

## RECORD OF MEETING

### Williston Comprehensive & Transportation Plan Update Focus Group for Agencies Representing Senior Citizens, People with Disabilities, and the Low Income Population

September 22, 2008 2:00 PM

Williston City Hall

Name of Participant:	Representing:
Becky Rhodes	Williston County Social Services (primarily working with the elderly, with an emphasis on keeping people in their home)
Sonja Owen	Opportunity Foundation
Deeann Long	Community Action Partnership (primarily working with lower income people)
Coreen Nehring	Region 1 Senior Services
Lisa Hoffman	Northwest Human Services Center
Cindy Gray	SRF Consulting Group, Inc.
Rick Lane	SRF Consulting Group, Inc.
Steve Peterson	SRF Consulting Group, Inc.
Kent Jarcik	City of Williston, Planning Department

Introductions were made. Cindy Gray and Rick Lane explained that the purpose of the focus group meetings is to gather information from specific groups that have the ability to provide information about public services, transportation features, transit programs, and so forth that may be pertinent to the city's Comprehensive Plan or Transportation Plan. They explained that it's important that SRF and city leaders understand the existing conditions and where there are unmet needs. The group provided the following information and comments.

#### Northwest Public Transit

- Newly expanded operating hours: 7am – 6 pm (Monday-Friday), 8 am – 3 pm (Saturday)
- In addition, NW Public Transit offers rides to Minot, Tioga, etc. A trip to Minot, for example, is \$20.

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- The service is open to everyone on an on-demand basis. A 24 hour notice is encouraged, but people can get same day service if available. Priority given to medical appointments.
- Under 60 years old: \$1.50
- Over 60 years old: Free (donations accepted)
- Service funded in part by federal government grants. A Jericho grant was received, which could become an on-going grant program.
- This service does not have a website.

#### Mercy Rider Program

- Started as a way to transport individuals to medical appointments.
- A \$2.00-\$4.00 fee is charged each way for customers.
- There is a limited amount of tickets available. Tickets are available from Mercy Medical Center and some social service agencies.
- Eligibility also dictated by income restrictions.
- Service funded in part by a DOT grant. The grant provides funds based on income level of 200 percent of poverty.

#### Housing

- The group discussed recent examples of rent increasing \$50, \$250, \$300/month.
- Rents were low for many years, and then jumped drastically in the last 18 months.
- Utility costs and property taxes also rising drastically.
- Some low income people are making more money because wages have increased in the area. This has made them ineligible for the same rental rates, or ineligible for low income housing, but yet they can't afford the increasing market rate rent prices.
- Some elderly people are experiencing difficulty affording their long-time housing due to the increasing rental rates.
- A local doctor owns much of the land west of the bypass and this may be an area of future housing.
- People with mental illness are on a fixed income. Their SSI is around \$600+/month. Rent recently went from \$350 to over \$500 per month.

- Senior citizens are looking for other places to live. Not many openings in low income housing in Williston.
- There's an overall lack of suitable size units (1 bedroom for seniors) at an affordable rate.
- Need for additional low income housing.
- Demand for housing far exceeds the supply.
- Rents haven't gone up in long time, so people are having a hard time adjusting to it.
- Because of the oil industry, there are more people moving in from outside Williston who are willing and able to purchase homes for higher prices.
- Marcil Group - Built 72 apartment units. They've also bought some existing apartments and have taken over management of others.
- The housing shortage started to occur over the last 18 months to 2 years. The city has gone from having housing vacancies to a housing shortage.
- From a land use standpoint, seniors would prefer to live closer to grocery stores, clinics, pharmacies, particularly in the core of the city (west of 2nd Ave, east of Hwy 2 west bypass)

### Transportation

- There are a number of missing links in the city's sidewalk system, and many sections of uneven sidewalks, difficult to negotiate by those in a wheelchair or using a walker, or having any type of difficulty getting around. In the old boom town, Sand Creek, there are no sidewalks.
- Sidewalks and parks are not well-maintained, particularly in southwestern part of Williston. Participants generally felt the city should take a more active role in sidewalk maintenance and construction.
- More ADA accessible curb cuts are needed at corners.
- Traffic concerns were noted around the high school and middle school during peak periods, especially around 14<sup>th</sup> St W and 6<sup>th</sup> Ave W. Parents stop in the middle of the road and drop off children on the streets adjacent to the school. Kids on bikes conflict with vehicles at the 14<sup>th</sup> Street & 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue 4-way stop. Participants felt that parents not being careful when they drive into this area to drop off children. They felt that the streets around the school are designed poorly and do not handle the peak drop off and pick up times. The area near the school entrances become a bottleneck.

- With higher attendance at the high school and middle school, problems are exacerbated.
- It's difficult to cross 11<sup>th</sup> St W in the morning. It's also very difficult to turn east onto 11<sup>th</sup> St W when traveling south from the schools on 6<sup>th</sup> Ave W. Particularly in the morning or during any peak times, it's difficult to turn onto 11<sup>th</sup> St W between 2<sup>nd</sup> St and 9<sup>th</sup> St.
- Drivers generally ignore crosswalks.
- There is some concern about street lighting and the need for improvement in some areas of town.
- Better crossings of the bypass at 9<sup>th</sup> Ave NW and 18<sup>th</sup> St W are needed.
- Inadequate truck service facilities result in more trucks stopping at gas stations in the middle of town.
- Need better striping for two left turn lanes from 26<sup>th</sup> St W heading east and turning north on US Hwy 2.
- Dangerous crossings of bypass on 11<sup>th</sup> St W and 9<sup>th</sup> Ave NW.
- NDDOT completed a study on whether 54<sup>th</sup> St NW (Little Muddy River crossing) could be extended west to USH 2.
- Many trucking companies on 1804 near Little Muddy River.

#### School Districts

- District 8 (Williston rural area) has regular busses and Head Start busses, although it is difficult to find drivers given the resurgence of the oil industry. Out of town games and school activities have had to be cancelled due to the lack of a bus driver, or parents have had to caravan the children to out of town events.
- District 8 has three schools and is only kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. After 8<sup>th</sup> grade, District 8 children go to high school in Williston.
- District 1 (within the City of Williston) has no school busses, which adds to the traffic problem around the schools. Children receiving special education can access bussing services.

#### Elderly and/or People with Disabilities

- Elderly lack access to church on Sundays
- Williston has some audible cross-walks, but could use more.

- Post Office has ramps, but no automatic doors—other businesses need ADA ramps.
- Width of aisles in some stores is too narrow for a wheelchair.
- Larger stores, such as Wal-Mart, should have benches placed throughout the store for elderly people to rest. Wal-Mart had a motorized chair for people to use, but it was stolen.
- Many businesses have assigned handicap parking, but many do not have on-site curb cuts near their front entrance, or the width of their doors is too narrow for wheelchairs. On-site features like speed bumps make it more difficult for people with disabilities to get around.
- It is very difficult for an elderly person to cross the bypass given the short amount of pedestrian crossing time allocated by the traffic signals for pedestrian crossings at the crosswalk.
- Additional street lighting may not have the result of getting the elderly to walk around more.
- Some elderly people who still drive feel uncomfortable driving at night. Night time is when there are the fewest options for getting a ride from a transit service.
- No parks are adapted for people with disabilities. Benches are needed near playgrounds for parents to sit. The sidewalk is gravel approaching the softball fields, which is tough for the elderly or people with walkers or wheelchairs. Some ADA accessible features are provided at Spring Lake Park (for boating/fishing access).