

City Council Meeting of February 6, 2012

Paraphrased and summarized from the complete transcript. Direct quotes from the complete transcript will appear between double quotes

01:07 Introduction & rollcall

02:14 Proclamations about other subjects begin <DELETED>

15:14 Mayor Glass: Introduces Trestle Rehabilitation Presentations and Comment period. "I'm looking forward to hearing and seeing the presentation from the staff. And then we will open it up to public comment prior to getting a discussion going here by the City Council."

16:36 Larry Zimmer: (Director, Public Works) gives overview, "We wanted to remove blight as most would describe portions of the Trestle as it currently stands, restore what was once public space, particularly along the river and to maintain the historic resource, which is the Trestle." 95% of the planning and design phase is funded by the Coastal Conservancy grant, with contributions from City of Petaluma and SMART. "Public outreach for this project was more extensive than most. We had a public meeting in December, it was well attended."

<Editor's note: He doesn't mention that stakeholder input had been originally scheduled for August/September 2011, but was postponed until the public meeting in December 2011. With no stakeholder input up to that point the 3 Alternatives were already fully fleshed out.>

He briefly sketches the 3 Alternatives the team considered, emphasizes that these are general proposals, all details subject to discussion and revision. No need to vote on a resolution in this meeting. He introduces Craig Lewis (consultant project manager).

20:18 Craig Lewis: Gives PowerPoint presentation (like December 2011 presentation). Begins with overview of existing Trestle conditions. Explains bents, piles, bent caps, stringers, joists (deck stringers), railroad ties, deck boards, track rails, and hand railings. "We estimate that up to 70% of" the timber piles "are basically beyond repair and need some type of strengthening"

22:34

Vice Mayor Tiffany Reneé: How was it determined 70% of piles would need repair?

Craig Lewis: "Basically from inspecting them, previous reports, just looking at them. There were core samples taken out of the piles themselves."

Tiffany Reneé: Any exam of piles below mudline?

Craig Lewis: "No, we have not looked at that."

23:52

Craig Lewis: Structural loading criteria (live loads, public assembly loads, future electric trolley load, the axle wheel loads, seismic loading) were applied to all three Alternatives.

24:55

Alternative 1 Restoring the timber piles was the main focus. One method considered was a jacket made from FRP material, fiber reinforcement polymer material that goes around the existing piles. Grout concrete is pumped in between the jacket and the existing timber. At least 2 piles at every bent would be treated this way. The remaining intact piles would be wrapped in high density polyethylene wrap, to prevent future rotting.

On a case by case basis any stringers (the heavy wood bridging between bents that directly support the trolley rails) with extensive dry rot would have steel plates attached to the exterior vertical surfaces by bolts passing through the wood portion. Recycled timbers might be used to conceal steel.

In all cases 100% of deck boards would be replaced plus some ties and joists as needed. The existing train rails would be salvaged and re-used if possible. A new hand rail system is required on the turning basin side.

27:32

Alternative 2 Leave existing bents in place but with no loads bearing on them. Install new bents in between the old, with three steel pipe piles supporting each bent cap. Each pipe pile ends in an augur that can be driven into the soil like a giant screw without use of impact pile drivers, with minimal noise disturbance or vibration.

There would be new bent caps to span the piles made from steel or concrete. The old bents would be left in place to rot away over time. 100% of deck boards would be replaced plus some ties and joists as needed, plus a new hand rail system.

29:14

Alternative 3 "Reconstructing the Trestle" The existing Trestle is completely demolished and removed. Completely removing old piles is problematic as they tend to break off at the mud line. New steel pipe piles would be augured in to replace existing wood piles (again 3 per bent). The bent cap system would be the same as Alternative 2, pre-cast concrete or possibly steel. 100% of deck boards would be replaced plus whatever ties and joists that can't be recycled, and a new hand rail system.

The Coastal Conservancy grant requires an interpretive and educational exhibit program and the team reviewed 5 themes.

32:23 Mark Hulbert (preservation architect)

Makes weak case that strictly speaking Trestle isn't an historic resource even though many (including himself) have said it's very probably (but not definitively) eligible to be added to National Registry if repaired.

Admits it might be eligible for National Registry as a component of a district, in this case the Downtown Historic District, but has not been officially recognized currently.

<Editor's note: Hulbert's remarks make it clear he also sees the Trestle as historically significant and seems almost apologetic for emphasizing its lack of official recognition as such. Since alternatives 2 and 3 are in direct conflict with getting rehabilitation funding through historic status grants this would suggest he has been coached by other team members to make the historic nature of the Trestle questionable, or irrelevant. That further suggests a bias on the part of the team for alternatives 2 and 3.>

40:25 Larry Zimmer

Summarizes the preceding comments "When we started this project... " we intended "to keep as much of the Trestle in place" as possible. Alternative 1 was looking like a bit of a hodge-podge with concrete jackets, polyethylene wrap, extra steel, - he called it the "uglification of the Trestle" - which led them to consider Alternatives 2 & 3.

<Editor's note: I find it hard to believe that the "bad" aesthetics of Alt 1 even occurred to the City engineers (not a particularly artsy group) let alone impelled them to Alternative 2, leaving the old piles and bents to rot (which sounds especially ugly to me as they would be left to deteriorate over years to come) or Alternative 3, complete demolition which destroys all historic significance into the bargain, in return for a meaningless and bland (though structurally simple and sound) modern support structure. I think it's much more likely that the prospect of convincing a contractor to take on the disassembling, evaluating, reusing or replacing and rebuilding of this fussy old structure, and the open ended nature of it which could easily lead to nightmarish ballooning change orders made them (or more likely Zimmer, as the executive in charge) run screaming towards simple straight forward solutions like Alt 2 & 3.

But to sell these extremely un-historic alternatives to the 'bleeding heart' historic preservationists, an appeal to 'a more aesthetic solution' might go down easier, and twisting poor Mark Hulbert's arm beforehand until he agrees to emphasize how the Trestle isn't quite 'historic' enough in a very narrow and technical way, so just forget about those scarce historic rehabilitation grants anyway. And he didn't even burst into tears as he contradicted his own report and personal opinions to not lose his consulting contract.>

Larry Zimmer states all 3 alternatives are viable, that is, do-able.

42:50 Chris Stevick (Professional restorer of antique structures, and long-time Trestle rehabilitation advocate)
Trestle technology is 150 years old. Restoration of piles in a tidal zone is common. Piles below the mud line, or sealed in a synthetic wrap are in an anaerobic condition and safe from further deterioration.

The stringers that support the track rails are made of three 8" x 18" pieces of solid fir bolted together (never under water above the bent caps) and have been calculated sufficient to hold a 132 ton trolley car.

The last time a locomotive crossed the Trestle in 1992, its combined weight was 200 tons. Even in its deteriorated state the Trestle (and the

train) survived. The trolley we have in mind, or a crowd of humans on the deck, would not exceed 50 tons, 25% of what it was designed to carry.

The Timber Evaluation Report (October, 2011) states "the bent caps appear to be sound." The stringers can be viewed from above or below for evaluation and those between bents 17 and 31 were replaced in 1969. Soundness can also be determined by striking with a mallet. Only one stringer, between bents 33 and 34, showed considerable deterioration. I'd like to see why all of the stringers would need reinforcing steel plates.

<<CHRIS, PLEASE CLARIFY-- Cowks?>>

"If the ??COWKS?? as you go along can be that much larger than what we're asking it to do then why do we need to have"... "steel on either side of these stringers."

SMART is currently dismantling several old trestles "and SEQA requires them to find somebody who might need or want to use that material." These materials, if salvaged, might be used to replace deteriorated stringers in our Trestle, as needed.

Are we jumping to inauthentic materials like steel beams, steel or concrete bent caps, and discounting the re-use of original materials still in good shape? If absolutely necessary, OK, but only if absolutely necessary.

The Historic Structure Report found the Trestle significant because of where it is (adjacent to Historic District), who it's associated with (McNear, Petaluma pioneer, who built it), and how it was used (integral to shipping on the Petaluma River in the historic era) and that it's the last wharf standing, sturdy enough to survive along a river once covered with wharfs.

The project must be funded in order to be successfully constructed. The most likely sources of funding are historic grants. Demolish the Trestle and you lose the basis for a historic grant. In that case, the City has to pay for the demolition with no funding for a replacement.

"If you create a destination like the Trestle, which celebrates Petaluma history, then you make Petaluma a destination and you're actually saving our downtown. So it's not just historical, it's also developmental. It's crucial. "

54:15 John Fitzgerald (representing P-RAP - Petaluma River Access Partners, and sub-group Petaluma Waterways) P-RAP and Petaluma Waterways are in favor of Trestle rehabilitation and want to make it part of the system of paths, trails, and access to recreation along the Petaluma River and the greater Bay Area trails

"The Trestle is a historic and culturally significant landmark along the Petaluma Waterways, the water and land trail that manifests our river access and enhancement plan."

"The Trestle should be clearly marked as part of the trail network, an interpretive display should show visitors how the Trestle fits into this historic, recreational, environmental, and public access treasures, that together comprise Petaluma Waterways."

57:20 Paul Siri (fish biologist and ocean policy consultant to State Coastal Conservancy)

Involved with River Enhancement Committee and in making connections between Coastal Conservancy and Trestle Rehabilitation project. Emphasizes importance of "Trestle restoration with regards to examining, recovering, and reusing as much of the materials as possible." Also advocates for a marine debris capture device where storm drains empty into Petaluma River at the Trestle.

1:00:53 Kevin Kelley (local architect)

Thinks Petaluma is a "spectacularly beautiful place" because of its historic architecture. Compares rehabilitation of the Trestle to challenges facing Venice, Italy, an ancient city built entirely on pilings driven into the mud below shallow sea water a millennia ago. His main concern is that an unsightly opaque green fence will be erected around the Trestle until rehabilitation is complete, blocking visitor visual access to the Petaluma River. Recommends professional consultation before erecting an ugly safety barrier.

Larry Zimmer replies the fence is by SMART for safety and liability reasons, but it will only block the end of the Trestle near Western. Also that it can easily be improved. Council members Healy and Barrett comment.

1:09:29 Marie McCusker: (Executive Director at Petaluma Downtown Association) Concerned about inadequate safety provided by existing fencing around Trestle. PDA enthusiastic about "a working, functional Trestle"

1:12:30 Mayor Glass - replies:

"I'm sure there's every intent on the part of the city to work with you, it wasn't the city that put the fence up, per se, it was SMART"

Returning to main topic:

"Mr. Stevick and volunteers like himself have worked long and hard with a passion about this issue and they certainly deserve to get at least the answers to the questions if we can deliver those. ...If the Alternative winds up to be that the historic nature and historic materials are not achievable to be used, he would like an explanation as to the research that went into it, the quantification of the analysis, and the why not of it essentially."

Mike Healy (Council Member) -

"the whole reason this grant application, this design process came about was because of Chris Stevick and his fellow travelers, so you know I really think he needs to be listened to even more so than members of the public on an issue of, you know, general interest. I really think that there needs to be an Alternative FOUR and I think that needs to be the Chris Stevick Alternative"

1:15:23 Larry Zimmer

"I believe Alternative 1 is Chris Stevick's Alternative." Healy doubts this, but Zimmer says then let's call it Alternative 1-B, what Chris wants is to preserve as much as possible of the original, historic structure and that was the overall intention of Alt 1. It means the contractor would have to disassemble a segment, evaluate the parts, and reassemble the segment using the good materials, replacing the bad, then move to the next segment.

Damaged piles need to be repaired. Chris didn't like wrapping some piles and not others, but it could be done to give a uniform appearance, however wrapping all would increase cost. Wrapping and grout infill increases diameter (changes appearance). Long steel sleeves that go below mudline are an option, but are problematic because of stress at the point of connection.

Mike Healy Maybe one twist on an Alternative 1 that the Mr. Stevick suggested was to try to stock pile materials from the other Trestles that SMARTs going to be replacing and there's two or three of them along the line.

Larry Zimmer "...and that's certainly possible we would have to find funding and a location to be able to" store the materials and evaluate their appropriateness.

Mayor Glass As Mr. Stevick asserted, would a 50 ton payload delivery as opposed to a 200 ton design be adequate? Would it "still be a useful amenity and be structurally sound?"

Larry Zimmer "If we need to I can turn it over to a real engineer but I would not reduce the design load."

1:21:09 Chris Albertson (Council Member)

<Editor's note: Wastes 10 minutes asking 9 questions that were answered in the report which he obviously has not read.>

1:28:53 Vice Mayor Tiffany Reneé

Asks about wrapping the up to 70% of pilings to reinforce & protect

Larry Zimmer explains steel or RFP wraps, infilled with cement grout

Tiffany Reneé Asks about visual appearance of wrapped pilings (will they look like existing piles?)

Larry Zimmer "...we're trying to match the color, we're trying to match the appearance, and the feel of the Trestle."

Tiffany Reneé Suggests the rail crane repair tool used to dismantle & rebuild the trestle segment by segment (mentioned by Chris Stevick) could even provide visual interest to the public during the rehabilitation process.

01:34:34

Mike Healy "just offer to buy this thing for a dollar and get it off their (SMART's) hands."

01:35:05 Mayor Glass

Sums up saying the spirit of Alternative 1 is "maintain as much of the historic integrity that is possible" and if "that isn't achievable then Mr. Stevick needs to understand why and so does the council" Alternatives 2 & 3, especially demolition "is a real hard one for people to really embrace."

01:35:56 Teresa Barrett

"I think you guys have started the approach to this without taking it from a historical perspective." CEQA stipulates "any kind of alteration of a historic structure is considered demolition, so you have to actually show why keeping, restoring it as it is, or with like materials is not feasible" Just being expensive is not a valid excuse.

She warns that not taking the historical value seriously at the beginning may cause serious permit problems at the back end. She thinks Alternative 3 isn't even possible "that looks like a freeway flyover."

Also how it looks now and when completed is important to a capital campaign necessary to raise joint funds for construction.

Larry Zimmer Defends the project by saying they are doing historical and environmental plans and dealing with permitting agencies "up front."

01:39:15 Mayor Glass

Glass & Zimmer sum up the discussion

Larry Zimmer: "If I had to guess it was, it is Alternative one and I understand that you guys are viewing Alternative one differently than I am, but they really are the same; Alternative one is 'Save as much as we can'."

Mayor Glass "Well, to shorten it up here, maybe for, so it doesn't have to come back Alternative one is what I would say and if it's not possible then the information to Mr. Stevick and the council as to why it wasn't possible whatever wasn't possible to do here's why not."

Larry Zimmer "There's a saying in engineering that, 'I can build anything if you give me enough money'."

Mayor Glass "Yep, I get it, that's probably true."

<Editor's note: Mr. Zimmer keeps hinting darkly that all these problems with Alternative 1 could be ironed out, 'but beware, it's gonna drive up the cost.' Yet by their own reckoning Alternatives 2 and 3 are more costly upfront, so this makes me think he's not really bothered by higher costs, it's more like he sees Alternative 1 as a needlessly complicated headache that could be avoided by going with 2 or 3 instead. The best way to drive Council members in the direction he prefers is to scare them

with 'You're going to have to spend money you don't have to get this impractical, even eccentric (if historically significant) result.'>

Mayor Glass "Okay, with that we're going to go to public comment on non-agendized items"

01:41:38

<NON-AGENDIZED ITEMS DELETED>