Chairman Gorman called the November 14, 2016 meeting of the Downers Grove Comprehensive Plan Ad Hoc Committee meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and led the meeting with the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL:

PRESENT: Chairman Dave Gorman, Irene Hogstrom, Ed Kalina, John Luka, Daiva Majauskas (7:05 p.m.) Jim Wilkinson

ABSENT: Members Carine Acks and Mark Thoman

STAFF: Community Development Director Stan Popovich

VISITORS: Devin Lavigne, John Houseal with Houseal Lavigne Associates; Don Rickard, 4735 Main St., Downers Grove; Amy Gassen, 5320 Benton, Downers Grove; Willis Johnson, 603 Rogers, Downers Grove; Dave Weiher; Bill Chalberg.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – OCTOBER 5, 2016

MINUTES OF OCTOBER 5, 2016 WERE APPROVED ON MOTION BY MR. KALINA, SECONDED BY MR. WILKINSON. MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE OF 5-0.

REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION OF DRAFT UPDATED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

63rd Street - Director Popovich acknowledged the concept sketches for 63rd Street and 75th Street that were distributed, noting they will be inserted behind their respective discussions in the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Devin Lavigne, with Houseal Lavigne Associates, reported that the Meadowbrook sketches of the buildings would be detailed out better aesthetically; details followed of how that would be done. Per a question, Mr. Lavigne reminded the members that there was consensus that the intersection could not sustain commercial development due to traffic counts, the nearby interchange, and the mall receiving marginal commercial uses. He could not confirm at this time what type of multi-family uses would be designated for the site. A suggestion was made that more convenience/retail space could be added down Woodward Avenue, for conceptual purposes. A question followed as to when the zoning would change, i.e., now or when a developer steps in. Staff clarified further.
75th Street – Mr. Lavigne explained the location for this site will be slightly larger than the Bolingbrook Promenade and follow the lifestyle center similar to Deer Park where smaller retail is closer to the street for walking and taking advantage of the site off of the interstate. Details followed on how the illustration would reflect improved landscaping. Concern was raised that if a couple of anchor stores could not be retained, would there be another alternative, possibly having residential in the rear? Other comments followed that this intersection had poor traffic signals, walking from the east edge of the development to the west edge was not probable and it was not an attractive complex. Dialog followed that the rendering lacked the depiction of the pedestrian atmosphere that lifestyle centers generate.

Mr. Popovich suggested inserting some graphics to better define that pedestrian “feel.”

Concern was raised that this location was in-between the size of Yorktown and the Promenade and the location was too close to every other anchor and so if the right anchor was not drawn in, it could be an issue conceptually. Ideas floated around as to how to draw in certain retailers and the overall challenges of retail in general.

Mr. Lavigne discussed that he could decrease the amount of retail square footage, orientate the site differently, thereby bringing in another product such as residential off to the side or rear of the site. Again, ideas flowed and discussions of lifestyle centers and their goal -- to get pedestrians walking on-site -- followed. As a last point, Ms. Hogstrom pointed out that certain lifestyle centers (Deer Park, Geneva Commons) included high-end stores which the village was lacking.

Mr. Popovich referenced the key changes in his memo.

Page 38 – Referring to the tools/programs that the village should offer its residents who seek to renovate their homes, etc., someone recalled there was discussion by this group about a design manual being created but that the committee’s consensus was that it would “educate rather than regulate new construction.” This topic should be added/emphasized on page 42.

Page 62 – Regarding the discussion about bicycle mobility and safety on sidewalks, there was recollection that information stating that bicycles were allowed on sidewalks per state law but it was based on yielding to pedestrians and not allowing riders in the Central Business District. In response, Mr. Popovich indicated that staff was not comfortable inserting this section into the comprehensive plan and pointed out that the comprehensive plan was a guiding document and not a regulatory document. The chairman asked for member input on this matter.

Ms. Majauskas voiced that she, as a bike rider, believed that bikes should be allowed to ride on sidewalks, citing the safety concerns if they were not and citing 55th Street as an example of a dangerous street when traveling on bike. However, through further conversation and confirming that it was already legal to ride bikes on sidewalks, members agreed that language should exist in the plan to encourage bike riding, which staff pointed out that it did and would continue to do so.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Bill Chalberg, Downers Grove Bicycle Club, relayed that the City of Chicago allows children age 12 and younger to ride on sidewalks given their experience. He explained the issue with riding on sidewalks was people backing out of driveways and not seeing the cyclist. He suggested
obtaining some research and having riders ride on the sidewalk in the same direction as the traffic flow.

The chairman stated the preference was to allow safe bike riding off of the sidewalk where possible.

Regarding the topic of bike parking, Mr. Chalberg asked the committee to consider adding locations to park one’s bike. Ms. Majauskas disagreed on adding more locations to park bikes.

Mr. Chalberg believed the riding of bikes in the street versus sidewalks was a personal preference.

The chairman entertained a motion to forward the comprehensive plan onto the Plan Commission for review and consideration.

MOTION BY MR. LUCA TO FORWARD THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO THE PLAN COMMISSION. SECONDED BY MR. KALINA.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY BY VOICE VOTE OF 6-0.

INTRODUCTION OF DOWNTOWN REGULATORY FRAMEWORK DISCUSSION

Director Popovich brought the committee up to speed regarding the Downtown Regulatory framework and how the framework, using various tools, achieves the Comprehensive Plan’s vision for the downtown.

Mr. John Houseal, with Houseal Lavigne Associates, explained the committee may not achieve all of the text amendment language that would be adopted and placed into the code, but instead achieve different things for different areas of the downtown, as the plan defines and recommends for each of the three different districts in the downtown area. A review of the three areas (districts), as defined in the plan, were reviewed: 1) Downtown Core; 2) Downtown Edge, and 3) the Downtown Transition. Mr. Houseal explained the goal is to have a template for each of the areas which explains what the village is trying to achieve by the comprehensive plan. Each of the respective areas were reviewed by Mr. Houseal, who asked for input and final sign-off:

No comments on the three districts were voiced by the committee members.

Mr. Houseal proceeded to summarize the positives and negatives of the various zoning techniques that were available to achieve the goals of each of the three downtown districts, as referenced above: Euclidian (traditional zoning); Form-based code (regulated); Conditional Zoning; Design Guidelines (not regulated) and use through a Planned Unit Development (PUD) (regulated and usually has three triggers for the process).

Mr. Popovich shared the types of developments within the village that usually triggered the PUD process, i.e., mostly the mix of uses and not necessarily the location or size of the development in the downtown area. Outside the Downtown District, however, he stated the larger developments with multiple buildings, such as the hospital, Midwestern University and the Esplanade, were PUDs.
Mr. Houseal reminded the committee that they had to consider what they wanted to achieve for each of the three districts, given the tools they had, and provide a balance between controlled aesthetics versus property rights. Considering a question on the possibility of having two separate areas for the Downtown Edge (DE) district, Mr. Houseal believed that going forward there could be two districts within the Downtown Edge district, as well as two districts for the Downtown Transition district and then one set of standards for the Downtown Core, but he offered to hear comments from the other members.

Asked if the village was trying to encourage consolidation, was the village content with development being developed within the lot lines, or was there a better/worse technique the village wanted, Mr. Popovich explained that the issue with the Core was that the lots were small and unless the lots were consolidated, not many large developments would occur, especially between Burlington and Curtiss. But, that was not to say that there were past consolidations in the Core area. In the Edge area, Mr. Popovich explained that the lots were larger and offered more opportunity. He was of the belief that the village should plan for both.

Mr. Houseal stated he was not concerned about consolidations in the Core area because they would be regulated most strictly by built form. However, in the Edge or Transition areas, there could be the potential for very large developments through consolidation and so he cautioned Mr. Popovich about that. Mr. Houseal supported the idea of the two sub-areas for the Downtown Edge area but questioned where would the village locate a six-story building where there was not much room to work with. Mr. Popovich recalled the discussion was that the height could go up to six-stories but that more greenspace had to be added to mitigate the impact. And, as one moved more north to the Downtown area, development should move closer to the 0-foot lot line with no open space.

Discussing PUD versus as-of-right, Mr. Houseal asked if the village had concern in any of the areas of development where the village should have a say or review before a permit is issued. The committee then began discussing other villages that either had a design review overlay district or a PUD overlay district with Mr. Popovich sharing that the village never had a design review overlay district in the past and the village’s philosophy was similar to Mr. Houseal’s philosophy, i.e., to partner with the developers to get a good product. The difference between an overlay and a PUD was explained to the committee by Mr. Houseal.

Positive comments followed that the village’s downtown had become a different look over the past 10 years, with a nice mix, and the little bit of freedom it had, was done well. Mr. Popovich shared that most of the downtown development had been through PUDs or design guidelines (generic) that were somewhat flexible and reviewed by staff. Again, Mr. Houseal stated that he did not believe it was in the best interest for villages to dictate architectural design and he proceeded to cite how different communities reviewed their plans. However, Ms. Hogstrom pointed out that by the time a plan comes to the Plan Commission it is too late to make comments on how a project looks. Mr. Houseal indicated that he can review the village’s PUD process to find out if pre-conferences are held with staff or the board prior to a public hearing.

Mr. Popovich stated that staff does meet with developers to review the design guidelines in place and asks them to demonstrate how the guidelines will be met. Architects are also on staff. Asked if there was something not working, based on the zoning and procedures already in place, someone mentioned that a very tall building was coming on-line and the mere fact that it was something new
or different in the village. Conversation then followed regarding modern buildings, improved materials, EIFS, etc. being used in the construction industry today as compared to years ago.

Asked if the village wanted to allow as-of-right review in any of the three downtown districts, Mr. Popovich believed the village did not have a desire to have a PUD for all development and believed some triggers had to exist but they needed to be defined, such as over a certain height or certain uses. He believed owners should still be able to come to the village if they wanted to renovate their buildings/facades without having to go through a due process. He was open to hearing otherwise.

Mr. Houseal suggested that rather than having a Downtown Transition 1 or 2 that the village have one district with specific setbacks, up to four stories, as-of-right, and anything above it had to be a PUD. The developer had to convince the village that the development was appropriate but it also allowed the village and developer to work collaboratively together for a better product.

Conversation followed regarding the various types of downtown developments occurring in the communities of Elmhurst, Des Plaines, Arlington Heights and Oak Park.

Asking another question, Mr. Houseal asked the committee if a development was three stories tall in the Downtown Edge district, was the committee comfortable having the Transition district as four-stories, as-of-right, and anything above that was a PUD. Mr. Houseal supported this because it made sense and the fact that the village was stating it was willing to go up to six stories implied it wanted something taller in the area. Others agreed and discussed the reasons why – the value of the downtown becomes much greater, to renovate the older buildings will become more expensive to developers, and the village wants to encourage that by allowing developers to construct upwards. On the other hand, dialog followed that the limiting factor on how tall buildings can be will depend on the parking, which will be the defining factor.

Asked if there were water issues underground, Mr. Popovich was not aware of any currently.

Taking in the comments, Mr. Houseal summarized his take-away was to have a minimally invasive regulatory framework and to create an environment that would allow reasonable, as-of right, and not burdensome procedures. He would only put in place guidelines and procedures to ensure those projects “out of the norm” get reviewed.

However, Mr. Popovich clarified that the issue, among staff, was the realization that a building could be constructed up to 70 feet in height and when it was acknowledged, the village realized it did not want that, which was how the Core district came about. The village was trying to protect the “Mayberry” part of town and not impinge upon it. Mr. Popovich believed how the village regulated the Core to keep the small town feel of downtown was important and how the village allowed for the economics behind it to work on the transition.

Mr. Houseal encouraged the village to develop some guidelines for the Core, Transition and Edge districts and then consider if it wanted to put in place some form of regulatory procedure to trigger the review or, to sit down with a developer and discuss it.

Discussion of relaxing the parking requirements followed with Mr. Houseal stating the 1.4 parking ratio was in keeping with the more progressive end of urban settings in suburban communities and
if a developer were to come in with a different figure, he would have to explain his/her case through a PUD or rezoning. Staff confirmed that was how it was done by the village currently.

Mr. Houseal closed the discussion by clarifying that zoning was not planning; it was a tool to implement planning. He would draft some framework language and return with a draft, reminding the committee that the draft will discuss the approach the village wants to take versus the actual amendment language.

Clarification followed that the setbacks should still be considered in the Downtown Edge 1 and 2 districts and then the height anywhere triggers the PUD. Graphics would be provided. Concern was raised by Ms. Majauskas who hoped to see a written draft since she believed that “the rules were only as good as the people behind them” and that staff could change over time and the village’s vision get lost. She cited the Village of Lisle as an example. Mr. Houseal discussed otherwise, stating that if the language is well written it can be interpreted even if staff turns over. No ambiguity would exist.

Asked whether Mr. Houseal or staff were using any of the remaining five zoning techniques or a compilation of them in other forms, Mr. Houseal explained that he still had to address the challenge of staff administering a zoning ordinance and reviewing the village’s current zoning ordinance. It would not be replaced in its entirety but tweaked where necessary since staff and the development community were currently using it. The goal was to make it user-friendly and fair to all parties using it.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The chairman invited public comment. None followed.

Staff confirmed the next meeting was scheduled for December 7, 2016.

ADJOURNMENT

THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 9:10 P.M. ON MOTION BY MR. KALINA, SECONDED BY MR. LUCA. MOTION CARRIED BY VOICE VOTE OF 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/ Celeste K. Weilandt
(As transcribed by MP-3 audio)