

**CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION**  
**Economic Development Strategic Plan Task Force Update**  
**VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**  
**October 12, 2020**  
**5:30 p.m.**

**AGENDA**

Requested by the City Manager

**1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

At the Study Session of the City Council of University City held via videoconference, on Monday, October 12, 2020, Mayor Terry Crow called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

In addition to the Mayor, the following members of Council were present:

Councilmember Stacy Clay  
Councilmember Aleta Klein  
Councilmember Steven McMahon  
Councilmember Jeffrey Hales  
Councilmember Tim Cusick  
Councilmember Bwayne Smotherson

Also, in attendance were City Manager, Gregory Rose; City Attorney, John F. Mulligan, Jr.; Director of Planning & Zoning, Clifford Cross; Beth Noonan, Alison Gray, Jacqueline Davis-Washington, and Stephen Ibendahl of the I-5 Group's Planning Team.

**2. CHANGES TO REGULAR AGENDA**

Mr. Rose stated due to a significant number of citizen's comments expressing concern and the need to make sure all residents have been heard, he will be requesting that the Public Hearings, Items I(1) and (2), remain on the Agenda, but that Items L(2) and M(1) be removed from the Agenda.

**3. Economic Development Strategic Plan Task Force Update**

Mr. Rose stated the Mayor and Council commissioned this Task Force in FY2020 to work with the City's Consultant; (I-5 Group), to draft an Economic Development Strategy for Council to consider. Tonight's update and discussion on this topic will be led by Stephen Ibendahl.

Mr. Ibendahl stated his team was able to restart things over the summer via Zoom. Even though the country is in the midst of COVID-19 they felt it would be important to move forward to make sure the City's economic strategy could be utilized post-COVID.

**What is an Economic Development Strategy?**

An Economic Development Strategy will position the City on a path toward a resilient economy by creating a vision to drive investment and growth for the community.

**Draft Economic Development Strategy**

A draft of the recommendations was released in September to obtain feedback before the Draft Economic Development Strategy is finalized later this fall.

- Neighborhood economic nodes (place-based growth strategy)
- Draft recommendations and best practices
- Follow-up stakeholder meetings
- Community Open-House
  - Replaced with an instructional video

During the week of September 28th, several small group meetings were conducted via Zoom. Interested parties could sign up to talk with the I-5 Group individually or post comments on the plan's website at [www.investucity.com](http://www.investucity.com).

## **Task Force**

- Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee
  - Sounding board for the Planning Team to create a shared vision
- Representatives from across the City
  - Chosen by City Council and Mayor
  - Council Liaison, Councilmember Smotherson
- Met 5 times during the process

## **Stakeholder's Meetings**

Conducted before COVID, in the spring of 2020.

- Businesses and property owners within the City
  - Why they located in U City?
  - What they saw as future needs moving forward?

## **Draft Recommendations and Strategies**

**Principle 1:** Growing Existing and Emerging Business Sectors

- Accommodations & Food Service; hotels and restaurants
- Health Care & Social Assistance
- Retail
- Professional, Scientific & Technical
- Manufacturing

The team was somewhat surprised by the amount of manufacturing in U City, which was identified as an emerging sector that can provide numerous entry-level jobs. It is also less impacted by anomalies like the current pandemic.

**Principle 2:** Ensuring Equitable Economic Opportunities

- Invest in the 3rd Ward
- Support Minority Entrepreneurs
- Equitable City Policies and Practices

**Principle 3:** Supporting U City Businesses and Workers

- Business & Talent Retention and Expansion
  - Focus on the needs of existing businesses
  - Invest in workforce development for residents
  - Retain existing businesses in U City
  - Increased focus on the International District

U City already has good partners in the area of workforce development, so it does not need to do everything on its own; i.e., the School District has a very strong program. There is a need to leverage business retention and outreach programs with existing workforce programs to better align the needs of some business sectors.

- Small Business & Entrepreneurship
  - Amplify the voice of local businesses
  - Grow next generation of small business owners in U City
  - Support additional neighborhood retail

To fully accomplish the City's economic goals a lot of work is needed in the area of business retention and expansion outreach which requires in-person contacts. The team heard a lot of ideas and comments about the need to have additional peer support.

- A business-to-business networking group that can be the voice of local businesses.
- Supporting businesses at the staffing level by investing in staff capacity; i.e., full-time Economic Development Director, and an ombudsman, who can be the point of contact for new businesses to help them navigate the start-up process.

**Principle 4: Collaborate with Local & Regional Partners**

- Develop a consistent policy for all non-profits
- Formalize a working relationship
- Leverage Washington University opportunities

Wash U is an important partner in terms of its student population; their buying power and the real estate they own within U City. Therefore, a key recommendation is to engage a third-party mediator who can initiate an open and frank dialogue between U City and Wash U that helps to build respect and understanding. Identify shared values and collaboratively develop a mutually beneficial working relationship.

Build relationships with regional partners that can support infrastructure development and enhancements that will be particularly important in implementing a strategy for Olive Boulevard; i.e., MoDOT, MSD, East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, and the Corps of Engineers.

Engage with organizations focused on promoting economic development across the region to expand resources and tap into specialty services that serve the U City's business community

**Principle 5: Celebrate and Promote U City**

- Expand economic development web presence
- Promote U City's unique character
- Strategic focus on collegiate market
- Ensure business-related publications are business-friendly
- Market distinct areas of the City

*"Explore U City"* has been a strong asset, along with the related social media and e-marketing. The Team recommends:

1. Expanding and centralizing its economic development content on a new *"Explore U City"* microsite so that it serves as a tool to promote the City as a place to live, work, and play.
2. Provide data for developers and site selectors looking to relocate their business.
3. Review the "Select O'Fallon" key study and the data highlighted on their website.

Evaluate developing specific messaging and marketing for targeted development areas/Districts. Except for The Loop other commercial areas within the City have not been named. Naming these areas will allow the City to develop targeted marketing strategies. Key Business Sectors:

1. Cunningham Industrial
2. Delmar Gateway
3. Heman Park
4. International District
5. Millar Park
6. Olive Gateway
7. Olive Innovation
8. Pershing-Forsyth
9. U City Loop
10. West Delmar

**Principle 6: Utilize Place-Based Solutions**

- Increased focus on Olive Boulevard
- Keep The Loop a top ten street
- Implement City-wide strategies

Olive Boulevard presents an opportunity to expand U City's retail and commercial offerings and augment its economic base. With the businesses along this important corridor generating the majority of its retail sales tax base, attention and investment by the City will be important to maximize the potential of this key commercial corridor and ensure that it is a vital part of the City's tax base.

The Team utilized a "District" approach to target what some of the strategies should be for the different areas along Olive.

A key recommendation for the "Heman Park District" is to promote more residential north of Olive and adjacent to the park. This will create better land use and provide additional support for existing commercial areas. (See *concept Sketch*)

There are several growing tech firms located in The Loop with limited room for expansion. The Team visualized the "Olive Innovation District," located east of Kingsland, as being the future area of expansion for tech firms. With the opening of TechArtista's co-working studios on the first floor of Lewis Collaborative Apartments, there is a potential for a tech corridor between The Loop and this District. (See *Concept Sketch*)

Use The Loop Special District's Strategic Plan to build consensus on Loop marketing; special events; SBD operations and scope for the public realm.

### **Update the City's Priority Map**

#### **First Tier**

- Olive Blvd/1-170
- Delcrest Plaza
- Delmar-Harvard Elementary School
- Olive Blvd., and North and South Road
- Olive and Midland Boulevards

#### **Second Tier**

- Olive Blvd. & River Des Peres
- 6610 Olive (Former Sur-Sav)
- Forsyth
- West Loop

### **Schedule**

Later this fall input and comments received will be utilized to help shape the Draft Economic Development document.

Release of the Final Economic Development Document will be contingent upon the time it takes to review the draft document.

Councilmember Clay posed the following questions to Mr. Ibendahl:

**Q. Do you think you were able to get a representative group of folks together, despite the restrictions imposed by COVID?**

*A. Overall, I feel pretty good about the results. Some of our engagements started pre-COVID, and while the original plan was to conduct 15 to 20 stakeholder/business meetings, by the end they had conducted close to 30. However, based on the knowledge that the Comprehensive Plan is forthcoming, the Team's focus was more on the business side and utilization of the Task Force to hopefully avoid engagement fatigue.*

**Q. Cunningham Industrial Park is a real underdeveloped resource that I was glad to see highlighted. Can you talk about how that manufacturing landscape could be expanded?**

*A. U City already has some great companies that seem to kind of fly under the radar, so, one of the recommendations talks about establishing a partnership with Wellston to help manage and market some of these job opportunities. The City is a little landlocked in terms of growth and he thinks the Olive Innovation District would be a good front door for that side of town.*

*A. (Ms. Davis-Washington): A lot of people say that manufacturing is declining; yet, the City is developing a manufacturing incubator that is supported by the Federal Government. So, while it may be somewhat marked, new technologies are making the difference.*

Mayor Crow stated this is one of the better streetscapes he has seen which reminded him of a development Council reviewed some time ago during a Study Session. Is there any movement on that project?

Councilmember Smotherson stated to the best of his knowledge, the development on Midland and Olive is moving forward. The last thing he heard was that they were accepting bids from contractors to work in the floodplain area.

Mayor Crow stated his thinking was that maybe the Midland development would be a good starting point for changing the streetscape on Olive.

He stated he was also intrigued by the number of healthcare and social assistance services in the community and was wondering if there was something Council and this administration could be doing now to assist those businesses? Mr. Ibendahl stated some of their recommendations touch on business retention and expansion. And a large part of it is just leg work in terms of developing a line of communications that allows the City to gain an understanding of their current and future needs because they are always evolving.

Ms. Noonan stated this goes towards having a structured business retention and expansion program that allows the City to develop survey instruments that determine the needs of its businesses, and builds the kind of relationship with those businesses so they know who to call if they have an issue. Even if the City itself is not providing the services, it can serve as a conduit to other resources.

Another piece of that program involves the principle of cluster growth. For example, understanding where the City's home-based businesses are so you can start to bridge relationships and create a synergy that attracts and engages other aligned resources and services in that same sector.

Mayor Crow stated he would hate to wait until the City has an Economic Developer to begin this work. So, would this be the right time for Council and this administration to start having some of those conversations on Zoom? Mr. Ibendahl stated there is no reason to wait in terms of the pandemic. And what they've found is that Zoom works really well for introductory meetings because it's so convenient.

Councilmember Klein stated the proposal talks about making Olive a two-lane street and bringing the two sides of the street together is an idea she likes. Is this concept feasible for the amount of traffic that utilizes Olive? And if so, how far would the two lanes run down Olive? Mr. Ibendahl stated based on information they received from MoDOT, traffic east of Hanley totals around 12,000 cars a day. Roads that are good candidates for a road diet; two lanes and a turn lane, have about 12,000 to 15,000 cars per day. So, while Olive seems to fit in terms of that existing condition, MoDOT's numbers are very general, therefore, he would suggest conducting a traffic study to fine-tune their analysis.

He stated a potential regional partner; East-West Gateway's Council of Governments has a Great Streets Program that offers a matching federally funded planning grant. So, Olive might be a good candidate for that program.

And the kick-off of the Corps of Engineers' Flood Mitigation Study presents an opportunity to not only make some developable sites, but it can also be used to create some amenities or benefits for the City in terms of additional park space, et cetera.

Councilmember Smotherson questioned whether Wash U had seen any of these sketches or provided any input on the Olive Innovation District? Mr. Ibendahl stated the presentation was shared with all the groups they met with in the spring, but the Team has not had any direct discussions with them regarding the concept sketches.

Councilmember Smotherson asked if concept sketches for the International and Olive Gateway Districts would be included in the final document? Mr. Ibendahl stated while they have done some other things in terms of the pros and cons related to future development pressures in these areas, the scope of their work did not include providing sketches for each area. He stated they also wanted to be a little careful with trying to fix some areas. Olive has a vacant site, and some of the other areas will require a greater level of detail and thoughtful site design to make things work.

Councilmember Smotherson stated because of their proximity, these two districts will be crucial to the Olive/170 development. The current sketches provide valuable illustrations of the proposed improvements and he would like to see that same type of guidance for these two areas.

Mr. Ibendahl stated if Council believes they should be a priority, they can always follow up with staff to discuss generating additional sketches. Councilmember Smotherson stated he thinks they should be.

Mr. Rose reminded Council that they had already set aside \$50 to \$100,000, for the completion of a Master Plan for Olive Boulevard, and that plan will include various designs for the entire corridor.

Councilmember Klein stated she had received questions from residents asking whether it would be feasible to close Delmar and sections of The Loop off from traffic during special events or Friday and Saturday evenings? Mr. Ibendahl stated the Team talked about The Loop having its own Special District Strategic Plan that dealt with events and programming.

And since closing the streets off to traffic could impact their clientele, they would certainly need to get a consensus from businesses before they could take on activity of that nature. He stated one of the recommendations that came out of the Parking Study was to conduct further analysis of circulation in The Loop to ensure that parking is functional. So, circulation and consensus are two components that would have to align in terms of making that type of closure.

**4. ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Crow thanked the I-5Group for their help in moving the City forward and adjourned the Study Session at 6:19 p.m.

LaRette Reese  
City Clerk