**Minutes**

**Subject:** Traffic congestion at I-295 and Gate Parkway and possible impact of a proposed IKEA store

**Date:** Thursday November 5, 2015

**Convened:** 6 30 p.m.

**Place:** University of North Florida University Center, 12000 University Drive

**Meeting Attendance**: Council Member Danny Becton, District 11; John Pappas, Acting Director of Public Works; Bill Killingsworth, Acting Planning and Development Director, Carl Weckenmann, Senior Manager of System Planning Jacksonville Transportation Authority; Jessica Shepler, Director of Governmental Affairs Jacksonville Transportation Authority; Sondra Fetner, Office of General Counsel; Mike Maier, US Real Estate Manager IKEA, Steve Diebenow, Partner of Driver, Peek & Hawthorn Law Firm; and Austin Chapman, PE, PTOE Prosser Transportation Engineer. Please see attached Sign-in Sheets for full list of attendees.

Council Member Danny Becton, District 11, opened the meeting, greeting the constituents and explained the purpose of the meeting, which was to discuss current traffic congestion and what new traffic may result from the planned 2017 opening of the IKEA store at the intersection of Gate Parkway and I-295.

Mike Maier of IKEA gave background on the store’s history and its operating philosophies. He explained that the furniture store is a regional company that strategically places stores to draw customers from many miles away as well as those in the community. Concerning traffic, he said the majority of its customers arrive Friday evenings after rush hour and on Saturday and Sundays. The stores open at 10 a.m. after the traditional morning rush hour. The average customer stay is between two and three hours. The 294,000 square foot building will have between 1,000 and 1,200 parking spaces.

Attorney Stevcn Diebenow, representing IKEA in its development plans, said there are zoning concerns. IKEA is asking for a 108 foot tall sign tower, the parking lot landscaping design would primarily be a perimeter model that differs from current code. To achieve these goals IKEA would ask for Planned Unit Development zoning, which allows for exceptions if approved by City Council.

Austin Chapman, a certified traffic engineer for the Prosser Company, said more than 70 percent of the traffic would access the store from I-295. This use would create half the traffic that would be generated if the property was used as it is currently zoned. When constructed IKEA would build infrastructure improvements, restripe existing road to create more turn lanes. The Jacksonville Transportation Authority would also investigate re-routing bus traffic and adding a stop to this area .Jim Knight of the Florida Department of Transportation spoke about the current plan, developed before the IKEA announcement to alleviate traffic congestion in this area with the construction of an Express Lane. The Southbound lanes on I-295 would include a tolled Express Lane. This is a $140 million project that is hoped to begin construction in early 2016. The northbound section of this project is part of the FDOT 20-year plan, but does not yet have a funding source.

Bill Killingsworth, Acting Director of the Planning and Development, gave an overview on how traffic is studied and how road development works. He explained that new computer models can examine the stress cars will pose to roads. These tools would be implemented in the future to predict traffic problems.

Throughout the meeting, residents raised several concerns that included:

* Vehicles taking short cuts through neighborhoods to avoid congestion.
* How many trucks would arrive daily to re-stock the store? When they would arrive and what routes would they use?
* Would the increase of out-of-town customers increase crime and blight issues?
* Why was this location chosen instead of one with a greater commercial profile?
* Why not complete all of the road work and then construct the IKEA store?
* What will happen to property values when the IKEA store opens?

Council Member Becton thanked the panel and those in attendance as well as the University of North Florida for the use of its facilities. He said this is the first of several meetings that will be held to keep residents informed on traffic work and plans to create a better flow in this area.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

The minutes were prepared and submitted on November 12 by Dan Macdonald, District 11 ECA and are meant to be an overview of the meeting and not a transcript of the event. Video of this meeting can be found [**http://www.coj.net/city-council/city-council-members/d11.aspx**](http://www.coj.net/city-council/city-council-members/d11.aspx)(Click on Town Hall).

**Minutes packet**: Minutes, sign in sheets, agenda, video disk, meeting notice, IKEA presentation, Prosser Presentation and FDOT presentations.

cc: Council Members/Staff

Cheryl Brown, Director/Council Secretary

Jeff Clements, Chief, Research Division

Dana Farris, Chief, Legislative Services Division

Carol Owens, Assistant Chief of Legislative Services

Kristi Sikes, Chief, Administrative Services Division.

[Cityc@coj.net](mailto:Cityc@coj.net)

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