

MEMO

To: Roger Hernstadt, Town of Fort Myers Beach

cc: Jason Green, AICP, Town of Fort Myers Beach
Brett Messner, P.E., Tetra Tech

From: Michael Thatcher, P.E., Tetra Tech 

Date: March 16, 2018

Subject: TPI-FMB – Traffic, Parking, & Pedestrian Review Memo

Tt #: 200-74765-18001

In our review of the Traffic Impact Statement, the Torgerson Properties, Inc. (TPI/applicant) presentation to the Town of Fort Myers Beach (Town) Local Planning Agency (LPA) on February 13, 2018, as well as other secondary documentation included in the proposed development rezoning application, we will address the following topics pertaining to the proposed TPI-FMB rezoning development:

1. Traffic Impacts

The applicant submitted their latest Traffic Impact Statement (TIS) dated March 5, 2018, prepared by David Plummer & Associates, Inc., following comments by Tetra Tech and Town staff. The previous TIS submittals were dated March 8, 2017, November 15, 2017, and January 23, 2018, with the most recent TIS dated March 5, 2018. Providing an accurate assessment of traffic conditions and forecasts for the proposed development are of critical importance, as traffic congestion is known to be an issue within the vicinity of the proposed development, and the latest TIS indicates that the proposed development will contribute to existing issues related to congestion. Below are comments pertaining to our latest comprehensive review, many of which have been brought up during previous reviews:

Industry Standards

The latest TIS, dated March 5, 2018, still does not accurately forecast traffic for the existing and proposed sites, which prevents a comprehensive evaluation of the traffic impacts for the proposed site. Forecasts still appear high for the existing development of the site, while low for the proposed development.

Although the applicant provided field data collected from existing parking operations on the site, it is unclear why the peak hour counts were increased by a factor of approximately 27% (report states 79% of parking area was observed; dividing counts by 79% increases the volumes by approximately 27%), other than part of the parking operations was not observed. From the diagram provided in the TIS, it appears that only a nine (9) space area was not observed, but this area is less than 21% of the parking available for the site, and their notes indicated at points when the lot was full. We believe that the peak hour counts collected at the parking access points should not be adjusted, and be assumed “as-is” in the trip generation forecast for the site.

We have previously commented on the high non-auto trip reduction rates used in the analysis, which do not appear reasonable. We cannot give weight to the contained statements within the TIS from business owners,

regarding their opinion of how their customers arrive and depart their businesses. It is not clear if these owners are present on a daily basis, during operation of their businesses, and likely do not have an unobstructed view of how their customers actually arrive and depart their stores.

Additionally, the TIS applies this high non-auto trip reduction to the hotel portion of the site, in addition to the retail and restaurant uses. Most trips generated by hotels during the weekday AM and PM peak periods would likely be guests either checking out (AM) or checking in (PM), or employees arriving or departing work; it is unlikely that trips occurring during the peak periods would be guests leaving for local amenities. As such, non-auto trip reductions should not be applied to the hotel portion of the trip generation forecasts for both the existing and proposed developments, especially since the hotel portions are being included in the internal capture calculations.

The TIS still contains internal capture calculations, but they are performed for the PM peak hour and Daily forecasts, but not for the AM peak hour. The latest version of the Trip Generation Handbook provides a methodology and factors for determining internal capture for the AM and PM peak hours, but not for the Daily condition. Additionally, internal capture trips are typically reduced from the overall forecast for a site, and not the individual uses, since these trips occur between uses and balancing is required between the supply and demand for each use. The summary sheets provided in the TIS appendix do not appear to properly calculate internal capture reductions, since the rates appear to be applied directly to each individual use. The internal capture calculations should be revised accordingly, and per industry standards. It is recommended that the TIS utilize and include the free, downloadable spreadsheets provided by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), available for calculating internal capture to facilitate future reviews.

The TIS does not include any forecasted trips for the proposed aquatics venue portion of the development. The trip generation forecast for the proposed development should include accurate forecasts for this portion of the development. Care should be used in preparing trip forecasts for this portion of the development, since information on this type of land use is limited within the Trip Generation Handbook.

The applicant should collect or utilize observed information, or customer surveys in support of the non-auto rate reduction used in their analysis. The statements from business owners regarding how customers visit their stores is not considered objective or adequate for supporting the substantial non-auto trip reductions utilized in the analysis. Furthermore, any non-standard information utilized in the TIS, such as trip generation for land uses not covered in ITE's Trip Generation, should also have supporting documentation provided.

Once the forecasts have been accurately prepared utilizing the latest standards, and consistent rates are applied for non-auto trip reductions, an objective review of the anticipated traffic changes and operational results can be evaluated. Additionally, the latest versions of industry standard publications and manuals are preferred, as they reflect the current state of the practice in evaluating traffic impacts for a variety of applications.

Valet Staging Area

There is the potential for stacking vehicles on Fifth Street, as a result of the valet staging area located in Parcel No. 3 (the northeast quadrant of the intersection of San Carlos Boulevard at Fifth Street), especially during check-in and check-out times for hotel guests. It is recommended that a queue analysis be performed for any potential valet operations, including guarantees on staff levels, service times (both drop-off and pick-up) based on similar facilities and measurements of valet travel distances (leaving the valet area on foot to pick up a vehicle, lowering the vehicle from a lift, and the return time in a vehicle). It may be advantageous to create a turn lane along the north side of Fifth Street, in order to stack additional vehicles and avoid a queue of vehicles in the roadway. It is recommended that this turn lane be adequately sized to stack a minimum of ten (10) vehicles within the turn lane, while meeting all necessary design criteria. This minimum stacking amount should be adjusted as necessary to meet the expected demands of the hotel and ancillary uses.

2. Parking, and Traffic Flow

Parking Spaces

It is worth noting that although the applicant proposes removing existing vehicle ingress/egress points along Estero Boulevard, as a result, the applicant proposes removing/relocating all existing beachside parking within their parcels, some of which was allocated for paid public beach use. As a result, an increased number of the public must now cross Estero Boulevard to get to/from their vehicle and the beach.

The Town of Fort Myers Beach Land Development Code (LDC) requires that joint use parking facilities have peak parking demands of the different uses occurring at different times. It is recommended that the applicant provide information to substantiate this. The applicant should also provide a plan for addressing parking if these projections end up being higher than provided in their application materials, including where additional parking will be provided or obtained from other property owners, and instructions for staff during these conditions, as the mix of users on a day-to-day basis cannot be controlled by the Town.

It is recommended that steps be taken to ensure that a guest checking out of the hotel exit the parking garage and find parking elsewhere, soon after their check-out time. This will ensure that they cannot occupy spaces designated for guests checking in to the hotel. This assumes that check-out will be in the morning, and the guest keeps their vehicle parked in the garage as they use other facilities throughout the island, before leaving later in the day.

It is recommended that the applicant quantify the parking impacts associated with planned operations of rooftop events, if such space is allowed, including staffing levels and special accommodations, particularly for controlling access to non-hotel guests. Since hotel traffic forecasts are based on the number of rooms, this additional proposed event space is not captured. It is recommended that a statement from the applicant regarding how these operations will be accommodated and accounted for, including any valet operations, contingency plans for additional parking requirements, and impacts from additional staff levels.

Overflow Parking

As eluded to above, It is recommended that the applicant provide overflow parking, as the current parking proposal excludes parking for the aquatics venue, rooftop events, additional required staffing for events, and other potential unknowns, until the ongoing operations of the development proves to be successful. As this is a hotel with multiple ancillary uses all sharing one parking garage, if the parking restrictions are not properly enforced, there could be no remaining parking for hotel guests.

3. Pedestrian Bridges

The applicant currently proposes two pedestrian bridges. The first crosses Fifth Street, north of the intersection at Estero Boulevard, which connects the resort to the Family Entertainment Center. The second pedestrian bridge crosses Estero Boulevard, west of the intersection at Crescent Street, which connects the resort to the Gulfside resort, bar, and restaurant. Fifth Street is a local roadway, owned and maintained by the Town of Fort Myers Beach. Estero Boulevard is a Lee County owned and maintained facility. At this time, no compensation for air-rights has been proffered for either pedestrian bridge. The LDC references both the Traditional Neighborhood Development Street Design Guidelines and Neighborhood Street Design Guidelines as their general controlling design criteria. Neither of these references make mention of pedestrian bridges, and per discussions throughout the review process, the decision has been that the *FDOT Manual of Uniform Minimum Standards for Design, Construction and Maintenance for Streets and Highways*, commonly known as the 'Florida Greenbook', will be used as the Town's controlling roadway design criteria, which is also generally used by Lee County. Below are comments that we will address pertaining to these two pedestrian bridges:

Vertical Clearance

Chapter 3.C.7.j.4.(b) of the Florida Greenbook states that *'the minimum vertical clearance for a pedestrian or shared use bridge over a roadway is 17-feet'*. The applicant verbally mentioned at the February 13, 2018 LPA meeting that the proposed pedestrian bridges would have a vertical clearance of 14-feet, 6-inches; 2-feet, 6-inches below the recommended advisory condition. This is an important topic, as it correlates with the floor elevations, and elevator landings.

Clear Width

The minimum clear width should be 8-feet for a pedestrian structure. Please note, the FDOT Design Manual (FDM) makes this reference to the minimum clear width, but the Florida Greenbook makes no reference. This value is rather our recommendation to justify the connectivity, effectiveness, and optimal use of these pedestrian bridges.

Lateral Offset

Lateral offset and placement of the bridge columns shall be designed to account for potential future widening of the roadways below.

ADA Compliance

The pedestrian bridges and all connection points shall comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, including providing full-length pedestrian handrails, curb or barrier protection, elevator and/or ramp access, proper walking surfaces, and acceptable means of ingress/egress. The applicants' Master Concept Plan (MCP) proposes staircases and elevators to access the two pedestrian bridges.

Safety

The FDM's standard detail for a pedestrian bridge includes a wrapped 2-inch mesh chain link fence screening enclosure with an 8-foot minimum headroom. This protects the bridge users from falls to the surface below, and prevents objects from being dropped or thrown from the bridge. The FDM allows for other configurations to be utilized, provided an 8-foot minimum headroom is maintained and that the bridge is fully or partially screened. Please note, the Florida Greenbook makes no reference to the enclosure of pedestrian bridges. The pedestrian bridges as depicted in the applicants' renderings, MCP, and presentation appear to be open-aired, where there is pedestrian railing, but no screening enclosure.

Location and Use

The proposed pedestrian bridge across Estero Boulevard, west of Crescent Street replaces the existing crosswalk in this area. Although this would increase the effectiveness of the roadway network, it would more than likely decrease the effectiveness for the public crossing Estero Boulevard, as they would now have to take a set of stairs and/or elevator to get up and then down from the bridge. This shall be coordinated with the County, as to the removal of an existing crosswalk connection.

There is the potential for the public using the pedestrian bridge as a view corridor of the Gulf and beaches. It has been our experience that pedestrian bridges, such as those in Panama City Beach, Daytona Beach, Saint Petersburg, and others, can become congested with stopped pedestrian traffic, which can cause an impediment to both traveling pedestrians, as well as a distraction to the drivers below.

County/Town Approval

The pedestrian bridges as depicted in the applicants' renderings, MCP, and LPA presentation appear to be decorative. The applicant will require approval of the right-of-way use, appearance, and design of both pedestrian bridges crossing the Town's and County's rights-of-way.

The pedestrian bridges will also require agreements from both the Town and County in order to build and maintain facilities on their rights-of-way.

We cannot verify the public benefit of the addition of the proposed pedestrian bridge crossing Fifth Street, based upon the current pedestrian counts provided by the applicant.

*Please note, the Florida Greenbook clearly states if a condition is either recommended or mandatory. If the condition uses the term 'should', it is deemed a recommended condition; however, if the condition uses the terms shall or must, then it is deemed a mandatory condition.

It is recommended that the Town discuss provisions in the event the applicants planned development proves to be inadequate for the required demands, such as offsite supplemental parking.

End Memorandum.

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