

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
February 7, 2019
FINAL

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

Members Present: Rachel Hughes-Nilsson, Chair; Gregory Milliken, Vice Chair; Jack Baartman; Alfonso Espinosa; Emily Greenman Wright; Derek Wissner; Sakhi Vyas

Members Excused: Charley Coss; James Pitts

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Robert Bauckham, Senior Development Planner; Jennifer Gutierrez, Community Investment Secretary; Beth Cheeseman, Code Administration Clerk/Cashier; Katie Reilly, Neighborhood Activator

A. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

B. ROLL CALL

Planner Anderson proceeded with roll call and determined that the aforementioned members were present.

C. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Vyas, moved approval of the February 7, 2019 Planning Commission agenda. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Wissner, supported by Commissioner Baartman, moved approval of the January 3, 2019 Planning Commission minutes. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

E. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

F. PUBLIC HEARINGS

P.C. #2018.29: Request from the Community Planning & Economic Development Department and the Oakwood Neighborhood Association to approve the Oakwood Neighborhood Plan. [Recommendation: motion to approve the Plan and recommend to the City Commission to confirm the approval of the Plan as an amendment to the 2025 Master Plan.]

Commissioner Espinosa reported that he would abstain from this conversation and vote.

Ms. Katie Reilly gave the staff report. She said the planning effort was led by the Oakwood Neighborhood Association's Planning Committee. To gather input from the neighborhood, they put together a survey, held nine focus groups, had pop up meetings at some existing community events, and held open houses. They also had a living wall for the plan with feedback opportunities at the Neighborhood Center.

Ms. Karen Larson, Oakwood Neighborhood Board Member, came forward to present the plan. She said they met with numerous groups to increase their understanding of the needs and desires for the neighborhood and to determine the best coalitions. They also had a favorable response when the plan was presented back to community. Ms. Larson reported they would like to have a new Community Center and more green space and naturalized areas where people can bike and walk.

Ms. Larson also reported that they found connectability to be very important. They found their neighborhood needs more sidewalks, and some need to be repaired or replaced. She cited the importance of the sidewalks and crosswalks, and connecting them to schools. Ms. Larson stated they lost their bus stop, which means they lost a major ability to access transportation in an affordable manner. Ms. Larson noted that their youth and seniors are extremely valuable resources that they need to continue to cultivate. They want to address senior issues for housing, home repairs, and nutrition. She reported they are making a coalition with the Woods Lake Association and the Winchell Association, and Parkview Hills is renewing their Neighborhood Association. Ms. Larson reported that instead of being one community, they will be a system of communities, which will uplift and help each other.

Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson opened public comment portion of the hearing.

No one came forward.

Commissioner Greenman Wright, supported by Commissioner Wissner, moved to close the public comment portion of the hearing. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Milliken, supported by Commissioner Greenman Wright, moved to approve P.C. #2018.29: the Oakwood Neighborhood Plan and recommend to the City Commission to confirm the approval of the Plan as an amendment to the 2025 Master Plan.

Commissioner Milliken and Commissioner Greenman Wright made favorable comments regarding the plan. Commissioner Milliken noted that it was a comprehensive, well thought-out process. He also appreciated that they viewed the process as an opportunity to affect change, to look to the future with vision, and to create coalitions. Commissioner Greenman Wright appreciated that they are seeking to develop the assets and the benefits already present in the community. She noted the Complete Streets approach for sidewalks, walkability, and the bus route as well as the attention to the water shed.

Roll call vote was taken and passed unanimously. Espinosa abstained.

G. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None

H. NEW BUSINESS

P.C. #2018.30: Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2019-2023: Imagine Fun! [**Recommendation: vote to offer support for the Plan.**]

Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson reported that she was abstaining from this conversation and vote.

Mr. Sean Fletcher, Director of Parks & Recreation, and Mr. Christopher Khorey of McKenna and Associates, came forward to present the staff report. Director Fletcher reported on their successes with the Henderson Tot Lot and with the Davis Street Park. He said having a Master Plan approved will enable them to secure funding through the DNR to get state grants. This will also serve as a plan for capital projects for the next 5 years. Director Fletcher stated they have tried to equitably spread the park improvements throughout the City. He also shared they have created an internal 10-year capital plan. He reviewed the following parts of the plan:

Great Neighborhood & Complete Neighborhoods

Director Fletcher noted that the parks (ex: Crane Park, Rockwell Park, Henderson Tot Lot, Davis Street), Parks programs, and walking paths are helping to make neighborhoods better. He stated that the parks are the City's venues. They had an LED Video board approved recently, so they can have movies in the park. Director Fletcher also stated that youth development is a huge focus for them. They desire to impact youth, give them the right spaces, get them away from phones and video games, and get them outdoors. He shared that Rockwell Park is an example of how they focus on youth. They designed that park knowing Phase 2 would include a building with restrooms and an indoor gathering space. That will provide space for the Super Recreation Program which attracts 25-40 kids per day. They also give meals at that site.

Inviting public places

Director Fletcher said they work with neighborhoods to find out what is wanted and balance that with what can be done. He gave the example of Reed Street Park. They are transforming it with a couple of age-appropriate playgrounds, court space, walking paths, and a picnic shelter. Director Fletcher stated they look for opportunities to acquire space. They know the Oakwood area is lacking for green space, but they have to identify a strategic partner and collaborate with them to accomplish this.

Director Fletcher outlined their park improvement process. He said the initial planning meeting is held in the park they want to improve. They talk about the vision for the park, engage people, and get their ideas. At that time they would have different plans available for the meeting such as Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 and the current Neighborhood plan. They would come up with a concept plan, and then come up with a design for the improvements. At the second meeting,

they work on fine-tuning the plan. When it is time for construction, they attempt to keep people up to date on the timeline. They will do that for the planned improvements to Verburg Park, taking one year to plan and one year for construction.

Community Outreach

The Parks & Recreation Department utilized a variety of different events to obtain input for the plan. They used movie events, lunch-time live events, and the Millwood National Night Out. They had an event at different parks in each quadrant of the community. A community survey was completed with a random sample of 5000 households. A total of 320 surveys were returned. Director Fletcher stated the information from the survey will really help with the 10-year strategic vision. He wants to focus on specific achievable goals.

Large Community Parks

Director Fletcher stated they have a goal to improve Milham Park, Upjohn Park and Spring Valley Park by 2028. He also said they want to put spray pads in each quadrant of the City with Farrell Park being the first by 2020.

Director Fletcher reviewed the 5-year Master Plan. He mentioned working with the FFE on funding for improvements to Reed Street Park, Springmont Tot Lot, Rockwell Park, Verberg Park, and Upjohn Park, and for Milham Park dam improvements and a pray pad for Ferrell Park.

Mr. Chris Khorey shared information about planning regions. He said Kalamazoo is a large city and Parks & Recreation operates 30 properties. Since parks are inherently a neighborhood amenity, they wanted to do this plan on a neighborhood scale. He said they grouped some neighborhoods together and organized them into planning regions. These planning regions help them understand differences in amenities in different parts of the city and to look at green space gaps.

Commissioner Espinosa asked about the non-motorized map. Planner Anderson responded that the map is in the Master Plan and the data is utilized to show gaps where sidewalks are missing in and around our parks. This map helps illustrate where funding can be funneled when it becomes available.

Commissioner Milliken asked if the Strategic Vision he mentioned was a working document to use internally or if it will be a formal approved document. Director Fletcher stated that it will be more of an internal document to help keep them on track.

Commissioner Milliken commented that partnerships and collaborations will be key in moving forward. A lot of the 5-10 minute radius deficiencies can be filled by schools and WMU where people go to recreate. Director Fletcher stated that while they know that recreation through schools does fill gaps, for purposes of this plan, those facilities don't count when the DNR asks for certain things to be in the plan.

Motion made by Commissioner Vyas and support by Commissioner Greenman Wright on P.C. #2018.26 to recommend to offer support for the Parks & Recreation Master Plan.

Commissioner Greenman Wright commented that the plan is extremely easy to read and well presented.

A roll call vote was taken and passed unanimously. Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson abstained.

I. CITIZENS' COMMENTS (Regarding non-agenda items)

Mr. Jeff Messer, resident, asked for information regarding site plan projects 2018.43 and 2018.50, the United Building expansion and the former Wayside West bar on Stadium Drive.

J. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

None

K. CITY PLANNER'S REPORT

Planner Anderson stated that in response to several Commissioners' questions about sanitary sewer backups and flood issues, she consulted with Director James Baker of the Public Services Department. He told her that when there is flooding, the utility pipes in street are sealed. Sometimes utility pipes between the street and a house can have cracks and water can get inside. The City offers to install backflow preventers for residents in the highest flood areas. When the water gets to a certain level, the backflow preventer shuts off the pipe so nothing goes out to the sanitary system and nothing comes in. If it engages, you can't use the water/wastewater facilities, but you can prevent the backup. Planner Anderson said that there is very little the City can do outside of that. She said they have discussed the program with residents in a lot of our key flood plain areas and will continue to do so in the future. Planner Anderson wanted Commissioners to know the program is available, and the flooding issue is not a deficiency or inability for the sanitary system to manage flows.

Commissioner Hughes-Nilsson asked if the City pays for the installation of the backflow preventer or if the residents pay. Planner Anderson shared that the program is free for residents. Commissioner Espinosa asked when the program was implemented. Planner Anderson wasn't sure, but knew it was at least last year if not before.

Planner Anderson shared more information gathered from Director Baker. When someone proposes a project in a flood plain, a couple of things have to happen in order for the project to go forward. If you are displacing where flood waters can go, you have to compensate for that on your site. They also make sure the project will not create any flood impacts further downstream. Director Baker reviews those projects and said he has confidence in how the MDEQ reviews them. Per Director Baker, the MDEQ would not approve a project which would create flood impacts further downstream. Planner Anderson reported that the City has an ordinance which requires developments not to discharge more storm water than currently. Staff member Anna Crandall looks carefully at pre and post construction calculations for storm water volume changes.

Planner Anderson also let Commissioners know the work of dredging the Crosstown Ponds will be done in 2019 and they will have a community meeting to let everyone know when and what that entails. They plan to have information on backflow preventers at that meeting. Neighborhood Activator Katie Reilly and Planner Anderson have been strategizing on how to do outreach to people in flood areas.

Commissioner Espinosa asked about ordinances related to wetlands. Planner Anderson stated they do have an ordinance regarding wetlands and it is also being incorporated into the Natural Features Protection ordinance. She said a lot of what is included in the Natural Features Protection ordinance is already in codes right now, they are just making a few changes.

Commissioner Milliken asked if there were any plans for below-ground improvements for Lake Street. Planner Anderson stated that the upcoming project for that street is a resurfacing project. She said the last time they opened up Lake Street, they lined the pipes.

Planner Anderson reported the Michigan Association of Planning will be offering Planning Commissioner related trainings. She inquired if the Commissioners would be interested in more information about the trainings, and asked them to let her know if there were any specific presentations from City staff they would like to hear. Planner Anderson informed the Commissioners that the MAP conference is in Kalamazoo this year in September.

Planner Bauckham came forward to give the site plan report. He said there have been five new projects so far this year. One project is a new building for 7-Point Supply, which will be located in the Davis Creek Business Park. Another new project is planned improvements to Reed Street Park located on Portage Street.

Projects under construction:

Oakwood Animal Hospital - building addition
Hydra Elevated Wellness - a new Marihuana dispensary on Portage Street
Hartwood Farms – a Marihuana grow operation on Sprinkle Road
Friendship Village – new pool building
Lewis Howard Company – new storage building on E. Vine Street
Lot 9 Project – the new mixed-use building on Water Street
400 Rose Project – the new mixed-use building on Rose & Lovell
Newell Rubbermaid – building addition in the BTR Park
Exchange building – the new 15-story building in the downtown

Planner Bauckham gave updates on the projects identified by Mr. Messer. The United Building went through the site plan review process. They needed to do changes and informed the Planning Department they were going to redesign the project. The project will still be done, but it is currently on delay. The Enterprise Leasing company wanted to do a truck leasing business at the former Wayside West building on Stadium Drive. They went through the site plan review process and were asked to do some changes, particularly in the landscaping improvements. The company has placed the project on hold. Planner Bauckham reported that the Economic Development staff recently met with the company about including the property in the Brownfield Plan. The hope is to move it ahead this year.

Planner Bauckham reported that at the March meeting, they will have a rezoning of a parcel connected to the Westwood Plaza complex at W. Main and Drake. The applicant owns the parcel, which is vacant and was used for storm water drainage. The property is currently zoned for residential and they would like it rezoned to CC. They would like to move the current driveway access for the complex onto the parcel to help support a new restaurant.

L. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Espinosa asked for an update on the National Feature Overlay. Planner Anderson said that on December 3rd a 6-month moratorium was issued by the City Commission and the Planning Department has until June 3 to create a set of ordinances and standards. They have been meeting with an ad hoc group of natural features experts to help them understand the standards and what should be included. Planner Anderson said they are using 4 tenets to create the standards: 1. They must be grounded in reality; 2. Staff can administer, manage and follow up on them; 3. The ordinance has to be able to be applied to the entire city; and 4. The ordinance will allow for a different way of doing development. She said the draft will be on the Imagine Kalamazoo web site by next Friday for public review. Focus group meetings will be the next step. They will have discussions with environmental conservation groups, some interested neighborhoods, and the development community. Planner Anderson said they will have a public meeting in March, and then it will come before the Planning Commission on April 9. The last step will be two readings at the City Commission.

Commissioner Milliken asked about the mapping component of the ordinance. Planner Anderson stated that the overlay will be mapped and will match (for the most part) what was in the Master Plan. Once past this phase, they plan to do a more detailed mapping study of the city. She said there are 5-6 features being regulated through this with each one needing a few months time for study. After that there will be an education phase. There is a whole layer of activities out there that residents and neighborhoods could do to be a better steward (ex: plantings, pesticide use, and native plant species preservation).

M. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Wissner, supported by Commissioner Vyas, moved to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "C. Anderson", is written over a horizontal blue line.

Christina Anderson,
City Planner
Community Planning & Development