

STOW PLANNING COMMISSION

Minutes of the Stow Planning Commission meeting held on Tuesday, March 28, 2017 at 6:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Brauer, Mrs. Harrison, Mr. Kohlmeier, Mr. Ross, Mr. Sprungle

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: Director of Planning Rob Kurtz
Planning Commission Secretary Pamela Daerr

PRESS REPRESENTATIVE: None

Mr. Sprungle called the meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 6: 03 p.m. and asked the audience to stand and say the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll call was taken.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Kohlmeier moved and Mr. Brauer seconded the motion to approve the minutes of the February 28, 2017 meeting. The minutes were approved as submitted.

BUSINESS ITEMS:

P.C. 2017-006 REZONING OF PARCELS 56-11129 & 56-03063 FROM I-2 INDUSTRIAL TO I-1 LIMITED INDUSTRIAL; ALLEN ROAD

Mr. Thom Finley from Omni Senior Living – 23205 Mercantile Road – Beachwood, Ohio was present to represent this item and was sworn in by the Planning Commission Secretary.

Mr. Kurtz: This is a request by Mr. Thomas Finley of Omni Senior Living, developer, and Mr. Steve Schler, property owner, for the Planning Commission's approval of a map amendment to rezone approximately 4 acres of property from I-2 Industrial to I-1 Limited Industrial. The majority of the property is vacant except for a cellular communication tower located at the rear of the property approximately 630 feet from Allen Road.

The property to the north is zoned I-2 Industrial and is occupied by the Matco Tool Company; the property to the east is zoned I-2 Industrial and contains a single family dwelling located near Hudson Drive; the property to the south is zoned I-1 Limited Industrial (recently rezoned - Res. 2016-131) and is vacant; and the property to the west across Allen Road is zoned I-1 Limited Industrial and is occupied by the Cleveland Clinic/Akron General facility.

The applicant intends to utilize this property in conjunction with the property to the south in order to develop a senior assisted living facility.

The additional property will allow for expansion and additional access from Allen Road for emergency vehicles. The specific project aside, the limited industrial could serve as a transition or step down between the industrial zoning to the north and light industrial to the south.

It is staff's opinion this is consistent with the recent rezoning to the south as well as to the zoning to the west across Allen Road.

Mr. Kohlmeier: Have we already discussed this as a study item previously? Has anything changed?

Mr. Kurtz: We discussed the previous rezoning of the properties to the south as a study item and a business item. This is the first time this particular property is being considered by Planning Commission.

Mr. Sprungle: It was the other two properties that they were planning to build on. Now these two properties are available.

Mr. Kurtz: The other properties rezoned were this one [pointing to the screen] and this one [pointing to the screen]. These two parcels are the first time he is seeking your approval or recommendation.

Mrs. Harrison: The plan isn't to build on these yet but for future expansion, or is it to make the project bigger than initially thought.

Mr. Kurtz: I think the project is larger than they initially thought and needs all these properties to develop it the way they would like as well as access. It's very important to get access all the way around the building and two access points from Allen Road is the key. This would help in that regard. Even though the existing property to the south extends all the way to Hudson Drive, from a practical point of view...

Mrs. Harrison: We talked before about that not being real easy.

Mr. Kurtz: Most likely that will be developed separately and have frontage on Hudson Drive and not Allen Road.

Mr. Finley: We have a long history in Stow. We developed the Omni Plaza in '91; Fishcreek in '91; Brueger's Plaza; Hampton Inn was through Omni Hospitality; Clunk Building and one more. We've had a lot of success. I think we've been good for Stow and Stow has been good for us.

We are looking at this as being the premier property. This will be in excess of 120,000 square feet, maybe larger with this expanded area. It gives us the flexibility and makes for a better project with more green space, future expandability and accessibility. I think both cities and developers are looking for high levels of flexibility to give you a more diversified product that we can all be proud of and ultimately serve the community.

We are looking at this as predominately expansion but it does help in the preliminary review of an initial plan by the Fire Department for accessibility access and green space.

We will also look at it as a detention area so we can have a higher concentration of buildings on the 7.81 acres having detention because that is the natural flow. The water is going to go there anyway, to the corner. So we will have a lake feature retention/detention type of scenario.

These are all preliminary plans but that is the way the 20,000 foot view looks at it right now as we move forward.

Mr. Sprungle: We were in favor of this last time but what substantially changed. Wasn't there going to be an access road that came out on Hudson Drive?

Mr. Kurtz: I don't think the concept plan showed an access drive.

Mr. Finley: It did not. The plan we are building at Westlake and Strongsville right now was the exact same plan I brought as a concept plan. We are not going to do that plan because the marketing report has identified what is a successful project for the Stow demographic. We are reworking the plan and creating a new design much more like what we we're building in conjunction with Danbury in Hudson.

To answer your question, no we did not have it going out onto Hudson Drive. The requirement from the Fire Department is that it would loop and they would have access all the way around. We were able to do that with the plan we had shown. We believe with this new concept plan we are going to be able to do the same thing and give them access all the way around.

Mr. Kohlmeier: We're talking about the same type of facility.

Mr. Finley: There will be assisted living and memory care which is dementia and Alzheimer, and then some independent living as well. The independent living will be three meals, services, home care services and what have you. The cost is much higher at \$2,500-\$3,000 a month but it will be an ala-cart. You can have the assistance level you need but these are independent people who are transitioning into assisted living. They may not need all that assistance now but they would much rather live here and move into that. It is a transitional type of community that you grow old and are happy doing so.

Mr. Sprungle: We have approved rezoning for this item before. The issue is what's different. Are you going to build on that additional property now?

Mr. Finley: Eventually we will build on that. We will expand into that with probably more of the independent living because we believe that has the strongest demand for the area, but time will tell. The preliminary plan right now has 95% of the building on the 7.81 acres, which was the approved portion. These 4.3-4.5 acres will have future expandability to that and stormwater detention.

Mr. Sprungle: It will be a different design than we saw last time; even on the original piece.

Mr. Finley: Correct. Through marketing reports and information from marketing experts we are going more to what the Danbury is doing in Hudson to meet the Stow market.

Mr. Ross moved and Mr. Kohlmeier seconded to approve P.C. 2017-006. **The Planning Commission recommended approval of rezoning request indicating that it was consistent with the adjacent zoning in this area.**

Yea: Brauer, Harrison, Kohlmeier, Ross, Sprungle.

Nay: None. The motion was passed 5-0.

OTHER

RESIDENTIAL BUSINESS STUDY

Mr. Kurtz: I want to discuss and gauge Planning Commission's thoughts on the RB (Residential-Business). As you recall we had a recent request for RB rezoning. That prompted me to take a good look at our current RB regulations; the specific regulations as well as where we have RB zoning. I put an analysis together and forwarded it the Planning Commissions.

In terms of the regulations we have, there is some redundancy in some of the conditions which is why I tried to format it. As you can see on the screen, the regulations controlling RB are in several different sections of the code. Sometimes that is unavoidable but ideally you want to reduce that.

What I have done is combine the three or four section and try to categorize them in a way that makes sense to me. For example; Permitted Uses, it is logical to have that as one of the categories. I didn't change any of the language; I just categorized them with different titles.

The Site Development Standards were not categorized that way but I gleaned those, with the exact language, from our current code and called them Site Development Standards.

The Building Design Criteria was third largest category that I tried to group together, again, using the existing language with our RB and also Landscaping and Screening requirements as a category.

If we want to review those, I wanted to categorize them in a way that was a little more logical than is in the code right now. Then we can take a look at these and if something needs to be tightened up or changed I am open to that.

I gave you a couple of bullet points that jumped out to me in terms of what could be looked at. One was:

- a. In the purpose statement at the very beginning, should we add RB as a transitional use from commercial to residential? It is not in the purpose statement now, but that's been in our latest discussion.
- b. Consider increasing the maximum of 3,000 square feet permitted for an RB use. In most cases if you are converting a building to an RB use the 3,000 square feet isn't a problem.

Two examples come to mind that are larger than 3,000 square feet that happen to be zoned RB. They are also in the Overlay District which allows them to go bigger. Both examples are pretty attractive and I think it is something we would want to emulate; one is the Geneva Chervenik building which is very large but has a very nice residential characteristic to it. The Redmon Funeral Home is another example of that. If you try to stick those in RB they are going to be way over, but that is the kind of development we are looking for in that area and maybe in other RB areas.

That leads me to the properties we looked at on Graham Road that were requesting rezoning to RB. I think there was definitely support from Planning Commission to rezone those as RB. From a practical point of view each of those individual houses may not be easily converted to a business use. Ultimately they may need to combine some of those parcels and build a building. To be feasible it would most likely have to more than 3,000

square feet. RB would limit that so if we put in some design criteria that says you can go over 3,000 square feet if it looks like the Geneva Chervenik Building or the Redmon Funeral Home or some other category so massing is articulated and broken up so we get a larger business use that is feasible but still looks as a business use. That language isn't in there now. I need your help with that. I'm curious if you have any thoughts on this. I may even task Kris and her team to assist in that.

Those are my thoughts on that. I am open to any suggestions or areas we should be looking at in that regard.

Mr. Ross: I think repackaging the criteria the way you have makes a great deal of sense. It's always frustrating to try to put all of this together for someone coming toward the development process. Going through fourteen sections of the code to try to find out what color landscaping you can put in is difficult.

The difficulty of doing what you want to do is that you don't have any design review panel or committee or any specific criteria. I can see where the zoning codes attempt to do those sorts of things but they're pretty ineffectual. You're talking about context and there's really nothing here that puts that language to the forefront and you're looking at some old concepts of expressing functions that went out in the 50's. I'm not being critical, if there's tuning that needs to be done, I'm not sure how you get what you want to get through this committee.

Mr. Kurtz: In terms of another committee or design review and many cities have those, but a) there is a challenge to staffing the board and b) there is an extra layer of regulations that from a Business Friendly point of view, it is one more layer we have. Maybe there could be a sub-committee of the Planning Commission. That is something to think about.

Mr. Ross: Your concerns are valid. I've been on design review boards and some have no clue what they are looking at or what to do and how to make it better. When you get in front of a good board they do make the projects better and they are helpful. I am very sympathetic as to the idea of how you staff them and the problems we do see.

The problem is if you look at the kind of criteria we are trying to achieve and they are sort of stated here, in front of a board like this, you are asking for the difficulty you are referring to.

Mr. Kurtz: When we adopted our overall Design Review regulations which are very basic, we used existing examples of elements in the community that we thought were appropriate to be replicated and then put it before Planning Commission. I think those, as Planning Commission as noted, need to be looked at more closely too; and I have some specific ideas about that as well. That is for another meeting.

That could be expanded to look at specific examples in the community in the RB or in the overlay we want to replicate. Then try to use our existing Planning Commission for that or look at some other additional review. I'm not sure what that would be for an item like this.

Mr. Ross: The difficulty in the approach you are taking is contextual because certain parts of the cities looks one way and other parts of cities look another way. If you are trying to put it all in one package it doesn't work. What you have to have is a group of people that understand the context of the current development proposal and can adopt things that are appropriate to that location as opposed to what is a mile down the street which may be a very different character.

I understand you are trying to maintain that transition from one thing to the other but they can be quite different.

Mr. Kohlmeier: Does Stow have an Architectural Review Board?

Mr. Kurtz: No we don't.

Mr. Kohlmeier: Do we want one?

Mr. Sprungle: Thank you for putting this together because there is a lot of detail work there and I appreciate it. I think what you are intending to do is what we talked about all along. Without making additional red tape, we want to be a business-friendly community too. So if people can meet the criteria and want to develop, we don't want to make it so difficult for them that they have to go from this board to that board. That is just my thoughts. It's tough enough and we try to grill people sufficiently.

When we talked about this last time, the idea of a transition neighborhood kept coming up. I think that was good. You are talking about putting that in a purpose statement that it is transitional. By putting it in a purpose statement it gives us the ability to define it. If someone were to come with a little bit of a spot situation and we can say wait a minute this is supposed to be a transition. So you got that covered.

I think to consider increasing the maximum to 3,000 square feet maybe the way to do that is to say is with Planning Commission's approval. In other words you don't have to change the regulation but given opportunity for growth or expansion with conditional approval of more square footage. I wouldn't want to put a number in there because it really would be site specific.

Then the whole idea of residential character, I think that is kind of appropriate too. If you remember when Redmon came and wanted to do the expansion. One of the things we asked them to do was put additional dormers on that site. The purpose was to give it a more residential look.

I think you're right on with these. The question is, how do you integrate them into code so that they are flexible enough but specific enough. So that you can use them if you need to so that somebody can't do something that is not desired but that you can give some flexibility when it makes sense for a particular site.

The first statement, putting that as the purpose kind of achieves that; the second one not stating what a maximum is but saying conditional approval of a larger site or larger square footage. I'm not sure how you get the third one in there. But I think the intent is true there and it's exactly what we did with Redmon and the extra dormer. I think it's good; I'm not sure how you put that in there as intent.

I don't want to make it so difficult for people to come to Stow to do business especially given that we have limited places for them to do that now anyway.

Mrs. Harrison: Under the second bullet point with the square footage, I think part of the concern of the homeowners that came forward was they didn't want to have it conditional that it could be rezoned if they are looking to market their properties. They wanted to know what the limitations were so they market it then to something.

If they say, well you could do more than 3,000 square feet with approval someone's not going to look at that and know what they can do. They don't want to buy it if they don't know if they will get approval. I think they were looking to know what it is so they could put their properties up and market it clearly as to what it could be. That might not really help in that sense of people not knowing exactly. I understand where they are at. That is kind of right there and it kind of feels less residential. I think they said they have tried to sell their houses and they haven't. So I can see why they are coming forward saying they need a little help. This really isn't residential like it was when they bought their homes. If we're not sure what the square footage is going to be, I think it's not going to help in those kinds of scenarios.

Mr. Sprungle: I agree with you and understand what you are saying but I don't know any other way to put it. These things come in as a study item and say I'm considering buying this property, however... Can you give me your thoughts on this?

Mrs. Harrison: I don't know with them if their intention was maybe if there was something where they could maybe aggregate their lots if they would want to build something larger. That would obviously be more attractive to somebody coming in to develop. Repurposing the home isn't always very practical. Especially having three right in a row. If you have someone that would want to aggregate and put something in like Redmon, it would look nicer. I don't think we would be opposed to it but I don't know how we word that.

Mr. Kurtz: Maybe there is a lot area or coverage.

Mr. Sprungle: Based on the size of the property.

Mr. Kurtz: If you have a code then you know you are going to get landscaping in front and no parking in front. So if we arrive at maximum coverage area and if you have three or four lots together you can do it.

Mrs. Harrison: That would be a better way to do it. Then it could be bigger than 3,000 square feet based on the lot size.

Mr. Sprungle: That's exactly what we should do. I agree.

Mr. Ross: You are kind of obligated to give them some specific criteria that the developer or property owner can look at and say, I can do this. There is always the opportunity to come for a variance. We don't want to rule that out. But leaving it, well we'll decide later, is just the wrong way to go.

Mrs. Harrison: If there is a clearer covered area, developers have an idea of what they can go in with. Maybe they can ask for a variance for more but they can at least do this and have an idea of how big it can be instead of having to ask for a variance first. It makes them less likely to want to invest.

Mr. Ross: How many lots they have to acquire to consolidate or whatever the case may be.

Mrs. Harrison: I know we talked about it being a transition area but when you look at the map there are some kind of all over the place. There are some grouped together.

Mr. Sprungle: There are some stand alone.

Mrs. Harrison: There are some that are kind of unique.

Mr. Kurtz: It's a little deceiving. It is hard to see at that scale [pointing to the screen]. It does look like they are all over the place but they are adjacent to commercial.

Mr. Sprungle: That is a business area. The one little piece on Kent Road stands out.

Mr. Kurtz: I will give you that. This one here [pointing to the screen] is industrial. This one [pointing to the screen]...

Mr. Kohlmeier: Is in the middle of the airport.

Mrs. Harrison: It is a use that would be really hard for somebody to buy residential. I think transition or for those unique properties where it is going to be hard for somebody to market. There are some that are hard to market residential.

Mr. Kurtz: This is the first time we've looked at what we have in RB. Most of them are offices which we probably would expect. A third are residential, six are service mostly salons, and we have two restaurants and 2 churches and the government is the library. It's not a big sample.

Mrs. Harrison: The ones that are residential those are ones someday that may want to market their house, that are already in the transitional area that are transitioning toward that but maybe haven't gotten to the point they are ready to move.

The area we are talking about is down here [pointing to the screen] it is next to one that is already RB.

Mr. Kurtz: Yes.

Mrs. Harrison: I think it is a good fit right there. Having one is not much of a transition. A little bigger area would seem more transitional.

Mr. Kurtz: Agreed.

Mr. Sprungle: In that particular area there is the creek on the other side which is a natural break.

Mrs. Harrison: Across the street is already changed over.

Mr. Kurtz: I was looking at the minutes when then was rezoned [pointing to the screen] because the residents lived there. Before Walgreens was there that was all residential. It seems hard to imagine.

Mrs. Harrison: I like the idea of changing the maximum based on the coverage area; that way if somebody would want to combine lots and put in an extra area that makes sense.

Mr. Kurtz: I will pursue that. Are there any other thoughts?

Mr. Ross: I would say a subcommittee of this committee as a design review group and get appropriate people to advise this committee if that's the way the government wants to structure itself. To try to do what you are doing without some sort of knowledgeable input leaves you

open to a lot of concern by the public. You don't need to be onerous about it, there are communities that do it very supporting.

Mr. Kurtz: Maybe it could be as you said a subcommittee that could meet with that particular applicant prior to the Planning Commission meeting. It doesn't have to be an official committee it would just be more advice for the Planning Commission.

Mr. Ross: Start out in that way and see how well it works.

Mr. Kurtz: Hopefully I have some good local architects that could help in that regard.

Mr. Ross: It's a step in the right direction.

STUDY ITEM

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

Continued discussion of Comprehensive Plan update including review of the comments from the Community Meeting #2.

Mr. Kurtz: Ms. Hopkins is with us and the primary goal is to review the comments from the January 10, 2017, community meeting. There will probably be jumping off points when we go through those comments.

Ms. Hopkins: It is interesting you had your discussion about the RB district and the quality of the construction because that is the first City-wide policy on our list. In total there were 16 dots.

A quick summary of that meeting; we had seven different City-wide policy topic areas, Quality of Place; Economic Development; Retail; Residential; Parks and Recreation; Environmental Protection; and Transportation and Connectivity; and ten focus areas. We gave people a limited number of dots to identify the policies and strategies they thought were most important.

In the handout it identifies where and how many dots were placed for each of these policies and strategies. We also gave people the ability to write comments. What's interesting is the number of dots tells us the priorities of the attendees and what they thought was the most important. Not necessarily what they disagreed with. I don't think you can say if a topic got no dots that there is not support for that. I think we can use the comments as how people critiqued the policies.

In terms of the City-wide policies the one that received the most dots was Quality of Place. It received 16 dots out of a total of 69 that were placed on the sheets. The Transportation and Connectivity received 14 dots; Retail received 13 dots; Parks and Recreation received 10 dots; followed by Residential with 8 dots; and Economic Development and Environmental Protection both had 4 dots apiece.

Quality of Place

1.2 Review and strengthen the existing design review guidelines. - We did have some conversations about that in terms of the Darrow Road Overlay 2 making sure that whatever was constructed along the corridor looks good. Even on some of the Residential policies along the corridor.

If you have a building and if it were higher density apartments instead of an office building, is that okay. We had people in the focus group said at that point it is really about the building and the quality of the building's appearance. I think that just underscores the need to figuring out a way to do design review and add that to the Zoning Code.

Mr. Sprungle: If we look at 1.5 – Promote the City's tree planting program which provides trees for the tree lawn. That is an interesting one. When you develop a brand new neighborhood that looks really nice and makes the neighborhood have a very green look to it.

As the neighborhood grows older, and I look at Heather Hills, to some extent the neighborhood looks older than it really should because the trees are overgrown on the tree lawns. In some cases it feels like you're riding through a tunnel. If you eliminated every tree in Heather Hills, it would be a younger looking neighborhood. How do other cities deal with it, do they replace those trees. There is a cost.

Mr. Kurtz: In my neighborhood apparently the trees they chose were not the right trees and they took them all down. On Mohican there are a beautiful set of trees on both sides and they blossom in the spring and there is a canopy of trees that I am very envious of. I don't look at that way.

Mrs. Harrison: When we bought our house, there was a tree on the tree lawn, we hadn't moved in yet and the tree was gone. I called the city and it had been reported as dead and they took it down. They said they could replant one and it would cost this much and we have this program. We said no thanks because we had all kinds of problems by having a tree in the tree lawn at our previous home.

Mr. Kurtz: In Baker's Glen, no one from the Service Department wanted trees in the tree lawn. They are required to place a tree in their yard and the City Arborist has to verify that because it is bonded.

Mr. Brauer: The trees are chosen. You can't put a walnut tree in a tree lawn, they are massive.

Mr. Ross: You will find some of the mature residential communities have a lot of trees. That is where the property values come from. I'll defy you to try to collect on your insurance the next time you lose a tree in a tornado and find out what it's worth. They do potentially cause some problems in the tree lawns and no doubt about that.

The advantage that you're going to find in a place like Baker's Glen is that is the kind of development that gives communities a bad eye because they're all the same, they look the same. This is how Ryan Homes got a black eye way back when. They came in and slapped 14 different houses all the same, maybe a different shutter, it looked cheap. It was brand new but didn't have any value to it.

Coming back and asking people to put landscaping or trees in their front yard as opposed to the tree lawn makes a great deal of sense. At some point of time you can have the same houses side by side if there are enough visual interruptions. That's what landscaping does. I tried to talk to developers until I'm blue in the face, the value of landscaping. If they're going to do lower-end homes with very little diversity, and the way a lot of places are platted today you can't get the diversity. They are trying to maximize square footage and it goes downhill from there.

Mr. Sprungle: I like that idea too, rather than on the tree lawn put it in the front yard.

Mrs. Harrison: 1.5 does say tree lawn or for the front yard in the comments. I think they have changed what they are planning in a lot of places because I think our home had an Emerald Ash and that is why they took it down.

Ms. Hopkins: I get the sense we can leave 1.5 in there as it.

Mr. Brauer: I think there is some value to that.

Mr. Sprungle: It does say "or the front yard."

Mrs. Harrison: I would be more for the front yard.

Ms. Hopkins: The strategy is promoting it.

Under Economic Development Policies there was one comment on 2.5 that talked about bringing back the façade program and commenting about how small businesses may not be able to upgrade buildings without assistance from the City. I would say that is an example of what 2.5 is talking about. To the extent that we want to give examples of types of assistance do you have any ideas on being more specific?

Mr. Kurtz: We have a couple of good projects that have accomplished that and basically we have some general guidelines such as; if the property owner was going to invest a certain amount we would contribute 50-50 on the improvements at the street.

When the Stow Plaza where Grismers is used to have a parking lot all the way out to the street. The property owner agreed to put a new façade on his plaza and we went half on the new landscaping in front. That is a small example. The Colonnade Building received that.

There are not that many cases where it would apply. The other issue is funding.

Mrs. Harrison: Is that a program we don't have anymore because of funding?

Mr. Kurtz: It is not funded currently. I am in support of it.

Mr. Ross: Particularly when you have older stock that you can't completely renovate the economics don't make sense, you can do something. Those programs are very helpful.

Mrs. Harrison: I'm thinking of the plaza at Darrow Road. That has so many empty spots up there now beside the Giant Eagle at Norton and Darrow. Maybe if there were some improvements to that, the parking lot and the front façade maybe they would be able to get more tenants or somebody would want to move in there if it looked nicer.

Mr. Ross: Sell the out lots.

Mrs. Harrison: Do something. I would rather see something go in there than build a new building. Would there be something to improve an empty existing space that would promote somebody wanting to move in versus wanting to build something brand new. I could see that. That would make sense.

Mr. Kurtz: Having the general theme of facilitating the expansion of existing plazas covers that. An example for that specific plaza there is one new tenant. The other building is fully occupied but the old golf building is two-thirds vacant. One third is occupied by Hattie Larlham. They really did a super job of renovating that.

We actually talked to the owner about if there was funding available about some sort of a storm water demonstration program because there is way too much parking. If they can give up a portion of that parking lot for some sort of demonstration project and even make a connection to the bike trail.

It's a little bit of funding. It's more a coordination or facilitation but it is hard to commit to programs but the sentiment is what can we do in each of these areas.

Mrs. Harrison: I know there is the expansion of existing businesses. I would rather see them put something big in.

Ms. Hopkins: Under the Retail Policies we will get to that more.

Mrs. Harrison: I would rather promote reuse and have funding go towards that so we are not building new building when we already have existing.

Mr. Kurtz: That is Economic Development too and there's no reason we couldn't say it again; maybe we add a line that says, or existing buildings.

Ms. Hopkins: Under Retail Policies there was a comment under 3.1 wondering if any of the retail areas were warranted being rezoned. We had not talked about that so I wasn't sure if anyone had any specific thoughts. There was no area defined either.

Mr. Kurtz: I'm not sure what that means.

Mr. Brauer: That conversation may have come up with the Dollar General Store.

Ms. Hopkins: We do that have in the focus area policy.

Mrs. Harrison: We talked about that area and how it is zoned. There are just a lot of little odd parcels there that I'm just not sure what you do with.

Ms. Hopkins: Under 3.2 there was a comment about reviewing multiple retail within so many feet of each other. My interpretation of this is someone thought you shouldn't have two coffee shops next to one another. I'm not so sure the City is paying attention to occupied space.

Residential Policies: We had someone talk about the low-density zoning along Graham Road at Leewood. That is there for your consideration.

Someone else made a comment about a concern that there was plenty of senior housing already in the City. We had identified in both the City-wide policies as well as some of the focus areas that senior housing options were a suitable use in the range of uses that would be permitted or appropriate for different sites.

Mr. Sprungle: The comment on no mobile home development – is that there should be no mobile home or development or is the complaint there is no mobile home development.

Ms. Hopkins: I interpreted that as meaning there should be no mobile home development.

Mr. Sprungle: That's the way I interpret it too and I support that.

Mr. Ross: I think we just have one location that I'm aware of.

Mr. Kurtz: That is the only place.

Ms. Hopkins: Right now mobile home parks are not permitted as a permitted use.

Mr. Kurtz: The one we have is north of Kent Road on Orchard Drive. It's not bad. There is no ability to do that elsewhere.

Mr. Ross: What's interesting about 4.6 is we have plenty of senior housing except the communities on both sides of us are going nuts on senior housing.

Mrs. Harrison: Senior housing is growing everywhere in general. If it's going to grow and people are doing market studies to say its needed, if we have the space for it like the one on Allen Road. That is the perfect location for one, not really near any residential to impact that. I don't think anybody would have any complaints about it.

I know they are building one in Tallmadge. It just seems like they just built a new one in Tallmadge. They are popping up everywhere. So if somebody wants to build one why not here.

Mr. Kurtz: People want to have the opportunity to move close to where they live now. They don't want to move away from their friends or church.

Mrs. Harrison: There are advantages to have them move close to their caretakers. Then they can stop by more frequently and help them.

Mr. Sprungle: It is the reality of our population.

Ms. Hopkins: Parks and Recreation: We had two comments. Under 5.1 someone suggested with the paving of main roads, it is a great time to add bike lanes. I think that is appropriate under 5.1 but we also talk about it under 7.4.

I think the comment is that whenever you're doing a road improvement project you want to take advantage of that time to add other amenities to it.

Mr. Sprungle: I have been beating that drum for a long time. You go into Kent and once you get to Fairchild there is a bike lane. As soon as you go into Hudson on Route 91, there is a bike lane. Stow doesn't have them on either of those roads. Especially considering we don't have a downtown and we don't have connectivity there are a lot of places where the sidewalks just end. That comment was made in here as well.

One way or another having connectivity from one neighborhood to another so people do not have to drive everywhere they go is something we should continue to reinforce.

Mr. Kurtz: In terms of the number of dots, six is a high number compared to some others.

Mr. Sprungle: You see it on 7.4 also.

Mr. Kurtz: Exactly, six on both.

Ms. Hopkins: Under 5.2 someone talked to me specifically about this and I'm not familiar with the situation but evidently there's a gravel parking lot that's close to or just before Silver Springs Park.

Mrs. Harrison: I think they are talking about Stow Road. It has been unofficial and it has grown.

Ms. Hopkins: There was a concern it is a safety hazard because it is not signed well or something to that effect.

Mrs. Harrison: It is awkward because the hill is right there and the way it comes over. You have to be ready to go when you are pulling out. I wonder if now that Metro Park is putting in more formal parking on Young Road if maybe that will get more use.

Mr. Sprungle: That is already getting use. That is what people would like to see on Stow Road too. It gets a lot of use.

Ms. Hopkins: I don't think that comment warrants getting into the Plan but that is an FYI for you.

Environmental Protection: There were no comments on this.

Transportation and Connectivity: There was an interesting comment about making sure new sidewalks connect with the existing sidewalks. I thought that was the intent of what 7.4 says about putting sidewalks where they don't exist. It's valid to say making sure there is the connection.

Mrs. Harrison: I think this comes up because of Dollar General also. There is a sidewalk in front of Dollar General but it doesn't connect all the way. There is the vacant lot so there is an awkward gap.

Mr. Sprungle: That's one of a number of places in the City.

Mrs. Harrison: Why even bother having a sidewalk right there because it goes nowhere.

Mr. Ross: There are a lot of those disconnected pieces in the City.

Mrs. Harrison: I think a lot of people would like to see some of those connections made. Along Fishcreek there are so many people that walk and there are no sidewalks along there on either side. I see kids in the morning walking that way. It would be really nice having some connection in that area especially with having some retail with residential in between.

Mr. Brauer: Going back to 7.2 with intersections in mind, we do have an intersection by Lowes that is the absolute worst intersection I've ever seen for drivability. Making the left two lanes turning left and if you look at the way the lights are I can't tell you how many accidents I've almost been involved with or see at that intersection. West on Hudson Drive and you're at the light you can go east or west on Graham.

Mr. Sprungle: The light changes to go straight.

Mr. Brauer: The light is turned to the left and the way they are offset. I've seen people on the right side go through. I'm surprised I have not heard more complaints when you talk about intersections. It's a bad one.

Mr. Sprungle: For somebody new in town or coming from a different location that doesn't know it, it is a bit confusing.

Mrs. Harrison: I think the whole area grew faster than the intersections and the plazas and the way things are added on. It's just a lot of awkward driving even into the plaza.

Mr. Sprungle: It's a tough intersection.

Ms. Hopkins: That is it for the City-wide policies and going into the focus area policies, out of the ten, I'll just do a summary of where the dots landed.

The City Center was well ahead of the rest with 43 dots placed on the City Center Policies. Season's Road had 12 dots, Darrow Road north of the City Center had 13 dots; Darrow and Kent Road area had 13 dots and then the Stow-Fishcreek area had 14 dots. The rest had between 4 and 8 dots.

Focus Area A – Seasons Road/SR8: There were no comments.

Focus Area B: Steels Corners West: Somebody suggested it be left alone. In the text we basically say right now there's no development pressure that seems obvious. The houses are relatively new. However, to the extent that there is development pressure based on the surrounding land use it is higher density residential. I don't think there is any need to change the policies.

Focus Area C – Gilbert Road: There were no comments.

Focus Area D – Stow/Falls Shopping Center: Someone suggested allowing property tax rebates for home buyers. That's kind of in the wrong place but maybe the Community Reinvestment Area is what triggered that comment.

Focus Area E – Northeast Quadrant of SR8 Entrance Ramp – Remnant from Old Carter Lumber Site: We had one recommendation encouraging Metro Park to purchase the property. We had some support of keeping it rural and keeping it green.

I'm not too sure last two comments were placed in the right location. Build apartments, I'm not so sure that was targeting that specific site.

Mr. Sprungle: I think it might be because Heron Springs is behind it. So maybe there is some logic that says what if Heron Springs were to expand. The advantage to that is that Heron Springs does have access on Hudson Drive. Although it is awkward to come in and out on Graham Road, those residents could get out on Hudson Drive. That might be somewhat warranted.

Ms. Hopkins: So is that something you agree we should add?

Mr. Sprungle: I would only recommend it if Heron Springs expanded toward Graham Road. That would probably be one of the only possible uses for that property. I wouldn't recommend a new development there.

Mr. Brauer: You're tied up with the road on the opposite side.

Mr. Sprungle: I don't see any other logical use for that property. You can leave it green.

Ms. Hopkins: Focus Area F – Hudson Drive Corridor: There was a comment about a need to keep the low-density character. Under F(c) we talked about allowing a mix of uses but making sure the setbacks and landscaping requirements maintained a low-density character.

I thought this was something to discuss with you. Does that make sense to reference the Hudson Drive Corridor an area with a low-density character? Is that something to be maintained or talk only specifically about increased building setbacks and landscaping requirements.

To me that would mean the chance for taller buildings and more building massing than Clock Point. That is a relatively small scale development that maintains the lower-density character. But I can see where somebody could say since you are backing up to State Route 8, four and five story buildings may be something that somebody would want.

Mr. Sprungle: People would want to put signage visible from the highway.

Mr. Kurtz: This property has access to highway frontage as well as Hudson Drive. Even though it is adjacent to Route 8 it doesn't have that feeling of an arterial road in that section. It does have a different feel to it.

Clock Point is a perfect example. It is relatively low density. But for Stow the multiple story office building is fairly unusual. That is probably one of the few. For Stow that is high if you will. I'm not sure what the right language is.

Mr. Ross: Maintain our current criteria.

Ms. Hopkins: When one person says it, you think should you consider it. Again it is one person's comment.

Mrs. Harrison: It doesn't seem like there was a lot of feedback on that area.

Mrs. Hopkins: Focus Area G – Darrow Road, North of the City Center: Item G(a) Continue to avoid retail along the Darrow Road corridor except at the existing nodes. That has been a long-standing policy of the City to maintain retail at specific intersections. A comment was made was that not many people want to live on a busy 4-lane road.

In the text we acknowledge that is an issue with the Darrow Road Corridor so we have recommendations for other uses. I would say despite this comment you don't achieve it by expanding the allowance for retail along the corridor.

Focus Area H – City Center Area: The comment about rezoning east of Graham to RB was put here simply because it was the closest focus area to it. But you have already discussed that.

The comments that were made were right in line with what we have already discussed. They are amplifying what we have already discussed and not really contradicting or making recommendations for anything contrary to what we've discussed.

Focus Area I – Darrow & Kent Area: There were no comments.

Focus Area J – Stow Fishcreek: We suggest proactively down-zoning the parcels and we had some agreement with that.

Mr. Kurtz: I had some conversations regarding the Stow and Fishcreek area and to let you know and we may have more conversations. There may be pressure for expansion of retail. Say the existing Circle K gas station doesn't meet the standards of current gas stations you may receive a request to expand the retail zoning which seems to be in contrast with the policy to date.

I explained leading up to the last couple of years about retail zoning in general, specifically in that area and told them the hurdles that existed there. By the same token I understand that we want to make sure businesses remain vital. I don't have the answer on that. It is a challenge if someone says we want to rezone a portion so we can remain. It's going to be a difficult decision for Council and Planning Commission.

Mrs. Harrison: Personally, it is already there. If the improvements would make it look more up to date, better or less cramped.

Mr. Ross: Are they expanding to the south, I assume?

Mr. Sprungle: It looks like an old-time gas station.

Mrs. Harrison: The thing about the Dollar General is it doesn't look any worse than gas stations on the two opposite corners.

Mr. Brauer: I don't think it looks bad at all.

Mr. Kurtz: You may get a study item. I don't know if they will pursue it or not but I wanted you to have a heads up on that so you can give it some thought.

Mr. Sprungle: Whether people like it or not, that is a pretty busy main intersection. Businesses want to be there and they want to expand there because it gets a lot of traffic. When I think about the Circle K on Norton Road on the Hudson side, that is a big complex. That is where they are going now. Look how big Sheetz is. Even Speedway is not tiny there.

Mr. Kurtz: Right. There are some pressures there.

City Center Plan

We talked about the City Center comments and those comments keep coming in various vehicles. I am referring to Facebook. There is certainly a volume of comments that we simply can't ignore. They are consistent with going back 10 years.

What did we do with the City Center Plan in 2005 which was adopted by Planning Commission and Council? I took a second look and I was actually reassured. A lot of concepts that were talked about then are still valid. Things have actually occurred since then. I wondered if we really reviewed what it was like in 2005 with the plan and I wanted to share that with you.

[Pointing to the screen] This was the City Center Plan adopted in 2005. At the time, City Center Boulevard was not connected. It stopped here [pointing to the screen] and stopped right there [pointing to the screen]. The buildings in orange are existing buildings and everything else is proposed new.

Since then the City Center Boulevard was completed; landscaping was established along the boulevard; grading was done here [pointing to the screen]; trails were put into the neighborhoods. Having trails from there to the neighborhoods. was more controversial than you would imagine. They didn't go in the exact route originally planned but they were put in here [pointing to the screen] and here [pointing to the screen] and I think they were successful.

We don't have any treatment there [pointing to the screen] or streetscape treatment there [pointing to the screen]. None of the new buildings indicated in brown were established. The grading was done, the Boulevard was put in and parking was put in primarily with a grant from, at the time, Akron General with some fitness trails.

This was more of a park and recreation type use [pointing to the screen] and the north of City Center was a mixed use area. We had the post office here [pointing to the screen] and the water tower [pointing to the screen] we have to live with and then we have a current residential property there [pointing to the screen].

This area to the north of the post office, north of the City Center Boulevard [pointing to the screen] was the mixed use. The term that was used was housing-mercantile and office. As I read the comments that keep coming in, there seems to be still a desire for that.

From a strategy point of view, what's in the plan now talks about a public-private partnership which, in my opinion, is a strategy that should be employed. The way a development is going to work is it has to be from a market point of view.

The City can decide the range of uses that are permitted and how it should look. The question is will that development make it from a market point of view. One strategy is to actually prepare that and have a call for interest. Kind of a pre-RFP and present what we would like to see, make sure you incorporate the Senior Center and make sure it looks like this.

If we get the uses that we want and built in the way we want it and it is marketable and a developer could do it, the City's involvement would be the land. That would be the tradeoff. The incentive would be we have the land available. We own this land here [pointing to the screen].

From a realistic point of view it is one step at a time and so if we wait until we get all of the property or wait until we get all of the funding in place then we might not get anything. A strategy I am going to consider is looking at this area here [pointing to the screen].

Mr. Ross: Have you ever invested any money to look at the entire piece of property. What you had shown me before was pretty Heinz 57. I don't see a sense of City Center there at all. From

my perspective, people would be very disappointed to see that small piece of property developed without looking at the rest of the land.

Ms. Hopkins: When you talk about the rest of the land do you mean where the service center is.

Mr. Ross: From Graham Road all the way to as far north as you own land and as far west as it goes. I think we are accepting some things that just happen to be there that don't contribute to much of anything, quite honestly; one man's opinion. Have we ever invested in having that land seriously looked at by someone who knows what they're doing? As opposed to just saying can we develop this piece of property right now?

Mr. Kurtz: All of this land has been looked at.

Mr. Sprungle: You're talking about all the way up to Arndale where the condominiums are?

Mr. Ross: Where ever we own.

Mr. Kurtz: This is all we own right here [pointing to the screen].

Mr. Ross: And the Senior Center.

Mr. Kurtz: The Senior Center is right in the middle and that would have to be incorporated into the development somehow.

Mrs. Harrison: So there is a residential piece and a post office that is awkward.

Mr. Kurtz: Right. From a practical point of view, if we wait for that residential property to become available, it may be a long while. Is there a small enough piece that makes sense that achieves a goal that people have been talking about and we have been talking about?

Mr. Sprungle: And yet allows for an expansion if/when that property does become available.

Mr. Kurtz: I don't know if that is the case yet but I'm interested in trying to see if it is feasible.

Mr. Sprungle: It was feasible and considered in 2005. Not to do it but it was part of a Plan. What we are seeing here is people are still interested in it in the same way.

Mr. Brauer: This is really the only property in the area you can do this because the City doesn't own any other property within the City.

Mr. Sprungle: Other than the golf course.

Mr. Brauer: A comment was made if you had additional property in the City nothing's to say the City Center has to be next to City Hall.

Mr. Kurtz: Right.

Mr. Brauer: But this is the most feasible.

Mr. Sprungle: It's already here.

Mr. Kurtz: It's here and we own it. If it is developed in a way we want it and it offers some features and uses that people want and we want, it doesn't matter if it is here or somewhere else but at least it's there. Whether or not there is funding to do the concept plan for the S.K.I.P II.

Mrs. Harrison: The problem is the funding.

Mr. Sprungle: If you made it look like a green field site and offered the land to a potential developer would it be a little easier.

Mr. Kurtz: That is what we need to find out. Can they somehow invest in S.K.I.P II? That is how they are tied in.

Mr. Ross: So why wouldn't you look at that piece of property right there [pointing to the screen].

Mr. Kurtz: That is our Service Center.

Mr. Ross: That can go in a heartbeat. That's a 50% building. It's just worthless. It can just disappear. In the scheme of things, if this is important that's not. That can be relocated in a week. Why do we confine ourselves to this? Why don't you plan for this plus whatever development you need there [pointing to the screen].

Maybe you do develop this Phase I but here's the game plan in 5 or 10 years. That is really shortsighted. I'm sorry, one man's opinion.

Mr. Kurtz: When it comes to cities and investing in a facility of that size it's going to be tough to convince Council that the previous Council invested that much in the Service Center. Could it be moved? Yes.

Mr. Ross: That's where you go to the developer and say I need a place for the Service Center but here's 50% more land to develop.

Mr. Kurtz: It's easy to go to a developer and say relocate this 3,000 square foot of Senior Center but 150,000 square foot Service Center with docks.

Mr. Sprungle: I'm with you but conceptually I see the validity of that and if people want to compare it to what they did in Kent, Hudson and Cuyahoga Falls you do need that extra piece of property to do something that is even on a smaller scale.

Mrs. Harrison: How big is that red square [pointing to the screen] we're talking about right now?

Mr. Kurtz: About six acres.

Mr. Sprungle: You could do something nice.

Mr. Kurtz: I think we could do a retail office/mixed use. Whether or not it is feasible that is not for me to say. Again, the Senior Center space would have to be accommodated.

Mr. Sprungle: Can you move the post office?

Mr. Kurtz: Down the road. Don't forget the single-family property there that is between the post office and the red square. In terms of when we can acquire that if it is even available is completely uncertain.

Ideally yes, you have both of those and then you have a better connection.

Mrs. Harrison: ____ post office and keep it in this walkable area and build it in.

Mr. Kurtz: Absolutely. High traffic is what you want. You want people coming there.

Mrs. Harrison: You can make it very small. If you're going to have a nice walkable area downtown, make it a small store front. When people are getting coffee they can drop off their mail and buy stamps. Just make it a smaller facility and incorporate into that. You could easily do that with a post office and make it marketable to them to want to do that.

Maybe a developer would approach that residential area with their plan and it might be worth the value to them. I just think it is a great idea but you have to get somebody to want to come and do it. I don't see the City being able to do it.

Mr. Kurtz: I agree we can't do it alone that's why we need a private partner.

Mr. Ross (Inaudible) thing. That's the way they are all done and (inaudible).

Mr. Sprungle: I would think there would be a developer that if you had enough property there and you were going to put the property up and they didn't have to buy the land somebody would be interested in that.

Mr. Kurtz: I hope so.

Mr. Ross: I think I could make a call to Mr. Testa who's a good friend of mind and you might have yourself a ...

Mr. Kurtz: He is certainly a quality developer and we will get other quality developers that will hopefully be interested in submitting a proposal. It takes a little bit to put that together. Ken Trenner and I are working on that right now. We may need some outside assistance. I think it is a start.

Mr. Sprungle: I was invited to a couple meetings with the Community Foundation about the S.K.I.P. Park. Then I got an email asking why no one from Planning Commission attended. I replied the last two meeting that were scheduled were the exact same days of the Planning Commission meetings.

Mrs. Harrison: They told us at the Parks meeting that we weren't to attend. That it was decided that no one from the City or Planning would attend. That it was a public funded thing and they didn't want influence from the outside. Then like two days before we received an email requesting why no one from the Parks Board had rsvp. We'd like them to come. At this point it was too late we had a Planning Commission Meeting.

Mr. Sprungle: There were two meetings and they were both on Planning Commission days. Annie Hanson sent me the email asking me to bring it up. I don't know if she is looking for support, or doesn't want support. It is confusing.

Mr. Kurtz: To me it seemed more of a fundraiser, they were trying...

Mrs. Harrison: They were trying (inaudible) but fundraising.

Mr. Kurtz: You have already supported the concept of the S.K.I.P. II in this plan but you are not a 501(c)(3) on your own where you can be involved in fundraising. Not that you couldn't be involved in fundraising.

Mr. Sprungle: As residents we could, not as Planning Commission.

Mrs. Harrison: At a Parks meeting they said they would prefer we not attend because they didn't want anybody from the Parks and the Commission to attend because it was about fundraising and they didn't want there to be influence. The way the email went out from the Community Foundation was worded awkwardly. It should have been clearer as to what they were doing and what the target audience was.

Mr. Ross: Where do we go from here?

Mr. Kurtz: Good question. It didn't seem like we had that many significant changes to the language based on these review of comments.

Mrs. Harrison: I think there are a lot of things that are the same in the Plan. It's great to have a Plan and a long-term vision but it doesn't seem like (obviously the City Center thing) there really has been any momentum or committees or effort toward making that happen. To me if we are writing it in the Plan, I understand it is the dream and it's what we want in the future and it's down the road, but I'd like to see there be some type of goal on how we're going to get there. Or another group that puts some focus to it.

It seems silly to write the same thing we wrote 10 years ago and then in 10 years I know you're going to be having the same discussion. To me if you have a Plan, it's great to have a Plan and a long-term vision but you still start putting effort towards getting there.

Mr. Sprungle: I agree with you. I remember when Sara Kline put a committee together to take a look at the opportunity at Stow-Kent Shopping Plaza. That is when we did a proposal to have a mixed use. That is exactly what it was. There was a plan to do something, then a small group that was put together as an action group to get something done. That was beneficial.

Since you have more comments about things like the City Center maybe a discussion with the Mayor about that suggesting there needs to be a group of people put together.

Mrs. Harrison: One unified group instead of every person going out soliciting different comments. Bill and I have discussed that it seems like the wheel has been recreated by six people in six different places.

Mr. Sprungle: Start with the end in mind. Don't do little pieces. What do you want this to look like?

Mrs. Harrison: Get everybody together and say we already have the comments from the community. I think it's clear what we have on that. This is what people want, let's put a group together to put some focus on how we get there.

Mr. Sprungle: Not in pieces, in total.

Mrs. Harrison: I don't think it's going to happen overnight but I think there needs to be a group that's putting some focus towards it or in 10 years we are going to have the same conversation about needing a City Center. And everyone will reply yes we do. Great let's talk about again in 10 years.

Mr. Ross: It's an interesting discussion because I set for an hour and a half with the Mayor indicating my position. The Plan is great but you have no way to get from here to there. That is what we just said. You have so few administrative structures here to implement this and to make sure that it works that it's almost depressing to be a part of the process because you're exactly right we are going to do exactly the same thing in 10 years and have the same discussions about the same situations. Without a way to implement it and the structure to do it, it's not going to happen. Good ideas. Good wishes.

Ms. Hopkins: So it needs a champion. When you say the structure and you talking about the one committee for the City Center, is that the kind of structure you're talking about.

Mr. Ross: No, I listed about 10 different committees this community needs in order to implement the Comprehensive Plan and to see this community go forward.

Ms. Hopkins: Is that in here? Can you give me your list?

Mr. Ross: I can give you the list I gave it to the Mayor and so on and so forth. Akron just got a wakeup call with respect to its residential situation. Guess what, this community is not that far behind. Without the programs and some commitment to do the kinds of things we'd like to see done. I've written a hundred of these things and they're still on paper. It's unfortunate.

NEXT MEETING:

The next scheduled meeting is scheduled April 11, 2017.

With no further business to discuss, Mr. Sprungle moved and Mrs. Harrison seconded the motion to adjourn. It was unanimously approved and the meeting was adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

Richard Sprungle
Planning Commission Chairman

Pamela H. Daerr, CPS
Planning Commission Secretary