

Meeting Minutes

Downers Grove Comprehensive Plan Village of Downers Grove

June 14, 2011

Call to Order

Mayor Tully reconvened the June 14, 2011 Village Council at 7:35 p.m. in the Committee Room of the Downers Grove Village Hall.

Attendance

Commissioners Geoff Neustadt, Becky Rheintgen, William Waldack, Marilyn Schnell, Sean Patrick Durkin, Bob Barnett, Mayor Martin Tully, Manager David Fieldman, Village Attorney Enza Petrarca, Village Clerk April Holden, Deputy Village Manager Mike Baker, Doug Kozlowski, Community Development Director Tom Dabareiner, Planner Jeff O'Brien, Devon Lavigne, Consultant, Houseal Lavigne

Village Manager Dave Fieldman explained that the meeting will include discussion on the Draft Comprehensive Plan (the "Plan") that has been in the works for well over a year. He said it is a very important document and it is imperative that the Council has the opportunity to thoroughly evaluate its contents.

Community Development Director Tom Dabareiner said that five hours to the east of Downers Grove was a rural community that was split in half by a highway. The east half was dedicated to those who wanted to raise horses, while the west half was inhabited by those who wanted to take advantage of the new highway and build a downtown. Every meeting broke out into a fight, and someone finally suggested ending the fighting and instead, developing a vision for the future of the community. Then 150 people gathered to develop their vision, and ended up with the first step of a comprehensive plan. They united over differences, developed a vision, and worked toward achieving common goals.

He then described a community to the north that once housed a federal prison and much later was home to unemployed prison workers. They investigated options for funding the community and developing a new prison. By developing their plan, informing other agencies, and working together they got their funding. He described other areas that created comprehensive plans to achieve their vision.

Mr. Dabareiner discussed the reasons for having a comprehensive plan. One of the main reasons is to bring a community together through public input. A comprehensive plan is based on a vision of the future to coordinate public investment and inform other agencies and developers of the vision for a specific community. It is a needed foundation for future actions, policies and ordinances.

Mr. Dabareiner recognized the Comprehensive Plan Committee made up of members of the Zoning Board of Appeals, Transportation and Parking Commission and the Plan Commission. Mr. Dabareiner then provided background information on the process. In 2007 the Council recommended prioritizing development for a strategic plan. A consultant was hired in 2008, and TCD 3 took place in 2009. The Comprehensive Planning Committee began its work in 2010, and presented their recommendations to

the Plan Commission. A recommendation from the Plan Commission was made to the Village Council in May 2011. The process has come full circle. He explained that a Comprehensive Plan is much more than a future land use plan. It incorporates and consolidates a community's goals and aspirations for its future physical characteristics. The focus area is seen as having the potential for redevelopment.

Mr. Dabareiner further explained this document is a strategic plan for physical characteristics, not a promise of, or protection from, change. It is a "to do" list, not a mandate, but rather it is a menu. It is a record of issues, not a zoning ordinance or regulatory tool. A plan has the ability to be amended, and is not a place for a final design. It is a foundation for decision-making and not a detailed plan for economic development, transportation or other components. He said that in this particular case, the Village is attempting to update a plan that is more than 40 years old. It is important to remember that the Village's Plan is a foundation versus an obligation, and it supports actions that the Village may take in the future. When the Plan is adopted, action items do not take effect after adoption; rather, this serves as a menu.

Devon Lavigne of Houseal Lavigne Associates, further described the workings involved in development of the Comprehensive Plan which will guide the community's development decisions and ensure quality of life for its residents by directing the use of land that will be beneficial to the public. The Plan is required to have a broad public outreach and input, and that outreach took place during TCD 3, which helped form the planning process.

Mr. Lavigne noted that the Comprehensive Plan planning process was open to the public and consisted of an initiation meeting, review of existing conditions, establishing a vision statement, goals and objectives, defining the key focus area plans and community-wide plans. The draft document was organized into 11 sections: 1) background; 2) vision for the future; 3) goals and objectives; 4) land use plan and policies; 5) residential areas plan and policies; 6) commercial areas plan and policies; 7) transportation plan and policies; 8) parks, open spaces and environmental features plan and policies; 9) community facilities; 10) key focus area plans; and, 11) implementation.

Commissioner Barnett asked what everyone thinks of the process.

Mayor Tully recommended going through the draft section by section to obtain questions and opinions.

Commissioner Schnell said from her perspective there are general concerns about the Plan and asked if that discussion should wait until all chapters are reviewed. Mr. Fieldman recommended going through it chapter by chapter, and when something comes up, address it.

Commissioner Neustadt stated that obviously a considerable amount of work was done regarding development of the Plan, and it has a great connection to the community. On page 11, under parks and recreation comments, he said there was a question raised as to the development of a water park and/or pool. He then asked everyone what the Village wants to have in this Plan that might affect the Park District, School District or other agencies.

Mr. Lavigne responded that they have to be careful not to step on the toes of other agencies. A comprehensive plan looks for the agencies to work cooperatively with other taxing bodies. The Plan looks to ensure the long-term quality of life for its residents. It recognizes the importance of schools and parks, etc. The feeling of recognition is probably welcomed, but it is not to mandate their actions, but merely a support of their decisions.

Mayor Tully agreed that the Village cannot mandate another taxing body to do anything. The Village can recognize that people like Downers Grove because of its parks, schools, etc, and the Plan serves as a communication tool. It does not tell other taxing bodies what to do, but aids in talking about opportunities and is a great starting point.

Commissioner Barnett said that he doesn't understand the open-ended questions about whether there should be pools, dog parks, etc. This does not seem valuable or appropriate to him.

Mayor Tully responded that the paragraph merely is a repetition of what someone else said.

Commissioner Schnell referred to page 11, and said that the comment about park programming does not belong in the Village's Comprehensive Plan. She sees the Plan as a document that looks to the future of Downers Grove. The Park District is another component of the community. She said those themes made her nervous. She said Future Land Use plans have parks and schools included, but then when they get into actual park programming, she is uncomfortable with it.

Commissioner Waldack referred to TCD 3. This Plan is comprehensive and general, it is not dictating anything. Every plan we have affects all taxing bodies. They are not dictating anything, but are merely incorporating ideas and opening communication. He doesn't think anyone should take any offense at what is written here.

Commissioner Rheintgen said that she believes the Park District does its own community survey, and she believes it is not the role of the Village to address Park District actions. She questioned whether the Park District was asked to review what would be put in this public document.

Mr. Fieldman explained that the section they are discussing is a written summary of what was said at TCD 3. He asked whether the Council wants a written summary of TCD 3 in its Plan.

Mayor Tully said he didn't think it mattered. He's more concerned about getting to the objectives. How they reached the draft language doesn't matter to him at this time.

Commissioner Schnell replied that her concern is with a comment made by Mayor Tully that having the pool in the Plan could help the Park District facilitate a pool. She also referenced the recreation center, which was very controversial and divisive at times. She doesn't want something in a public document that would help facilitate a pool. That tells the community that the Council is already behind approval of a pool.

Mr. Lavigne commented that the section in question is just a summary of TCD 3.

Commissioner Neustadt noted that this is a background portion, but pages 10 and 11 have specific recommendations and, although page 7 labels the section as background, that distinction might be lost on someone skimming through the document.

Mayor Tully commented that how this is read by a casual reader is important. Mr. Lavigne replied that they could make references to other documents.

Mr. Dabareiner noted that the Park District looked at this in detail and what is contained within the document. They edited it heavily. He said he had conversations with Dr. McDonald regarding

references to the schools, and Dr. McDonald made some changes that are reflected in the draft document.

Christine Fregeau asked about TCD 1 and TCD 2.

Mayor Tully responded that they could be added to the list as part of the background.

Commissioner Schnell said that TCD 1 was looking at the community's growth, and TCD 2 was probably more relevant.

Mr. Fieldman asked if there was direction to reference TCD 1 and TCD 2. He asked whether they should remove pages 8-12 and reference them by documents.

Commissioner Waldack said that he would prefer that they go to the Park District and the School Districts and ask them if they want to be removed from the Plan. He prefers keeping the history.

Mayor Tully noted that no one is saying the historical information should be ignored or removed; however, it could be referenced and doesn't have to remain in the bound document.

Commissioner Schnell said the Plan should stress the Village's vision for the future, and should start with that.

Commissioner Neustadt referenced page 22 and asked how they let people reading this know that they are still at the beginning section.

Mayor Tully said that obviously there is a concern here that has been expressed by a number of people. Maybe this could be dealt with by the use of language.

Commissioner Neustadt then referenced page 98, which states that the Village should stay informed on the plans, policies, and projects of various agencies and organizations. He said that this sums up their whole conversation about other agencies, and it should be incorporated into the Plan, rather than specific action-type entities of other organizations.

Commissioner Barnett said there was a theme he read that contained a considerable amount of logic and solid information. There is also a lot of superfluous, meandering information that needs to be deleted. That is a big part of his concern.

Commissioner Neustadt noted that this document is extremely important to the community.

Commissioner Barnett said he doesn't want to diminish the efforts made by community members, staff, and the consultants. A lot of good people did a lot of good work. But, he wants to comment on these elements, as he has to sign off on this document. On page 3, under "Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan," he said the use of the word "social" bothers him. He also said that the last paragraph is repeated elsewhere in the document. He recommended adding the County of DuPage to the last paragraph.

Mayor Tully asked if the "wordsmithing" changes could be captured in one place. Council members agreed to this idea.

Commissioner Durkin asked as to the "local landmarks" included in the Plan.

Mr. Lavigne said the Committee selected destinations for people who live here and to bring here those who do not. They serve a function to attract businesses and potential residents.

Commissioner Neustadt asked for the minutes of the Committee. He asked why a landmark that is not in Downers Grove would be listed in the Plan.

Mr. Lavigne said these landmarks showcase assets in or near Downers Grove.

Marge Earl said that Yorktown Shopping Center attracts people but the Committee did not want to advertise another community and shopping elsewhere.

Mr. Fieldman suggested that in addition to “wordsmithing” the document, Council members add their ideas and concepts to an editable version of the Plan. This would allow Council to review areas of agreement and disagreement.

The Mayor said it would be very helpful to know where there are agreements and concerns in order to see the themes.

Commissioner Neustadt recommended Council members meet individually with Mr. Fieldman.

Tom LeCren suggested numbering the pages by chapter instead of numbering them consecutively to help in terms of editing.

Bill White suggested adding additional subtitles along the side margins.

Commissioner Neustadt noted that some matters in the Plan are either done or in progress and suggested they be identified as such.

Commissioner Rheintgen asked if the goals and objectives in the Plan create a staff action. Mr. Fieldman said it would be used to propose a work plan, but it would come before Council and Council would set the priorities.

Commissioner Schnell addressed the five key focus areas and said she understands the value of identifying them. She would like to discuss the ramifications of development ideas in terms of the Council participating in development. She said identifying areas is appropriate but said it could be problematic down the road by being specific.

The Mayor said Council needs to have the question answered as to whether this is problematic. He views this as illustrative.

Mr. Dabareiner said it is very common to have this level of specificity in a Plan such as this. It does not commit the Council to doing anything for any of those properties and it would come before Council before anything happened. The Comprehensive Plan, including the focus areas is aspirational.

Commissioner Neustadt noted that the words “support and encourage” and “promote” suggest the Council is promoting redevelopment and could be problematic for the Council if it is taken out of context.

Commissioner Barnett asked for more background information of the role of Economic Development Corporation (EDC) in the development of this Plan.

Commissioner Neustadt referenced page 32, #6, regarding requiring all industrial development areas to meet applicable performance standards. He said our Municipal Code already addresses this. He then referenced page 48 and noted that Downers Grove is not a rural community.

Commissioner Durkin said there is not an emphasis on the Belmont Underpass.

Mr. Dabareiner cautioned not to edit out information that should be contained in the Plan.

The Mayor noted that if the Plan is to be used as a reference tool, some redundancy may be useful. Some people will read this from front to back and others will read only the part that is relevant to them.

Commissioner Schnell asked about amending the Municipal Code once the Plan is adopted.

The Mayor said this will happen in several ways: Council will direct staff; staff will initiate changes; or someone will bring an idea before the Council.

Commissioner Schnell said she is concerned about the workload moving forward.

Commissioner Waldack said Council has not seen other comprehensive plans and before changes are made, he suggested looking at how this Plan aligns to other plans.

Mr. Lavigne noted that every plan is an expression of their community. He offered to share a collection of plans.

Mike Davenport said he served for a year on the Comprehensive Plan Committee and noted that he also attended TCD 3 and other meetings. Many of the issues discussed tonight have been discussed previously. He asked that the Council give weight to the discussions already held and the professionals contracted to work on this. This work is the result of many Committee members participating in this process.

The Mayor thanked the audience for their work, attendance and participation.

Commissioner Barnett said he has heard two messages and he is not comfortable with them. In his mind, you cannot make a document available, fully expecting developers, potential homeowners and potential businesses to work from it while also saying Council makes final decisions and directs work. There is content in this document that will trigger staff work on policy issues. It is important for Council to thoroughly review this.

The Mayor said this is no different than the Strategic Plan or the Long Range Financial Plan. Ultimately the Council has to approve it.

Commissioner Durkin mentioned that there is no discussion of wind turbines in this document.

Ms. Earl said the Committee was made up of 11 people; there was never 100% agreement and this document is what was agreed to. It is the result of collaboration.

The Mayor asked if there are any other concepts missing in the Plan.

Commissioner Durkin said there is no mention of the Commuter Shuttle in the transportation section. He asked as to the impact if there is no shuttle service.

Commissioner Schnell discussed green technology including cars and parking spaces for electric cars, CNG facilities, etc.

Commissioner Waldack noted that the DuPage Para-transit plan is missing.

The Mayor said Council needs timetable for deliverables that is reasonable and realistic.

Mr. Fieldman said he will meet with Mr. Lavigne and Mr. Dabareiner, and will propose a work plan to include a schedule and timelines.

Mark Thoman urged Council to read the minutes of the Committee meetings.

Commissioner Durkin asked about the key focus areas and how they were determined. He said the area of 63rd Street and Woodward is not discussed.

The Manager said the key focus areas were considered by Council as part of the definition of the scope of this work.

There being no further discussion, Mayor Tully asked for a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Schnell moved to adjourn. Commissioner Neustadt seconded the Motion:

VOTE: YEA: Commissioners Schnell, Neustadt, Rheintgen, Barnett, Durkin, Waldack; Mayor Tully
NAY: None

Mayor Tully declared the Motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 9:32 p.m.