

PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
November 5, 2009
DRAFT

Second Floor, City Hall
City Commission Chambers
241 W. South Street, Kalamazoo, MI 49007

Members Present: Terry Kuseske, Chair; Sonja Dean, Vice Chair; Mark Fricke;
Merilee Mishall; Linda Wienir, Reed Youngs

Members Excused: Casey Fawley; James Kneen

Members Absent: Bertha Stewart

City Staff: Keith Hernandez, Deputy Director/City Planner; Robert
Bauckham, Assistant City Planner; John Kneas, Assistant City
Attorney; Amy Thomas, Recording Secretary

Guests: Barbara Miller, City Commission Liaison

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Kuseske called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Planner Hernandez completed roll call and determined that the aforementioned members were present.

C. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA (November 5, 2009)

There were no changes to the agenda.

Commissioner Mishall, supported by Commissioner Dean, moved approval of the November 5, 2009 Planning Commission agenda as submitted. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES (September 3, 2009)

There were no changes to the Minutes.

Commissioner Wienir, supported by Commissioner Dean, moved approval of the September 3, 2009 Planning Commission minutes as submitted. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

E. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

F. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None

G. CITIZENS' COMMENTS REGARDING NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

H. OLD BUSINESS

Master Plan Update and Discussion.

Planner Hernandez advised that the information compiled from the working group meetings was included in the orange folders provided to the Planning Commissioners. On October 27th, a public meeting was held at the Linden Grove Middle School to gather public input to be incorporated into the Master Plan updates. The next public meeting is scheduled for November 10th from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at St. Mary's church/school, 939 Charlotte, in the East Side Neighborhood.

The three goals of the Master Plan are to preserve, enhance and transform. Four working groups were created to focus on each of the categories in the Master Plan: neighborhoods, quality of life, transportation and market place. The working groups last met on September 22nd, at which time the key findings and preliminary ideas were expressed as follows:

1. The current economic environment in Kalamazoo is challenging. Business activity is slow and the unemployment rate is high. Additionally, many city residents face high poverty and occupations with low wages.
2. Some of the city's economic woes can be attributed to larger economic trends impacting the greater Kalamazoo region. The City of Kalamazoo under performs economically compared to other similarly-sized cities with a large university presence. It is important to determine what contributes to that underperformance.
3. Kalamazoo has an abundance of property zoned for commercial and industrial uses. The population of the City of Kalamazoo is shrinking and there is concern that too many areas in the city are designated for commercial use. That is a sensitive topic with members of the business community. There are representatives from the business community on the market place working group. It is not being suggested that commercial areas should be designated to become residential areas or green space, but the city is looking for creative ways to adapt

to the current economic realities. The city has some unique assets, including Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College and the Kalamazoo Promise.

4. The long term economic outlook for Kalamazoo is modest. There are some economic signals throughout the region and the state that are not favorable. However, Kalamazoo has been out-performing the rest of the state in some areas. The city is home to some promising employers, including health care providers and businesses in the BTR park.
5. It was suggested that Kalamazoo needs to have a regional outlook. The city has reached across political and geographic boundaries to see how the area can grow regionally.

As a result of the working group meetings, the following preliminary ideas were expressed as areas the city should be focusing on: 1. Find alternative uses for under utilized properties. 2. The amount of land designated for retail use should be right-sized, and alternative uses be explored for the city's surplus retail land. 3. Encourage development of neighborhood-based business, service and entertainment districts in key locations across the city. 4. Provide flexibility for use or redevelopment of under utilized and vacant properties. 5. Build upon the city's assets, slow down population loss and attract new residents and businesses. Mr. Hernandez advised that the city is working toward retention more than growth at this point. The goal is to slow down the exodus and retain the people who are already here. The economic consultant advised that the City of Kalamazoo has a chance to retain population because of the university presence; other cities may not have that chance. Young people come to the city for opportunities, and that provides Kalamazoo with a chance to keep those individuals in Kalamazoo. 6. The city is looking at developing a strategic plan between the downtown and Western Michigan University to facilitate activity and movement between the two areas. 7. Continue to be the art and entertainment center for the greater Kalamazoo region. 8. Actively seek green technologies and green jobs.

Commissioner Kuseske commented that there appears to be a contradiction between #2 and #3. Planner Hernandez stated that there needs to be better use of the land in the city. Under-utilized retail uses/land areas could be reduced in size and then put to better use.

Commissioner Fricke referred to the two bullet points under item 5. He inquired as to what promoting research and development and expanding opportunities for research has to do with residents. Planner Hernandez mentioned that people working in research in the area might want to live in the city. Commissioner Fricke indicated that employees might choose to live in Portage. Planner Hernandez commented that the City of Kalamazoo is the center of many activities and is a viable alternative. Commissioner Fricke commented that bringing businesses to the Kalamazoo area doesn't mean people will live in the City of Kalamazoo. He suggested there should be more focus on that issue. Commissioner Dean commented that there is a disconnect regarding how the bullet points represent the idea of maintaining the population in the City of Kalamazoo.

Commissioner Youngs commented that economic development is the key for any community. He suggested focusing on vacant commercial industrial property for use as Brownfield redevelopment sites. Kalamazoo is by the highway and yet the downtown area is tucked back away from the highway. He suggested promoting the areas that are near the highway such as the Davis Creek Business Park. There are lots of vacant properties in the area which could be providing a tax base for the City of Kalamazoo. There should be more emphasis on how to attract businesses to the area. Planner Hernandez mentioned that there have been discussions regarding having more regional competition and making it a Kalamazoo County issue. Kalamazoo wants to be a beacon in the region, and local municipalities should be working together to do that. There should be a combined effort in the region to market what is available locally.

Planner Hernandez suggested that the Planning Commissioners review the remainder of the hand-out and contact city staff with any questions. The handout provides information on what the public will be asked to informally vote on at the next public meeting. Attendees at the public meeting will be provided with 10 tickets and asked to vote for the issues they feel are most important. Feedback from the public will help the consultants and city staff prioritize the issues.

Commissioner Dean inquired if the votes had been counted from the public at the last meeting. Planner Hernandez advised that the votes have been counted but the results will not be revealed at this point. The results from the October meeting are consistent with the results from the first set of public meetings in July.

Commissioner Kuseske inquired as to how the results of the public meetings are communicated to the City Commission. Planner Hernandez advised that the results have not yet been provided to the City Commission, but a report will be forthcoming in the near future.

Planner Hernandez stated that after the public meeting on November 10th, updates to the Master Plan will be moving to the next phase. He suggested that the Planning Commissioners provide him with any additional comments by next Friday. The working groups and steering committee will be meeting after that. The meeting may be hosted at City Hall in the Commission Chambers. Planner Hernandez encouraged the Planning Commissioners to attend the public meeting on the 10th.

Attorney Kneas acknowledged that the Davis Creek Business Park is not developing as rapidly as anticipated. The Brownfield Redevelopment Authority has recently contracted with Callander Commercial Realtors to market that site and the riverfront redevelopment property (the location of the former Kalamazoo Tank and Silo building).

Commissioner Fricke mentioned that some of the goals that were mentioned, such as proposed changes to business route 131, would involve a higher level of authority. He inquired as to how that information was being passed to representatives in Washington. Planner Hernandez advised that he did not have information about how it is being

presented in Washington. The Master Plan is a policy document. City staff is in communication with representatives of the Kalamazoo Area Transportation System (KATS), which is a regional planning organization. City staff will present the Master Plan to KATS and the document will be reviewed by their policy committee. The Master Plan will be made available to federal and state level officials as appropriate.

Commissioner Youngs referred to the KATS 20/25 plan. State Representatives Debbie Stabenaw, Carl Levin and Congressman Fred Upton have lobbied on it.

I. NEW BUSINESS

None

J. CITIZENS' COMMENTS

City Commissioner Barb Miller welcomed Commissioner-Elect Kuseske to the City Commission.

K. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

Planner Hernandez advised that the CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) approval process is moving forward. It could not be reviewed in October because the streets, water and waste water portions have not been completed yet. This information should be available in December and the subcommittee will be convened to review the information. Commissioners Kuseske, Wienir, Dean are on the subcommittee. City staff will contact the subcommittee shortly to confirm a time for the meeting.

Commissioner Kuseske suggested looking at how the CIP impacts the budget. The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for following through with many of the suggestions that are made about beautifying the city. The improvements are not free; someone has to pay for the electricity, water and personnel to take care of the landscaping/flowers that are planted.

Commissioner Kuseske advised that the department heads are working hard to present information on the CIP, and it is then being reviewed by personnel in the City Manager's office. Some of the funds coming in are allowing the city to proceed with important projects. Review of the CIP is an ever changing and evolving process. Commissioner Kuseske stated that the first time he looked at the CIP with the Planning Commission, the information was confusing. The budget for the beginning of the year ended up being a much larger budget because of funds that were being carried forward from prior years. Funds carried forward are now being identified each year. The process has been clarified and prioritized so the report to the Planning Commission will be easier to understand.

Planner Bauckham advised that the draft wind energy regulations will be reviewed at the December Planning Commission meeting. City staff anticipates having the regulations in place early next year.

City staff will be looking for a qualified candidate to replace Commissioner Kuseske who was recently elected to the City Commission. Planner Bauckham encouraged the Planning Commissioners to advise city staff if they know of any suitable candidates for the vacant seat on the Planning Commission.

L. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

The Planning Commissioners congratulated Commission Kuseske on his recent election to the City Commission.

Commissioner Kuseske commented that every City Commissioner has the City of Kalamazoo's best interests at heart. Many of the City Commissioners have served on the Planning Commission in the past. The Planning Commission provides an opportunity to view the City of Kalamazoo as a complete picture. Commissioner Kuseske thanked city staff for their work and the transparent public process they have helped create. He encouraged the Planning Commissioners to talk with city staff about any questions they may have in order to allow the decision-making process to run more smoothly at the dais. Commissioner Kuseske commented that it is an honor and a challenge to move to a new position.

M. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Keith Hernandez, AICP
Deputy Director/City Planner
Community Planning and Development