

Expanded Community Advisory Panel (XCAP)

November 10, 2020, 4:00 pm

Summary - Special Meeting (virtual, through Zoom)

1. Welcome and Roll Call, Review Agenda and Make Changes as Needed

Present: Gregory Brail, Phil Burton, Tony Carrasco, Inyoung Cho, Larry Klein, Nadia Naik, Keith Reckdahl, David Shen, Cari Templeton

Absent:

2. Staff Updates

Phillip Kamhi, Chief Transportation Official thanked the XCAP Members for all their hard work on this project.

3. Oral Communications

None.

4. XCAP Member Updates and Working Group Updates

Chair Naik reported she did a lot of reading and writing to revamp the outline for the final report for it to make a little more sense.

XCAP Member Brail commented that part of Chair Naik's memo seemed to propose a set of new chapters, suggesting a new Chapter 3 that combined Chapters 1, 4 and 5.

Chair Naik replied what she tried to think about was for new Council Members looking at this for the first time and trying to understand it, what would the logical sequence of reading these be. She thought combining those chapters would be helpful because Chapter 2 was originally describing the methodology used and she was unsure if it deserved its own chapter. There was a lot of repetitiveness between Chapters 2 and 4, and she felt having a chapter that briefly described what each alternative was to someone who has never seen it before, then going through the pieces of each would make more sense.

XCAP Member Burton voiced concern that Chapter 3 would be enormous because of all the content and he felt this needed to be structured and possibly offer a condensed version.

Chair Naik replied that there would be an executive summary that she and XCAP Member Klein would write at the end, which would be a prologue to all of this. For example, Chapter 3, Section 2, Churchill, then 2.1 Executive Summary to give a short summary about what was done on Churchill and explain what is covered in that Section. Chapter 3 could be broken down noting the three alternatives for North Palo Alto and 4 for South Palo Alto. She advised she was open to suggestions.

XCAP Member Burton expressed it does make sense because it does reduce the amount of flipping between chapters in the former outline but there is a lot to read in one place. He noted there seemed to be a lot of repetition in the chapters he has read so far.

Chair Naik reiterated that was why she tried to make this an amalgamation of those two, to cut that back, so for example, everything about Churchill is in the one section on Churchill.

XCAP Member Burton reported when he read the sections on the alternatives, some were fairly crisp, but one went 22 pages.

Chair Naik indicated once all that was folded together, that will get cut. She and Member Templeton wrote the section about the underpass which has the most, but there are some things in there that was for the Appendix. That was also the alternative hardest to describe in words.

XCAP Member Brail asked what will happen to the chapters everyone wrote over the last several weeks?

Chair Naik responded she hoped those chapters would be put together. On page 2 of her memo there was a chart on which she tentatively wrote Members names for each chapter. If that works for the Members, they can take what was written for those chapters and turn it into the format that matches what she has on page 3 of her memo.

XCAP Member Templeton noted what came into her mind when writing these chapters, was understanding the boundary better between what part of describing this is staff's responsibility and what is XCAP's? There has been a lot produced by staff and she is concerned a large part of this is rewriting what staff or contractors on behalf of staff have presented. She would like to see the limited time XCAP has to be focused on the extra the Group is bringing.

Chair Naik replied she saw it as XCAP writing the report that Council reads. It is not that staff is producing something and XCAP is writing the Reader's Guide to it. So, the onus is on XCAP to explain the alternatives that the consultants have done the work on in language that is readable to Council Members or members of the public looking at this for the first time.

XCAP Member Shen noted a lot of the sections he had written for the previous Chapter 2 were literally copied and pasted from the consultant's documents. He believed one was of doing this is to simply skip all that and/or put the big information sheets in the appendix. The XCAP can then put in the color they can provide that is not there, such as the deliberations, the opinions, the community feedback.

XCAP Member Klein's opinion was that it was inevitable everything be included. Just because a lot of it comes from staff or the consultants doesn't mean it is precisely the same. How XCAP saw some of the facts could be a little different than staff or the consultants saw them. He agreed with chair Naik that this should be a document that

is readable for many years into the future. He would like this to be a document that the reader could say they understood that was going on.

Mr. Kamhi agreed and advised the Group to take anything staff or the consultant has done, but also let staff know if there is something the Group is trying to find.

XCAP Member Templeton advised she brought this up because the last time Chair Naik presented to Council, staff had a separate report and she wondered if this was a group effort with staff or will there be a separate staff report?

Mr. Kamhi responded when XCAP presents its report, staff would not plan on producing a separate report. There would likely be something like a cover memo to potentially provide some context. Staff's intention is to follow up after the XCAP report and take Council through any questions they might have from their reading of the report. It would be nice from staff's perspective if any XCAP Members would like to be involved in that process moving forward.

XCAP Member Klein reiterated there would be executive summaries at places by Chair Naik and himself, and he emphasized to make it more readable. An executive summary could say, for example, regarding Churchill, the majority of the Group voted to close it and a minority preferred a modified underpass, etc., so there is a "roadmap" for the reader. He responded to Member Templeton that the idea that staff may have something additional to say, that is fine. There is no requirement that staff and an advisory group have to be on the same page.

XCAP Member Templeton agreed there are parts of the document that are duplicative and as long as it is agreed that is okay, that needs to be made clear. Regarding Chapter 3 and the Churchill assignment, she would like to see people who live closer to those areas take responsibility for that chapter. Member Cho lives near there but maybe there is someone else who lives nearby that would be interested in working on that.

Chair Naik related part of the reason she assigned Members as she did was because it was helpful to look at less familiar sections because those who are very familiar may present things that the average person may not understand. Also, being less familiar with an area may make for a better editor of that section. She also reminded members they have been looking at the matrices for more than a year. If a Member has a question about something, they know exactly where to go to on that matrix. The average Council Member looking at this for the first time will need to see something in writing and not have to try to read the shorthand matrices. There is some redundancy but that is what happens with technical reports. She referred to page 4 of her memo, there would be an executive summary about Churchill, maybe a timeline of the events, which is important, then go into the viaduct, the partial underpass, the closure. She included freight to make sure that was covered. Then there could be majority/minority decisions, suggested areas of future work, then a brief mention of the public opinion. If something similar is followed for each of the sections, that may remove most of the repetition in the old outline.

XCAP Member Shen noted he would be happy to switch with Member Templeton if she would like to do the discarded alternatives with Member Carrasco if she promised to edit that chapter.

XCAP Member Templeton agree with that.

XCAP Member Brail did not want to leave the impression that this part of the report was only written by the people who live next to the tracks, or written only by people who don't live next to the tracks, so he agreed with the assignments.

Chair Naik reported she realized after making the assignments that Member Brail's assignment may need to be split into South Palo A and South Palo Alto B. She reiterated the assignments were just asking the groups to take the stab at writing this. Then all will have the responsibility of co-editing each other's other chapters. After this, all Members will go through Chapters 1 and 2, there may be two meetings to review Chapter 3 and review each other's edits.

XCAP Member Burton remarked the chapter numbers were very confusing. He felt subgroups would need to have their own meetings in the next week.

XCAP Member Templeton noted she and Chair Naik just worked extensively on a portion of South Palo Alto and the chapter for that and now will be working on a different section and she felt uncomfortable with that. She asked if any of the work already done be retained?

Chair Naik explained the underpass version is the longest, probably the one most complete and is the section that most resembles what she imagined the rest of the chapters will look like and that will be a model for discussion of Chapter 3.

XCAP Member Brail agreed the underpass section contained the largest amount of "inside baseball" and he was a little put off by some of it and didn't agree with all of it. That may be the right format, but to make it something useful, it has to be more than a reiteration of everything that happened.

XCAP Member Shen commented that he and Member Cho live near Churchill and know it best, so he and Member Cho could probably do the first cut quickly, then hand it off to members who don't live there. That may be a way to get it into Chair Naik's format as fast as possible.

Chair Naik remarked the challenge with the Brown Act, if South Palo Alto is divided into parts 1 and 2, because there are many alternatives, then each group of two members could share it with a different group of two before the next meeting.

XCAP Member Shen replied work would still be needed to put it into the proposed format, so he suggested putting it into that format then show it to another two-person group.

Chair Naik recommended whatever groups of two are decided on now, the second two-person group to see that revision should be decided today. Each group should be prepared to write their section, then be prepared to edit the next one.

XCAP Member Templeton asked if the other chapters had been worked on the same way as the underpass?

Chair Naik responded those were all the Chapter 5's that were released.

XCAP Member Templeton then questioned how much of this is new work and how much is formatting?

Chair Naik clarified it is more formatting than anything else. Reading the previous Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 and then Chapter 5, which each member wrote a small section of. The only one that is completely new is Discarded Alternatives. The others have some basis. She explained on the agenda, members click on Chapter Tracker which shows hot links to all of the latest versions. If members are working on Churchill, for example, they would look at Members Cho, Shen and Templeton's Chapter 2, methods used to understand alternatives, pull out all Churchill items and put it together with whatever relates to Churchill in Chapter 4, then put it together to resemble the outline being discussed. Some alternatives, such as Churchill and Discarded Alternatives may need new content. Some of the South Palo Alto items are more ready to go. This report will not be presented to City Council until after the first of the year, but it would be much better for the Group to make an attempt to complete this before the holidays. She asked for feedback from Members regarding who would like to do certain chapters, and did the Group feel the "leanings" chart should be included.

XCAP Member Templeton believed the "leanings" chart led to a lot of confusion and miscommunication.

XCAP Member Brail agreed with that, but hoped there were some things the Group could agree on. This may not be towards one preference or another, but that would mean spending more effort on the recommendations for additional information, which could make a decision easier for whoever takes this up in the future.

Chair Naik advised the Suggested Future Work Section is probably where there will be the most discussion.

XCAP Member Brail had not read the financing chapter, but realistically affordability is a chapter that is needed.

XCAP Member Klein noted one thing that will be said in South Palo Alto is that the Committee was unanimous in rejecting tunnels.

Chair Naik believed the area of future work needed agreement by XCAP.

XCAP Member Klein added in the financial section there should be an underlying statement stating there is no practical financing in sight currently.

XCAP Member Brail advised there may be some money available from the County which could be enough to do the Churchill bicycle tunnel and possibly reconfiguring Embarcadero.

Chair Naik returned to the “leanings” question where she and Members Templeton and Brail were nos.

XCAP Member Reckdahl stated it was a quagmire.

XCAP Member Burton asked if there could be an agreement on the recommended alternatives because then the “leanings” would be irrelevant.

Chair Naik advised there was no agreement.

XCAP Member Burton felt then options were either including the “leanings” as the best the Group could do, or if it was felt Council would ask why XCAP could not come up with recommended alternatives, anticipate that and do exactly that.

Chair Naik asked how the Group felt about going through the intellectual exercise of what are all the recommendations for all the alternatives, then think about the ones that the Group thinks are doable.

XCAP Member Shen felt “leanings” should be left out.

XCAP Member Klein agreed to leave that out.

Chair Naik noted the majority felt “leaning” should be left out. She then asked if everyone agreed with the new proposed outline and the new proposed chapter order.

XCAP Member Carrasco agreed with the outline and chapter order.

Chair Naik continued with work as it’s divided, work on Discarded Alternatives will be done by Members Carrasco and Templeton.

XCAP Member Templeton did not know why the case could not be made to just finish with the other instead of redoing things again. The original set of instructions for the document are not being changed to a different set of instructions that causes them to be rewritten.

Chair Naik advised additions need to be made to the chapters already created that describes what is in the original Chapter 2, which is the methods used to evaluate and also Chapter 4 which is things that have been learned.

XCAP Member Templeton noted what she understands from the new proposals for the outline and chapter order is that it would make more sense this way and there is still missing information.

Chair Naik remarked this is an effort to put the document together to make more sense.

XCAP Member Burton observed for something as complex as this, it is not surprising to discover half way through that the original outline does not work and also bear in mind if there isn’t a very good report, it is less likely to have a real impact on the Council. He asked Chair Naik what she thought a realistic completion date could be.

Chair Naik replied it depends on how much the Group is able to get done in the timeframe. She hoped this would be done by or before January 15. One problem is that final input is due by Thursday so it can be posted, even though the meeting isn't until the following Wednesday. There are also restrictions caused by the Brown Act. The next meeting is scheduled for November 18 but that could be canceled if necessary. The week after that is Thanksgiving, but Monday, November 23 would be available.

XCAP Member Brail voiced concern about using Word.

Chair Naik advised the work could be done in Google.docs then changed Sarah can convert it into a Word doc.

XCAP Member Burton asked Member Brail if he was talking about page one of the outline in the memo or page 2?

XCAP Member Brail replied he was talking about, on page 2 of the Chair's memo, the new Chapter 3, South Palo Alto.

Chair Naik indicated Member Burton was not assigned a chapter, but he could work on that too.

XCAP Member Burton offered to work on a review for these.

Chair Naik returned to the schedule and noted if the Group could not meet Nov. 18 and Thanksgiving week is skipped, the next meeting would be December 2, but there would be a similar turnaround period of two weeks, and then there are the holidays, so the next meeting would be the last week of December, then well into January. She then addressed a staff request she had on page 5 of her memo. She took a picture of a Town Hall presentation the City had done in February which showed the estimated timeline of when XCAP makes a decision, how long the process takes. Because of COVID this timeline probably could not be achieved, but she asked for something like, when Council makes a decision this is how many years it could take for design work and how many years for construction work. Something that lays out if and when Council makes a decision, how might this go.

Mr. Kamhi thought a lot of that will be the next phase of the discussion. Anything at this point would be very rough. He could possibly provide the next steps in the timeline without assigning time.

Chair Naik was looking for something that would explain, even if Council decides on something, the City has to work with Caltrain and the VTA before things happens.

Mr. Kamhi noted a lot of that would depend on the direction from Council.

XCAP Member Klein agreed with Chair Naik about the timeline so residents understand this is a very long-term project.

Mr. Kamhi reported today VTA released an info item to TAC which showed they removed all grade separation funding for the next ten years from their Measure B budget. This is only an info item and has not been decided at this point.

Chair Naik expressed she was hoping for something basic such as, from the point where Council decides, it would take X amount of time to get designs certified, then possibly X years to get permission.

XCAP Member Klein wanted to get the point across that this is a long, drawn-out process.

5. Writing and Editing of Final Report

Chapters 1 and 2

Public Comment

None

XCAP Member Comments

Chair Naik described the process for editing and writing Chapters 1 and 2. Substantive edits will be discussed and agreed changes upon will be made on the report.

XCAP Member Carrasco recommended in Connecting Palo Alto, the rail connection that connects Palo Alto to other cities is really important for our businesses and it takes cars off the road. He did not see the acknowledgement of the benefits of rail connection.

Chair Naik thought that was covered in the Comprehensive Plan, why this is the backbone of the system and things connect to it.

XCAP Member Carrasco did not have a specific place for this to go, just that it should be acknowledged that it is a huge benefit to Palo Alto.

Chair Naik clarified this could be something that describes Caltrain and our community. That might be something in Chapter 2, where community context is described.

XCAP Member Brail advised there is a Section 4 of this chapter that talked about supporting public transportation goals, etc. and a paragraph in that section could make that clearer.

XCAP Member Klein voiced concern about the first paragraph. There are too many different thoughts in that paragraph. He felt the first paragraph on the City's website connectingpaloalto.com should be used because it is a good model of what this should say. He also felt the arrows on the chart seemed to be inconsistent.

XCAP Member Klein's suggestions were discussed by the Group and changes agreed upon were made in the document

XCAP Member Shen noted throughout this document COVID and pre-COVID are mentioned and he suggested defining COVID.

This was discussed and Chair Naik advised the cover note will talk about it, but it still makes sense to note this in each of the sections it is in.

XCAP Member Templeton suggested, instead of COVID, call it pandemic.

XCAP Member Klein suggested adding the date it started.

Discussed changes were agreed upon and added to the document.

XCAP Member Templeton questioned under What is XCAP, a lot of time was spent on this wondering if the amount of explanation was relevant. She also felt the opening sentence was vague.

After discussion of this point, Chair Naik made some changes as agreed upon.

XCAP Member Carrasco asked for clarification about the short summary of the whole report that will be written by Chair Naik and XCAP Member Klein?

Chair Naik answered yes, it would be the Executive Summary. She then moved to the grade separation section and she explained she put in a lot of graphics because that makes it easier to understand.

XCAP Member Carrasco inquired if mention was needed about what would happen if grade separation is not done?

Chair Naik thought this was included in other chapters but perhaps the word gridlock could be used.

This was discussed by members.

XCAP Member Brail liked the graphics and the fact that they came from Caltrain.

XCAP Member Klein returned to the four reasons for doing grade separations. He suggested the list should be in the order of priority and the first should be to remove the congestion and safety could be second.

Chair Naik explained she put those in that order because the Council has agreed that grade separations are something they want and as a result they recognize their decision means there will be congestion because they are also supporting the concept of Caltrain which means there will be more trains because that is good for Palo Alto. As a result, the Comprehensive Plan is planning for these separations because safety improvements will be needed, reduced congestion and support for public transit is needed.

The order of reasons for grade separation and causes of traffic in Palo Alto were discussed by Members and agreed upon changes were made to the document.

Chair Naik then moved discussion to Chapter 2.

There was then a discussion regarding freight trains and the graphic showing the grade and changes agreed on.

XCAP Member Klein suggested under High Speed Rail and Caltrain Operations, two more things in the high-speed section. It would be appropriate to point out that the City of Palo Alto's official position is in opposition to high-speed rail and second, add something that says many experts believe it is unlikely that high-speed rail will ever come to the peninsula.

XCAP Member Carrasco pointed out there is a high probability that high-speed rail will come to San Jose which means many passengers will have to transition to the Caltrain trains and Caltrain will have to increase service.

These points were discussed and changes to the document were made.

XCAP Member Klein then referred to the second bullet point under Caltrain Corridor Wide Grade Separation Study and he wanted to emphasize that the corridor study does not implicate the work XCAP has been doing.

XCAP Member Reckdahl felt this made it look like XCAP was a passive observer.

Chair Naik advised that when getting into alternatives, there is very specific strong language about going forward Palo Alto should be involved in the Caltrain Corridor Study and the reasons why. That is in the recommendations for later.

XCAP Member Reckdahl encouraged wording that clarified this will not be shelved.

The wording for this was discussed.

Chair Naik noted she included some information in the report about the Caltrain Governance Reform, talking about the different districts that would be possible.

XCAP Member Carrasco would like some reference to the "leafiness" of Palo Alto.

Chair Naik responded there is a strong reference to that in the beginning of the Comprehensive Plan and that future Councils should be relying on the Comprehensive Plan to look at if these things fit, and upgrade their criteria accordingly.

XCAP Member Brail moved discussion to Funding for Grade Separations and noted in the past AECOM brought in some consultants on funding who presented a chart with potential funding sources and how much money could be expected to be raised by them.

Chair Naik replied she looked at those, but there was a lot of disagreement about the numbers the consultant presented and she felt none of the graphics would be useful for this conversation. She felt the important thing was to explain the way grade

separations have been funded in the last 150 years and how that has changed as a result of the history of the corridor. She did not want to elaborate more than noting there are other options that can be looked into.

XCAP Member Klein indicated under Funding Grade Separations, he had trouble with costs are rising in the Bay Area because he was not sure that is currently true.

Chair Naik replied this was a direct quote from Sebastian Petty's conversation. She thought he meant the cost of grade separations are rising, not because the construction costs are generally rising, but because the complexity of grade separations today versus what they used to be makes it more expensive.

XCAP Member Klein suggesting stating that in this report.

Chair Naik advised she included some information on Measure RR and discussion was held on this item.

XCAP Member Klein suggested defining PTC, Positive Train Control someplace in the document.

There was discussion about this and wording agreed on.

XCAP Member Burton thought the COVID section needed to be revised in light of Measure RR and this was discussed.

Member Burton then recommended condensing the section on freight and this was discussed by Members.

XCAP Member Templeton questioned the framing of this chapter and calling it Community Context. This was also discussed by Members.

All these items were discussed by Members and suggested changes were made to the document.

Chair Naik asked about the timing of the next meetings and this was discussed.

6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 pm