

**City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
May 6, 2010
DRAFT**

Members Present: Sonja Dean, Chair; Mark Fricke, Vice Chair; Carla Chase; Todd Hamilton; Edward Planeta; Reed Youngs

Members Excused: Casey Fawley, Merilee Mishall, Bertha Stewart

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

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Dean 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

There were no changes to the agenda.

Commissioner Youngs, supported by Commissioner Hamilton, moved approval of the May 6, 2010 Planning Commission agenda as submitted. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES (April 1, 2010)

There were no changes to the minutes.

Commissioner Youngs, supported by Commissioner Chase, moved approval of the April 1, 2010 Planning Commission minutes as submitted. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

E. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Planner Hernandez advised that the Planning Commission retreat is scheduled from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. on May 21st at Pretty Lake Camp. The retreat is open to the public and will be noticed in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.

The next public meeting for the Master Plan update is scheduled for May 25th in the Van Deusen Room at the Kalamazoo Public Library (central branch library).

F. PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. P.C. #2010.03: Consideration of a request from the Wesley Foundation of Kalamazoo for a special use permit to allow the expansion of their facility located at 2101 Wilbur Avenue with an enclosed, barrier-free entrance.

Planner Bauckham gave the staff report, which is included in these minutes by reference hereto. The subject property is totally surrounded by property and facilities that are owned and operated by WMU (Western Michigan University). The Wesley Foundation owns the subject property. The site contains a two-story building at the southern portion and a parking lot on the north side of the site. The building is used for a variety of religious activities.

The Foundation would like to construct an approximately 600 square foot, enclosed, barrier-free addition at the southeast corner of the building. Planned expansions of religious assembly facilities in the city in the residential zone require review and approval from the Planning Commission. The site plan for the project was included in the Planning Commission packets. The site plan shows the proposed addition at the southeast corner of the building. It also shows an addition at the northwest corner of the building for housing purposes, and an expansion of the parking lot. Tonight's request pertains only to the proposed addition for the handicap access at the southeast corner of the site.

City staff believes the request meets the criteria for a special use permit, and they are recommending approval of the special use permit with the condition that the final site plan be provided to city staff for review and approval by the Site Plan Review Committee.

Commissioner Chase inquired as to how the size of the space would be determined, and if there is sufficient space to provide the handicap access. Planner Bauckham advised that more details will be submitted with the final site plan, but sufficient space does exist for the addition. The subject property is privately owned, so the applicants will need to get building permits for this project.

Steve Hassevoort, InForm Architecture, PLC, was present to discuss the application. He advised that he is the architect on the project. John Ross, member of the Board of Directors of the Wesley Foundation, was also present. Ms. Hassevoort stated that the Wesley Foundation is the campus ministry of the United Methodist Church. The Wesley Foundation is on nearly every major public campus in this country. The Foundation has occupied the building at 2101 Wilbur since about 1962. The surrounding area was mostly residential at that time, but the University has since expanded around the subject property.

Tonight, the applicant is looking for approval to proceed with phase I of this project, which will bring the building up to barrier-free access standards. The space has already

been laid out in the lobby, and there is room for the proposed changes. The changes will include a grade-level lobby, a new stairway and an elevator. There are three levels in the building, one is slightly below grade, one is slightly above grade, and there is a small, loft/balcony space. The elevator will serve all three levels. Barrier-free restrooms will be added, and windows will be replaced to improve the energy efficiency of the building. The mechanical/electrical system will also be updated. The site work for this project will include the proposed addition and any necessary sidewalk modifications leading to the addition. There are no plans to change the parking at this point. Fundraising is currently underway to help offset the cost of this project.

Public Hearing

Bob Miller, Associate Vice President, Western Michigan University, advised that the University has enjoyed having the Wesley Foundation as a neighbor for many years. It is not the intention of the University to oppose the application that is being presented tonight. Mr. Miller referred to the site plan, which shows an expanded area to accommodate a new housing facility, which the University would oppose. It is the understanding of the University that city staff and the City Attorney's office have indicated to the Wesley Foundation that they would not recommend approval of the new housing facility. The University continues to be in active discussions with the Wesley Foundation as they look at future opportunities, in hopes that both entities can come to an agreement that is mutually acceptable.

Commissioner Youngs, supported by Commissioner Chase, moved to close the public hearing on P.C. #2010.03. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Fricke, supported by Commissioner Planeta, moved approval of P.C. #2010.03, with the condition recommended by city staff. With a roll call vote, the motion carried unanimously.

G. CITIZENS' COMMENTS REGARDING NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

H. OLD BUSINESS

1. Update on the Master Plan project.

Planner Hernandez introduced Planner Augustine to provide the Master Plan update.

Planner Augustine provided the following information regarding the Master Plan update and highlights of the draft plan:

City staff is in the process of concluding the year-long process of updating the Master Plan. An example of the draft Master Plan was circulated among the Planning Commissioners. City staff wanted to make the Plan as visually interesting as possible. The consultants were given a 75-page limit for the Plan and they came close to that target. Eventually, there will be an appendix to the Master Plan, which will contain more information on demographics and transportation for people who want a more in-depth look at the Plan.

Sustainability is emphasized in the Plan. There are green boxes at the beginning of each chapter that mention key sustainability initiatives within each chapter. The Plan also focuses on business resources and entrepreneurial target areas in Kalamazoo. The current trend for large industrial and commercial development tends to be Greenfield development with easy highway access. The City of Kalamazoo has a substantial amount of older-model (historic) entrepreneurial areas. A good way to encourage entrepreneurial spirit in the city is to use those resources.

Other goals of the Plan are multi-modal streets defined as "complete streets," which involves the creation of a transportation system for all modes of transportation, not just cars. Greenway corridors, which are interconnected portions of the recreation system, are designed to allow you to get from one side of the city to the other without using your car. Partnerships and regionalism are also goals of the Plan. Especially during the current economic climate, it is more important than ever that we work together with our partners and our neighbors.

The draft Plan is six chapters long, starting with an introduction, and followed by four chapters which are devoted to quality of life, neighborhoods, transportation, and market place. The last chapter is the Action Plan, which talks about what the city wants to do at the end of the Master Plan process, how they want to move forward, and what the next steps are.

Public input has played a major role in the Master Plan update. The process started off with the creation of a Steering Committee with many leaders in the city. Four working groups were created based on the four topics/goals of the Master Plan. Individuals who work in those areas (topics) were part of the working groups. Each of the four groups had between 10 and 15 people who were practitioners in a field related to the working group they were in. Those groups met throughout the process to provide direction and feedback to city staff.

Four public meetings were held in different areas of the city; about 400 people attended the public meetings. There are over 600 fans on the Facebook page that is devoted to the Master Plan rewrite, and there is a Twitter account with regular updates. A virtual Master Plan meeting is available on line. City staff reviewed all of the previous Master Plans and incorporated information from those plans into the current version of the plan. There is also a set of guiding plan visions and principles, which represent an overview of what the Plan is trying to accomplish.

The second chapter of the Plan is Marketplace. A focus of this chapter is “green” environmental practices. A goal of the Plan is to promote “green” industries through the culture of the town, and also by reminding people that you can have “green” developments on a Greenfield site, but the greenest building is one that’s already built.

The Marketplace chapter takes into consideration the current economic situation and acknowledges that it is impossible to know what the economy will be like in five years. Ten cities that are similar to Kalamazoo were used for comparisons to determine how well Kalamazoo performed. The strengths and challenges that Kalamazoo has are also discussed.

The key strategies focus on the “Kalamazoo Promise” with regard to its academic aspects and its ability to attract and retain businesses. It also focuses on reusing underutilized sites and the fact that Kalamazoo has a much higher level of commercial and retail zoned property in the city than is currently warranted by the population of the city. Strategies have been developed to transform these areas into more appropriate land uses. Land-banking and finding ways to use vacant property and to bring it back to a more appropriate use is a major focus of the Plan.

The third chapter pertains to Neighborhoods. “Green” building features, conversion of vacant property into infill, green space, and community gardens are a focus of this chapter. This chapter refers to the individual Neighborhood Plans. The city has approximately 20,000 fewer residents than it did at its peak. The goal is to have a pragmatic plan that acknowledges that and provides ways to deal with down-sizing and attracting residents. Land use and character are also discussed in this chapter.

There are several types of residential categories discussed in this chapter, including “core residential” which is a term used to describe the more densely populated areas of the city. “Modern residential” is a term used to describe the more suburban housing further from the core neighborhoods of the city. There are templates in the Plan for how a good suburban commercial model would look, which would have parking to the side and back and streets with boulevards. The Plan provides best-case scenarios for all of the land use types in the city.

The heart and core of the Master Plan is the Future Land Use Plan. The Plan includes a new element, which is referred to as “character.” For instance, areas that are zoned single-family residential, such as the Winchell Neighborhood and the Oakwood Neighborhood, may have radically different land uses. Even though these are single-family residential areas, they look different and have different street systems; the yard sizes and the houses are also different. The Plan includes design guidelines to help maintain the individual character of the various areas in the city. There are four residential types: Core Residential 1, Core Residential 2, Modern Residential 1 and Modern Residential 2. The Plan provides a description of each residential category, which details the land use and the character of the area. The Plan is a work in progress and public comments are welcome.

It is important to keep the employment centers and the different types of commercial areas together. It is also important to see where there are land use conflicts. A potential area of land use conflict includes an industrial area of the Milwood Neighborhood, which abuts a single-family residential area. Emerald Park provides a buffer in that area. It is important to use similar buffers between other industrial and residential areas. There is also potential for conflict along Stadium Drive where a commercial area abuts a single-family residential neighborhood. Areas where there are more intense commercial uses tend to be the source of conflicts with adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The key strategies of the chapter include encouraging near-downtown neighborhoods for people who want to walk to entertainment and work, etc. Emphasizing the positive aspects of core neighborhoods for people who want a walkable community is also beneficial. The Plan also focuses on neighborhood reinvestments through housing partnerships with non-profit and for-profit businesses. There is a perception that there are not many incentives available for for-profit builders. The working group emphasized the importance of providing those incentives, and of providing a wide variety of housing types.

Transportation is the fourth chapter of the Plan. This chapter focuses on mixed nodes and compact development; encouraging density; walkability; transit-oriented development; working on parking preferences for high-occupancy vehicles, hybrid vehicles and electric cars; encouraging sustainability and “green” technology; pervious pavement, and encouraging all modes of transportation. Safety and management are also discussed and there is a heavy emphasis on non-motorized vehicles, trailways and transit.

There will be continued focus on improving gateways in and out of the city. The first and last impression that many people have of the city is coming and going through major access points to the area. It is important that those corridors provide a positive impression of the city. The Plan refers to access management, which pertains to minimizing the number of driveways onto roads.

Retrofitting streets to lower speeds, improve aesthetics, supporting walking and biking and providing links to the trailway system are goals of the Plan. The term, “road diets” is a term used to describe excess capacity on the street that makes the area more dangerous for pedestrians and bikers. Converting streets from three lanes to two lanes with wider shoulders and bike lanes helps to remedy this situation.

The fifth chapter pertains to quality of life. The strategies in this chapter are as follows: minimizing energy consumption, green development practices, encouraging farmers’ markets and access to local produce, improved waste management practices and continuing to pursue brownfield remediation. The City of Kalamazoo has one of the foremost brownfield programs in the nation.

There is a focus on cultural and entertainment resources in this chapter, as well as education and academic institutions. Many of the recommendations in the chapter fall in

the category of partnerships, which the city can develop with other entities for the benefit of the community. Sustainable initiatives, parks and natural resource systems are discussed in this chapter.

Key strategies in this chapter are healthy and active lifestyles; continuing to promote Kalamazoo as the regional hub for entertainment, as a cultural destination, an education community, and making sure that Kalamazoo continues to be a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable city for future generations.

The Action Plan is the last chapter of the Master Plan. It compiles all of the sustainability strategies and puts them in a series of 140 action steps. The steps are prioritized with regard to immediate priority level, short-term, medium-term and long-term. During the public meeting process, the public identified priorities which are as follows: natural area preservation, expanding local food options, reuse of vacant properties, neighborhood reinvestment, transit system, walking and biking. The theme of the Plan is "green" and sustainability, and that reflects the culture of the city.

The draft Plan is currently in the public comment period. The Michigan State Planning Enabling Act requires that the city has a process to allow for substantial public input. The Plan is made available to local jurisdictions and to the public at large for a 63-day comment period. We are currently in the middle of that comment period. The last public meeting regarding the Master Plan update will take place on May 25th in the VanDeusen room at the downtown branch of the Kalamazoo Public Library. The public hearing will take place in June, followed by the anticipated adoption of the Plan by the City Commission.

Commissioner Chase mentioned that some communities are focusing on the design of space in homes to have one zero-step entrance and a half-bath as part of their sustainable design movement. Part of the goal of this movement is to help keep people in their homes longer. She inquired if that has been brought up as a possibility for infill housing in Kalamazoo as part of the sustainable design. Planner Hernandez advised that it has not been discussed at this point. The Master Plan will be used as a template to begin looking at design guidelines for development. This is the first step in identifying what is important to the community; the specifics will be discussed later. It might be possible to mention that concept in the Master Plan. Commissioner Chase commented that there are parts of the Master that are open to interpretation, so that as new ideas come about, it will be possible to see how they might fit into the Plan.

Planner Augustine advised that the parts of the Master Plan that pertain to the zoning ordinance are about two and a half pages. The rest of the Plan is about having a generalized direction in terms of initiatives the city will be taking and who they might be partnering with. Sustainability refers not only to "green" building concepts but also about "aging in place" as Commissioner Chase mentioned. She advised that the specific terms that Commissioner Chase referred to are not currently in the Master Plan, but

adding additional language about sustainability is important. As ideas for additional infill housing are developed, there is potential for incorporating those ideas.

Commissioner Chase inquired if there was a possibility of the Master Plan becoming a living/working document on a public scale after it is adopted. She suggested competitions for public input on how projects could best be accomplished, or ideas on how to accomplish an action plan. Having ongoing public involvement in these decisions makes the Plan more of an interactive/living document. Planner Augustine advised that some steps have been taken toward making the Plan interactive. The first step was reducing the typical 300-page Master Plan down to less than 100 pages. Also, there has been substantial public outreach during the process of the Master Plan rewrite. The tools that have been set in place through that process will continue to allow staff to ask for opinions from the public. The Plan has some generalized language that will allow for interpretation.

Commissioner Fricke commented that the Master Plan is the marching orders for every department in the city. Involving the public is an ongoing process because this becomes the standard to which city departments, boards and commissions must adhere. The Plan can be molded and formed every year as the public input process continues.

Planner Augustine advised that one of the reasons staff tried to get representations from all city departments on the working groups is that staff in those departments are involved in the areas covered by the Master Plan. Those staff members also need to be involved in the process as it moves into the future.

Commissioner Chase inquired if there are measurable outcomes for the Action Plan objectives. She suggested that it may be beneficial to share things with other communities on a national level that we have learned from this process. That would also bring recognition to Kalamazoo. She inquired if there is a task force to measure the outcomes to see which strategies work and which ones don't. Planner Augustine stated that in the past, updates were provided on a periodic basis to let people know the status of the action items. Planner Hernandez advised that the city has a scorecard, which lists the items that need to be accomplished over a given year. Updates are provided every month with regard to progress on those items. The public provides direction to staff on how to prioritize the tasks that need to be completed. City staff needs to figure out how to accomplish those goals with input from the community.

Planner Augustine advised that city staff has applied for a couple of awards for the Master Plan. Staff will be providing a presentation at the Michigan Association of Planning Conference. Through the use of new outreach tools such as Facebook, staff can continue to provide updates with regard to the planning objectives that are being met.

Commissioner Hamilton advised that he had been provided with an earlier version of the Master Plan. He inquired if he could get the updated version of the Plan. Planner

Augustine advised that the updated version can be found on line at www.kalamazoo.org/plankalamazoo.

Commissioner Fricke inquired as to the difference between the Master Plan and the zoning ordinance. There may be instances where there may be conflict. How do you weigh the process between the two? Planner Hernandez advised that the Master Plan will be more current than the zoning ordinance. The Master Plan is used as a guide to form what is in the zoning ordinance regarding how land is zoned. If there is a conflict, it would make sense to consult the Master Plan since it is the most current document that represents the will of the community. The Master Plan can be used as a guide when considering whether or not to change the zoning of an area or parcel of land.

Commissioner Fricke inquired as to why changes to the zoning ordinance were not completed after the Master Plan was updated. Planner Hernandez advised that a zoning change would not be initiated only as a result of changes to the Master Plan. Usually, an applicant would request a zoning change and that request would proceed to the Planning Commission for approval. City staff would not normally make a request for a zoning change unless there is a development tied to the request. The Master Plan is a guide for zoning changes but not necessarily the edict to proceed with a change.

Planner Augustine advised that the introduction chapter in the Master Plan provides information about the difference between the Master Plan and the Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance is law and the Master Plan is policy. At the end of the Master Plan there is information pertaining to the State Planning Enabling Act and the new requirement for a Zoning Plan. It refers to Future Land Use categories and some of the text used in the Master Plan and how it relates to the Zoning Ordinance. Transitioning to concepts about land use and character means that there will be more flexibility. Each future land use and character category will have four potential zoning classes. That information is applicable to decisions made by the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Youngs expressed concern about the possibility of spot zoning, which could gradually lead into other properties in the area being rezoned. Planner Hernandez indicated that the Master Plan is important for preventing that type of scenario. Planner Augustine advised that the Master Plan does not recommend whole sale changes to land use. Land use in the city is already established and it is not the intention to take areas of land "off line" and change them. There is an overall framework for the Plan, which is entitled, "preserve, enhance and transform." This concept details the areas of land use in the city that are already working well and the importance of using the correct tools to preserve those land uses. There are other areas of the city that need to have a complete transformation. There is a map in the Master Plan that details each of those areas.

Commissioner Chase inquired if individuals could use the Master Plan as a marketing tool once it is finalized. Planner Augustine responded in the affirmative. The more partners the city has to promote and use the Plan, the more beneficial it should be to everyone.

Planner Hernandez mentioned that the 63-day comment period will end after the next regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting (June 3rd). In order to expedite review and approval of the Plan by the Planning Commission, Planner Hernandez suggested moving the next meeting to either Tuesday, June 8th or Thursday, June 10th. The general consensus was that June 10th would be preferable. Planner Augustine

advised that a commitment was made months ago to finalize the Plan in July. If the Plan is approved by the Planning Commission in June it can proceed to the City Commission for final approval in July as scheduled.

I. NEW BUSINESS

None

J. CITIZENS' COMMENTS

None

K. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

Planner Bauckham referred to the site plan spreadsheet. He indicated that there were very few new projects in January and February this year. Eleven projects were submitted to city staff for review in the month of April, which is a substantial number. Three of those projects are proposed new buildings, including an addition to the Interact Building on the southwest corner of Burdick and Walnut. Currently, the building is a residential-looking facility in the back with a commercial store front. They want to take down the existing building and construct a new brick building. Also, at the northeast corner of Crosstown Parkway and Westnedge there is an old, abandoned gas station. A new restaurant has been proposed for that site. The applicant intends to renovate the existing building, repave the parking area, and add landscaping. The city's Metro Transit division will be constructing an addition to the bus garage, and the Gospel Mission is proposing a new building on the south side of their parcel where the retail store is located. The new building at the Gospel Mission will be used to repair donated vehicles. The new building will be similar in appearance to the front of the existing store.

Planner Bauckham advised that the Wind Ordinance and Bicycle Ordinance are also tentative agenda items for the June Planning Commission meeting. The Wind Ordinance is ready to be presented to the Planning Commission; the Bicycle Ordinance is currently being reviewed by the Kalamazoo Bike Club and the city's Recreation Department.

L. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

City of Kalamazoo Planning Commission Minutes

May 6, 2010

Page 11 of 11

Commissioner Dean thanked Planner Augustine for her presentation on the Master Plan. She advised that she has been involved with the Master Plan update over the past year, and she expressed enthusiasm for being involved with such a comprehensive plan.

M. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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