staff and the final list should be finished within the next couple of weeks. Staff looked at volume demand, crash history, operations, constructability, and affordability.

Council Member Paulson stated there have been a number of projects the City has done by taking out 150 feet of curb and moving it four feet and adding an additional lane. That can hugely clear up an intersection, so that two lanes are created instead of just one left turning lane. He sees these projects as larger than just restriping. This is improving the congested areas and improving them in that location. He likes these projects.

Council Member Sterling stated the Mt. Vernon Highway and Roberts Drive multiuse path connects to the Dunwoody bicycle lanes, but does not go all the way up to Roberts Drive.

Council Member Paulson stated he believes there are sidewalks all the way from the park going west.

Mayor Paul stated once the Path400 is built out, it will connect Sandy Springs with the Beltline and other paths in the City of Atlanta. This will be connecting the City to a much larger trail system that people are already using to commute to work by bicycle.

Council Member Tibby DeJulio stated he has walked a portion of this trail with Denise Starling and it is amazing. The City should not have much of an issue purchasing right-of-way, because most of it is owned by GDOT.

Council Member Sterling asked if at the interchange points people will be able to access Windsor Parkway and Wieuca to get onto the trail.

Assistant City Manager Poole stated that is the intent.

Mayor Paul stated one of the reasons this pathway project is important is because we all talk about MARTA being an asset. One of the biggest challenges is once you get to MARTA, how do you then get to where you are going and not need a vehicle. There is also the issue with when you leave work, how do you get to MARTA and not need a vehicle. This project makes a significant effort in making this area more transit friendly. The City of Atlanta will use a significant portion of their resources to solve the last mile connectivity within the City of Atlanta. If you really want to make transit work, you have to get the people to their final destination.

Council Member Paulson asked if there is a way to model the traffic on I-285 west bound versus adding the flex lane.

Mayor Paul stated most of the traffic back up on I-285 going west bound starts around Raider Drive. If additional capacity is added at that point, that is where the traffic needs to be absorbed; more so than east bound. Most of the traffic is travelling to I-75 north. If the citizens give the City the resources, the City will leverage them to the maximum amount possible. One of the things the City has always done is to engage the citizens in discussions. The City wants the citizens to tell us what they think.

Director of Communications Sharon Kraun presented slides 16 – 24.

Mr. Long stated Fulton County has had six public meetings already for south Fulton County. Some of the cities in South Fulton are having individual meetings. They decided to have a block of meetings throughout the county and have every City at each public meeting. The general attendance of the meetings was in the range of twenty to thirty people. A lot of positive feedback was received. There has been no negative comments to date. The webpage looks terrific. There is a Fulton County webpage for TSPLOST and the County would like to link that to the City's webpage, if the City will approve that.

Council Member Bauman stated as a resident of Fulton County he will be paying taxes that will be distributed evenly. Citizens will want to know what other jurisdictions are doing. He asked if any or much thought has been given to how some of the projects, particularly the congestion relief projects, integrate with surrounding communities. Has the City found opportunities by working with Roswell and Dunwoody to provide east/west and north/south relief.

Assistant City Manager Poole stated that was the task of the consultant. Staff is looking at other projects that are touching the City.

City Manager John McDonough stated this is trying to be done in the short amount of time that is available.

Mayor Paul stated the Mayors are looking at that as an overall objective. When the conversation was started we assumed that the City might have to pay the burden of the managed lanes on GA400 and those types of projects would be part of this process. In the intervening period, the Governor has said the managed lanes will be added. The Governor has taken on a lot of these regional projects as the State's responsibility. This then allows the City to rethink how we integrate these other projects into the larger plan. Now that these larger projects are being considered, how do we take what we are doing and tie them in. The biggest challenges we have on our surface streets is when the expressways back up and you cannot access them. He asked how does the City optimize moving the traffic within the larger context. The Governor giving the City a great multibillion dollar gift has freed up the City to look at the smaller projects that make the entire system more efficient. The Governor did something to allow the City to focus those resources into the type of projects seen tonight.

City Manager McDonough stated there is more of a local focus given the limited amount of time to put these lists together. That question was raised two Mayors' meetings ago, because of Johns Creek, Forsyth County, and Gwinnett County. Sandy Springs is much more affiliated with the impact from Cobb County. There are also interjurisdictional issues between some of the cities on some of the smaller roads that desperately need to be widened in North Fulton. Time is a challenge, because we do not have time available right now to look at how to put together a large project with Cobb or DeKalb County. Those issues were discussed at the last Mayors' meeting and with Fulton County. That is why the list that Council saw this evening was focused on efficiency improvements typically within jurisdictions. If this is done correctly, all of the projects will provide efficiency improvements. Staff is already talking about how to address the issues that were raised from the Mayoral leadership group about how to handle the east/west multicounty traffic outside of Fulton County. The tax can only be spent in Fulton County. The amount of intergovernmental work that has to go into working with Cobb County and DeKalb County is not something that happens in weeks or even months. That is something that typically takes years.

Mayor Paul stated these are resources that are geographically confined.

City Manager McDonough stated these projects do not even include MARTA. The bigger issue of mass transit and multi-jurisdictional travel outside of Fulton County still has to be dealt with and organized. That will not happen within this five year period, but the planning can happen during that time.

Mayor Paul stated he will address the transit portion of the conversation, because it was the more contentious piece of the conversation. When this conversation started, we were operating under the rules that were set by HB170. HB170 required anonymity in that any City could opt to not participate and then no city would receive funds. When Representative Jones saw the progress Fulton County was making in spite of this provision, the anonymity thing was removed from Fulton County. The cause of concerns about MARTA's plans going into North Fulton were not addressed. A disagreement among the communities in North Fulton about the type of transit was an issue. MARTA is focused on heavy rail. Some of the communities felt that heavy rail is too expensive and not appropriate for their community. One of the byproducts of what Representative Jones did in this piece of legislation allowed the municipalities the ability to proceed with this process. One of the great things that happened was a commitment by the communities that were opposed to authorizing MARTA to extend heavy rail up to Windward Parkway. We realized this gave us the time necessary to continue the conversation about transit. At the last Mayors' meeting with the Commission there was an agreement that the discussions will continue to focus on the transit piece. He, Mayor Wood, and Mayor Reed all felt very strongly that a significant portion of this money should go towards MARTA. He thanked Mr. Long for doing such a wonderful job of pulling all these pieces together and working with all of the staffs across the County in keeping this process moving forward with the support of the Fulton County Commission. This has been a very rewarding process, because of the constructive conversations that have been going on. There are still gaps and transit is the biggest piece. There is a commitment by some of the Mayors that have doubts about MARTA going further north into Fulton County. There is an acknowledgment that transit has to be a part of future discussions and the other Mayors have agreed these conversations will continue, so that we can begin to address that. He hopes a solution will be found to extend transit into North Fulton. He commends the Lieutenant Governor who has done a magnificent job of restoring credibility at MARTA. Lieutenant Governor Cagle made a key point that stabilizing MARTA is not the end game. There should be a big picture on transit in the Atlanta region and no one has answered that question. It is not enough to extend MARTA into North Fulton and to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) area and Emory and maybe to Stonecrest. There needs to be an east/west transit that connects to the Doraville station and hopefully to Cumberland and the Braves stadium. He commends Lieutenant Governor Cagle for raising that question. It is incumbent upon all of us who are leaders in this region to start working with MARTA to find a larger solution to the transit issue.

Council Member DeJulio asked the way this law is written, if the I-285 and GA400 interchange should encompass projects that are being considered, can other projects be substituted.

Mayor Paul stated under the legislation, once you create the project list, the jurisdictions are bound to that list. One way to work within that framework is to include categories and define purposes, so there is a balancing act making sure there is enough specificity that the voters know exactly what we plan to do. The voters need to be reassured that the money will be used for this purpose. It is intended that we need a high degree of specificity in the projects initially, until there is an established trust. The E-SPLOST will be voted on May 24th and it is almost an automatic that it will be passed, because the school board has built the school projects they stated they would build.

Council Member DeJulio stated the project at I-285 and GA400 is not even designed, yet. There could be spill over from that into some of the City's projects.

Mayor Paul stated that interchange is not fully designed, but it is understood where it will be located and how it will operate. There may be questions about the managed lanes. The question is how do we get people out of their cars in order to commute in others ways throughout the City. That is why sidewalks and trails are important. There are people who like to be able to go to work by bicycle or using another form of transportation, but it is not safe to do that right now.

Council Member Bauman stated in the Mount Vernon Highway area, when a lot of bicycles go across the bridge it slows the riders down.

Mayor Paul stated if we can create grade or traffic separation to make it safer, you will see more and more people using alternative forms of transportation. The last mile connectivity should make transit functional by extending it further north. There was a statistic in the Next Ten presentation that says if 70% of the citizens had a safe, efficient way to go somewhere without getting in their car they would use it. We only need about a 10% reduction and that would have an enormous impact on congestion. The plan is about how do we move people in a way that optimizes those who need to and have to use vehicles to get there. Another question is how do we empower those that want to get there in another way to move in the overall network of transportation.

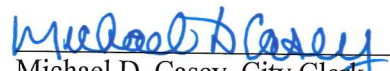
Council Member Paulson stated there was discussion about projects the City might not have to pay for, because they are already part of the I-285 and GA400 project. As the City's list gets formalized, staff should talk to someone at GDOT to see if any of the City's projects have been considered. The Mount Vernon Bridge over GA400 might be part of the GA400 and I-285 project.

Mayor Paul stated that is a good point. There are fewer questions about the projects today than there were three years ago. The City has a good understanding of where those projects will go and what their impact will be. The City can now take the opportunity to fix other projects within that larger framework.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

Date Approved: May 17, 2016


Russell K. Paul, Mayor


Michael D. Casey, City Clerk