

**CONNECT TRANSIT BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

**SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES – FEBRUARY 10, 2021**

**351 Wylie Drive – Training Room  
Normal, Illinois 61761**

A Special Board Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Connect Transit was held on February 10, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. at Connect Transit with Board Members participating in the meeting virtually.

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Trustee Judy Buchanan  
Trustee Linda Foster  
Vice-Chairman Julie Hile  
Trustee Tim McCue  
Trustee Deb Presley  
Trustee Mandava Rao  
Chairman Ryan Whitehouse

CITY MANAGERS: Town of Normal Manager Pam Reece – Late arrival (4:58 p.m.)  
Bloomington Deputy City Manager, Billy Tyus – Present

STAFF PRESENT: Mark Peterson, Interim General Manager  
Pat Kuebrich, Finance Director  
Jeff Holtke, Marketing Manager  
Steve Stockton, IT Manager  
Jill Baxter, Board Clerk

The Special Board meeting of the Connect Transit Board of Trustees was called to order by Chairman Ryan Whitehouse at 4:30 p.m. Roll call was taken and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were two (2) public comments.

Mr. Ben Hart, President and CEO of *Heritage Operations Group*. Mr. Hart's company manages senior care facilities throughout McLean County and the state of Illinois. Heritage is very supportive of Connect Transit and its mission. Additionally, they applaud the Downtown Transfer Center Study and believe the proposed center will be an asset to downtown Bloomington. The purpose of his comment was to provide input on how one of the sites currently under consideration would impact established downtown businesses. That site, namely being the Market Street Garage. Heritage's corporate headquarters are located in downtown Bloomington on the North side of the old square in the Heritage Plaza Building. Heritage redeveloped the former Roland's Department Store back in the late 1980's and has been a member of downtown ever since. Today, it employs 141 people out of its downtown headquarters building. We are one of the largest, if not the largest, private employer remaining in

downtown. The Market Street Garage is vital to the continuity as a business in downtown. Our employees, visitors and tenants rely on parking in the Market Street Garage throughout the work week. Our building alone permits over 180 parking spaces in the Garage from the City of Bloomington. If those parking spaces were to be eliminated, there simply is not enough available parking in the vicinity to accommodate our workforce. We would be faced with the very real possibility of having to relocate our corporate headquarters. This would have a detrimental impact on downtown as our employees and our Heritage Plaza tenants help to support downtown economic activity. We have voiced our concern about the loss of the Market Street Garage in the past when other projects were being considered such as: the YMCA relocation. The Garage may not be a visible hub of activity but he stated he could not over-emphasize the importance it has to downtown businesses such as Heritage. Our employees, clients and visitors simply depend on it. This doesn't even consider the other downtown retail establishments and businesses who depend on it as well. He stated he was simply providing his perspective. In reviewing the Transfer Center Study, we are pleased that Connect is considering alternative sites. He would advocate that these other sites would be much better suited for the new transfer center. They would not have the negative impact on established businesses who are important members of the downtown community and its vitality. We would ask that the Board please take these issues into consideration as you are making decisions on the future of the transfer center. More importantly, how it may impact important long-standing members of the downtown community. He thanked the Board for the opportunity to share his perspective and would certainly welcome any follow-up dialogue or discussion.

Chairman Whitehouse thanked him for his comment and stated that Mr. Peterson and he would be in touch with him to discuss further.

Mr. Harry Pratt sent in an email regarding a comment stating his objection to the Transit Center Site Choice #3 (email is attached).

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### *Presentation by Farnsworth Group: On-going Site Study for the Downtown Transfer Center*

Chairman Whitehouse commented before the presentation that this is step 1 in the public gathering. This is being recorded for citizens in the community for the ability to watch later. Today is a fact-finding mission. Connect staff is working diligently to call agencies and partners within the community and talking to leadership staff asking them to provide their input on the three (3) sites, and asking their leadership to get insights from their staff together with insight from the people they may serve. We will reach out to the City of Bloomington and the City Council to provide insight. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February we will revisit this and hopefully make a ranking of the site locations for which we think best fits Connect Transit's needs. The Chairman implored the public to go to Connect Transit's website on the home page where there is a place to provide input on each of the sites. If there are more technical questions, Mr. Frankenberger of Farnsworth Group is available to have those conversations with you as individual Board members. The Chairman turned the floor over to Farnsworth Group to talk about process and give the pros and cons of all three (3) sites and then the Board of Trustees may ask questions.

Mr. Chad Frankenberger took the floor and stated that he is Senior Project Manager and that also in the room with him was Ed Barry, a principal of the company. We will go over the three (3) sites and what we are discussing tonight will be three tasks of sixteen. Specifically, one of the tasks was to identify potential sites. The second one was to evaluate those sites with a list of criteria and the last is to provide preliminary sketches for the three (3) finalists. From that, we have received input from project stakeholders, both by reaching out to the community as a part of some of the online surveys, as well as Mr. Whitehouse noted, the Task Committee, which is made up of a couple of downtown business owners; a couple other City staff; other business entities as well; and leaders within the community. We have identified the potential sites and now we are evaluating them. We used a distinct list of criteria to identify and help score these sites, identifying the pros and cons as well. Some of the evaluation criteria that was used:

- Identifying the property size and shape
- The ownership – publicly or privately owned site
- Any costs and availability associated to the property
- Topography
- Available infrastructure adjacent to any site
- Sightlines and circulation options (from a bus movement standpoint as well as pedestrian)
- Route fit (meaning within lines of existing routes)
- Environmental Status
- Historic Status
- Potential reuse of existing dwellings on the site
- Surrounding uses; partnership opportunities; special community status
- Sustainability

### SITE 1

The first site is the former *Pantagraph Building* located off Washington Street and flanked by Madison Street and has Jefferson Street running through it. This is an iconic community-focused building that has been in the community for a long time. It has a lot of adaptive reuse qualities and potentials. It is under-utilized with the amount building as well as the site itself. It has a probably a high degree of sustainability from the fact that we would be “reusing” potentially part of the main building itself. It provides or lends itself to be a great opportunity for partnerships and multi-use opportunities within the building footprint itself and then potentially on the site. The topography across the site is relatively flat which would make for an efficient layout and more importantly, a safe layout and very convenient circulation. The property size is two (2) city blocks so that provides a great template to begin with. Certainly, going back to the shape of the site; a very rational site from the standpoint that it is linear and square and lends itself to bus circulation very nicely. Lastly, there is potential room for expansion.

Some of the minuses for this is certainly ownership. There is a cost for acquiring the site. There are some renovations that would need to be done, as well as potential demolition of some of the surrounding connect buildings and things of that nature. With this site, we would be vacating or closing down Jefferson Street as it comes through the site. On the overview, you would see a clean and concise circulation in/off of the area and is in line with some of the existing routes in the area. The site is flanked

by three (3) 2-way streets and the only single one-way street is Madison. We have another option where we show the removal of some existing buildings within that site – preliminary in nature – but shows some potential expansion green space and good circulation.

## SITE 2

Existing Market Street Garage. Some of the pros for this site is that it is a publicly owned building and the potential availability. It is a good location and is located within the “buckle”. There is existing parking on and near or around the site. There could be some potential for reuse as was noticed on the Pantagraph property. Some of the cons with this site, the shape is still good; however, the site size is only about 1.5 blocks, a little bit smaller than the first site. There is quite a bit of topography (elevation changes) from the south of the site all the way to the north of the site. Additionally, some of the substantial modifications that would need to be made to the existing structure or updates should that structure remain or be removed, is demolition of the structure and would have costs associated with it. On this site, it is flanked by two (2) one-way streets on the east side and west side which could become problematic with circulation. The option that we have shown, we tackled what the circulation could be but on the north and south side, those are 2-way streets. Again, that gives some flexibility for routes coming in and certainly leaving a transfer center. We provided a second option for this site which provides on the corner the existing post office and we could see maybe some potential for some additional mixed use development versus the other option where we don’t look at that and it frees up some additional circulation for buses.

## SITE 3

This is the former CII East building off of East Street with the adjacent parking lot to the east and to the south. Some of the pros for this location is the proximity to the existing transfer center. It is just a block or two to the east. The topography in this area is relatively flat as well as we noted previously on Site 1 and would provide for a safe and hopefully efficient layout. You have the location and the adjacencies to some of the other downtown businesses and amenities that are there. Some of the cons are this is the smallest of the three sites that we are presenting today which would reflect a smaller building footprint which may require going up to help accommodate program square footage. The circulation in this site becomes a little more fragmented. We think it could work but it becomes a little more “disconnected”. This site is privately owned so there would be costs for procurement of that site. Going back to the square footage, it becomes pragmatic of fitting in the desired and wanted program.

This is a very short and quick summary which hopefully has been presented in an understandable presentation. Mr. Barry added that we started out by looking at the entire “buckle” area, and then zeroed in on about 8-10 sites and then got to these three.

## **DISCUSSION**

Chairman Whitehouse opened the floor to Trustees for discussion mentioning that the Board has two more weeks to gather information. At our February 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, we will be having an in-depth conversation about our likes and dislikes for each of these locations.

Trustee Buchanan asked if Farnsworth could share with the Board about its process of reducing from 8-10 sites to these three?

Mr. Frankenberger stated that one of the first criteria was property size and shape. As you can see from an overall aerial of the downtown area, large sites are very hard to come by and a lot of the sites that would potentially be available are also parking areas, small parking areas. We tried to leverage all of those things against one another. These three sites out of the criteria that we had, fit that criteria the best. As we noted the buckle and staying within that buckle or adjacent to the buckle, to be able to enhance the timing of routes and things like that.

Trustee Buchanan follow-up with a question if Farnsworth could explain to us the roughly defined boundaries of the buckle?

Mr. Frankenberger responded that the buckle is roughly Madison Street to East Street, Olive Street up to Locust Street.

Trustee Foster inquired whether Farnsworth considered combustion, lighting of the facility, and noise?

Mr. Frankenberger responded that location as far as those items are concerned, yes, and he believes that as we progress, we would take that dive even further into it. We are still somewhat at a 10,000-foot view and we are slowly stepping down from that. One thing that has been stressed in the public input that we have received is that safety is very important. One of those things is having a well-lit area and cognizant of the noise of buses coming in and out and things of that nature. Hopefully, the three sites that we have are somewhat insulated or help insulate some of that from the downtown, especially as we move away from the buckle.

Trustee Hile questioned the size of the sites. She was curious about what has been the process for envisioning the size of Connect Transit down the road and how that has factored into your thinking about these sites which are clearly, in her view, three very different sites. In the surveys and the responses we have received from the community, there is a concern about parking. She understands that planning cannot happen yet but was curious as we think about location, if we go with a larger site that is more conducive for partnerships which might include some possible parking from other stakeholders.

Mr. Frankenberger responded that Farnsworth had taken into consideration the expansion of Connect Transit down the road. With the amount of buses we show sitting on the sites, hopefully allowing for future expansion from where Connect is currently at now. The additional developments as you are noting, yes. Ideally, looking at square footage of just what CT would need from an operation standpoint, but then in addition to is there potential for partnership. Each site is a little bit different but believes each site would offer a little bit of that. Some maybe more than others. The Pantagraph building is relatively large with multiple floors and would probably accommodate that. The Market Street Garage, from the options that we have shown, there is potential there as well, maybe to a slightly lesser degree.

Mr. Barry added that behind the sketches of the sites provided, there is a program of spaces that has some specific square footages to it that was used to arrive at the sketches. There are some details of how many square feet or different rooms/spaces.

Trustee Rao inquired if there were any documents showing any technical requirements relative to the sites such as passenger requirements or space or size required?

Mr. Frankenberger stated that in a part of this study, we were tasked with 16 requirements and one of those tasks was to develop a program of spaces. We received some really good feedback, especially from the riders and users of the service, and we took that and some square footages from feedback received. The short answer is yes and it will be in the final report for everyone's review, adding that Farnsworth is still finishing the final report as they are still in process of completing the last few tasks. Once it is finalized, we will distribute that accordingly.

Trustee Presley asked if there was a document that Farnsworth had been given listing those 16 tasks and if that was also something that could be shared with the Board.

Chairman Whitehouse stated that once the final document is completed by Farnsworth, that document will be shared with the entire Board.

There was no further discussion.

#### **GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT**

Interim General Manager Peterson recognized staff for all of their outreach efforts encouraging not only individuals in the community, but other stakeholders and organizations to provide feedback which will ultimately be presented to the Board to assist in the final decision for a site. We will be continuing to receive feedback from the City Council so you will have the benefit of their thoughts before the Board makes any final decision in a couple of weeks.

Chairman reiterated that staff would continue outreach and encouraged the Board to reach out to their own network and those in the community that have reached out to each of them individually. The Board needs and wants any and all feedback.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Whitehouse entertained a *Motion to Adjourn*, moved by Trustee Foster, seconded by Vice-Chairman Hile.

AYE: Trustee Buchanan; Trustee Foster; Vice-Chairman Hile; Trustee McCue; Trustee Presley;  
Trustee Rao; Chairman Whitehouse

NAY: None.

Motion carried and the Special Board meeting of February 10, 2021 adjourned at 5:18 p.m.

Judy Buchanan  
Trustee Judy Buchanan, Board Secretary  
[SEAL]

Jill Baxter  
Jill Baxter, Board Clerk



## Jill Sellards Bower

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**From:** HP75@protonmail.com  
**Sent:** Monday, February 8, 2021 3:22 PM  
**To:** Jill Sellards Bower; econdev@cityblm.org; ward6@cityblm.org; mayor@cityblm.org; Tim Gleason; btyus@cityblm.org  
**Subject:** Connect Transit - Public Comment Against Transit Center Site Choice #3 (CII East)

As a downtown resident, I have several concerns about the proposal of Site #3 for the transit center. I support this project overall, but the selection of Site #3 would have significant, and far-reaching impacts on the downtown area that make it unsuitable for selection.

Let me share a few reasons this would be a terrible selection from a practical standpoint.

- The proposed larger adjacent parking lot of the CII East building is not especially large. Driving a regular sized SUV, there's often not much room to maneuver in the lot. Attempting to drive city busses through this area would be a disaster. It's really quite small.
- Trying to exit the lot is always difficult. That intersection between the CII East Building and the Parking Deck is a major entry point into the downtown core. Busses trying to enter or exit in that area will find it extremely difficult to get in and out, and will cause major traffic snarls in the process. Exiting via Front street isn't much better, plus all the pedestrian traffic Front Street receives and street parking would make the inflow and exit of busses a huge headache for everyone involved.
- Accessing the parking lot is extremely awkward. Busses heading South on Madison/ US 51 will have to make a tight and dangerous turn on Olive St, to head back North on East St to get to the parking lot. After making a left onto East, they have to immediately cross 3 lanes of traffic to make the turn into the Lot (or onto Front.). Meanwhile, people on Grove tend to pull out in front of you when you do that, because they think you're turning on Grove. Maneuvering in that area can be tricky in a car. Doing it with a City bus is inviting accidents and injuries.
- A transit Center in this location will destroy the quiet and tranquil area of downtown W Front St offers to shoppers and diners.

In addition, there are some other considerations.

- Often, people who don't live downtown don't realize that the upper floors, or in some cases, the entire building of that row of buildings facing Front St/Epiphany farms are filled with private residences. Some are apartments, some are people's homes that they own. Site #3 proposes to build a bus stop in people's back yard. All those buildings are filled with people trying to live in their homes. **There isn't even a street separating the residences from the proposed site.** I'm sure you understand why nobody would want a bus station built in their back yard, steps away from where they are trying to barbeque on their deck.
- As a homeowner on that street, I simply cannot afford to take the massive hit to my property value that a bus station in my backyard would cause. I'm sure other homeowners, and business owners who's businesses rely on outside dining during warmer months would feel the same. Selecting Site #3 will force us to band together and take every legal option to prevent or delay this project long enough for a more appropriate choice to be selected. **Choosing site #3 would have huge repercussions on a lot of people home life and livelihoods. I'm sure the board doesn't want to hurt people that way.** I'm not a litigious person but picking Site #3 would back us into a corner with no other options.



I'm asking the board to PLEASE not consider Site #3 as the location of the Transit Center. Either of the other options is much more accessible, safer to get in and out of, and wouldn't wreck peoples home lives or livelihoods.

**You can't have a Downtown where people want to Live, Work, and Play if you step on people's homes and businesses.**

Thank you.  
Harry Pratt

Sent with [ProtonMail](#) Secure Email.