

APPROVED MINUTES

MINUTES
OF A WORKSHOP DISCUSSION
WITH THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND
MEMBERS OF THE PLAN COMMISSION
ON
MAY 12, 2003
AT THE VILLAGE HALL, COMMITTEE ROOM
IN THE VILLAGE OF DOWNERS GROVE

On behalf of the members of the Plan Commission and on behalf of the Economic Development Commission [EDC] Strategic Planning Committee [Committee], PC Chair Jirik began the discussions at 7:10 p.m.

ROLL CALL: As this meeting was a workshop discussion, attendance was voluntary.

PRESENT: Members of the Plan Commission: Commission Chair Jirik, Commissioner Kahlke, Commissioner Matejczyk, Commissioner McCormick, Commissioner Nicholaou, Commissioner Reynolds, Commissioner Stark, Commissioner Waechtler
Members of the Strategic Planning Committee: Commissioner Ryan

STAFF

PRESENT: Kenneth Rathje, Director of Planning Services
Steve Rockwell, Director, Economic Development
Joseph Skach, Director, Redevelopment
Amanda Brown, Planning Services
Lori Skotterud, Redevelopment Specialist/Planner
Ginny Mindo, Economic Development Staff

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM APRIL 28, 2003

PC Chair Jirik requested if there was concurrence on the minutes, with the proposed revisions, from the workshop on April 28, 2003. The members of both commissions concurred.

Ogden Avenue

PC Chair Jirik suggested continuing the discussion on Ogden Avenue because, as the minutes reflected, there was need to work through the land use issues and come to a consensus.

Mr. Skach began the conversation by referring to the goal statement stating that at the previous meeting, there was discussion of incorporating some key modifications by orienting the land uses toward automobile services. Ms. Skotterud then displayed the area on Ogden Avenue, just west of Authority Drive, while Mr. Skach explained that instead of the land use designation of Office/Research/Manufacturing [ORM], the group proposed a new designation of Office/Research/Commercial [ORC] to include B3 zoning, which is predominant along Ogden Avenue, and potentially a mixed-use zoning would be appropriate for this area, as shown in the GIS graphic.

Commissioner Waechtler asked Mr. Skach whether the discussion at the last meeting specified automobile and automobile related services, or was it left open for other types of Commercial. Mr. Skach replied that the new land use designation, as discussed by the group, introduces the idea of specifically contemplating automobile and related service uses in addition to the traditional Commercial retail. The group recognized that the predominance of B3 zoning on Ogden Avenue allows for a variety of uses; but the group felt it may be a viable

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economic as well as land use strategy to promote auto-oriented uses. PC Chair Jirik noted that there are two concepts when referring to *auto*, one is the selling of vehicles, and the other is the auto services and supplies. He also noted that because of the prevalence of automobile related businesses, there appears to be a “rising-tide” effect that could help the other stores on Ogden to thrive. PC Chair Jirik added that part of that previous discussion was continuing that kind of Commercial enterprise to keep it vibrant to make sure it doesn’t get “choked” or conversely do things just to discourage the traffic, which could harm the smaller businesses. Mr. Skach added, with respect to the previous discussion and contemplated land use designation changes, the group was discussing whether the zoning would specifically contemplate the car dealers and that class of uses in addition to some of the other uses that B3 allows, some of which could likely belong in an “M” [Manufacturing] district. Mr. Skach also noted that another issue in need of resolution was what the character of Ogden Avenue should be, whether it is primarily a domain for the automobile, as a Retail/Commercial strip or is there some combination of the automobile and pedestrian oriented uses and sidewalks. As there appears to be several members that seemed to feel strongly that Ogden is not, and would not be appropriate as a pedestrian oriented corridor. Commissioner Reynolds concurred again brought up the idea of pedestrian bridges to connect the north and south sides of Ogden Avenue. Commissioner Matejczyk added that Winthrop Harbor is a good example of a community with walkways that are successfully used. Mr. Skach noted that the current goal statement captures these ideas as a basis for moving forward; but the vision, as a basis for moving forward with practical initiatives, needs to be fleshed out.

Commissioner McCormick expressed concern that though there are high-end car dealerships, there is also plenty of room for used car dealers, which are on the opposite end of the spectrum. Mr. Skach noted that currently on Ogden including JK Pontiac, Ford and other businesses that are not all automobile, but auto related services could potentially be the economic generators. He added that “there is nothing wrong with endorsing a walkable environment, but is that the way Ogden Avenue really should be structured?” was the question the group should decide. He also noted that it is already walkable on both sides Ogden in many areas. Commissioner Waechter brought back the subject of used car lots stating that if a new car dealer moved out, we could start getting a proliferation of used car lots down the road and that possibly they could require a Special Use. He added that the addition of fast food franchises and other restaurants are a nice addition to the corridor. Mr. Rathje stated that if the Council feels that is the type of use they want to have extraordinary control on, then we could establish specific criteria that prospects would have to meet. They could also classify it as a Special Use and consider them on a case-by-case basis. Mr. Rathje added that it probably wouldn’t be something that they could control the number of units as far as competition.

Commissioner Ryan stated that he’s noticed more used car dealerships starting up along Ogden Avenue in the last two years. Mr. Rathje cited that the phone calls his department has been getting are from people interested in those lots. He added that the used car business is different from the new car business because new car dealers sell the same brand and they can custom order cars if necessary. Used cars have a lot of variety and a lot of different conditions of cars, and shoppers end up having to go store by store to find what they are looking for. Mr. Rathje added that there is a real strength of destination where one can come to Downers Grove and there is a reinforcement of multiple of opportunities to find what they want. PC Chair Jirik noted that this group has talked about Downers Grove being a “destination”, and being known as an automobile destination would be a good thing, and the Village would benefit tremendously, as long as we’re staying on the high-end, which we might then develop some other high end retail to cater to that. He added that this market is headed in this direction and this is commensurate with the goals of the Village to include aesthetic goals.

Commissioner Stark suggested that a lot of used car dealers are coming in because they do not require a lot of space. He noted that they do not have service departments and basically just need a place to park their cars so they are visible by the street. Commissioner Stark cited that the marketing trend now is a new type of car dealership that doesn’t have the volume of the larger American cars and does not require a large amount of space. He suggested targeting “boutique” type cars to fill the smaller lots.

Commissioner Stark suggested taking the “core” of Ogden Avenue and making it “car dealership free,” where restaurants and other businesses can create an area that has the Downers Grove Ogden small town business feel. He noted that the areas on the east and west ends could be more conducive to automobiles. Mr. Rockwell reported that the EDC’s Ogden Avenue Committee would be giving a powerpoint presentation to their Board,

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which will show a potential vision of Ogden Avenue that is very much in line with what Commissioner Stark is saying. Mr. Rockwell cited that this group needs to discuss changing their incentive policy for dealerships so that it will attract the high-end dealership. Mr. Rathje reported that prior to 1991, automobile repair was simply listed as a permitted use in the B3 zoning district and a special use in B2 zoning district. The type of use we are discussing can be a permitted use by simply having criteria that must be met. He noted though, that the service function has many attributes that are less hospitable to adjoining residential uses than an auto sales business does. Commissioner Stark stated that the auto sales business has less infrastructure [shops, storage, etc.] investment than a business that also does repairs. Mr. Rathje noted that they don't generate the negative impacts to the extent that the service centers do pertaining to adjoining property. He cited one of the ways to provide protection against this is by establishing rules by right in which they would have to come in with their site plan and satisfy specific rules. This may also help attract a better class and quality of automobile dealer. Mr. Rockwell stated that "zoning mechanics would need to be examined so that these opportunities don't pass us by." Mr. Skach noted that it might be difficult to try to differentiate between a "used car" and a "new car" business with respect to requiring a special use as equal protection issues under the code may come into play. He added it could be difficult to use zoning to keep a particular type of auto sales business out.

Commissioner Stark then asked if there was an area on Ogden Avenue that we would not want to have the car dealerships. Mr. Rockwell responded that they could go on either end of Ogden and leave the core for something else. Mr. Skach requested clarification, for the group's benefit in terms of the direction of the conversation, that another class of land use strategy for Ogden was being introduced to the discussion, which does not specifically contemplate include automobile sales or service. Mr. Rathje gave a "what if" example of, potentially, a large grocery store leaving the core area of Ogden Avenue [Jewel] and whether or not it would be a good location for a car dealership. Commissioner Stark stated that this site, in his opinion, would be unacceptable for a car dealership and that he would rather have the area subdivided, redeveloped, and turned into something to be proud of rather than just a revenue maker. Mr. Rathje cited that Commissioner Stark was incorporating his value system into the discussion, which is a different discussion. He then gave a similar example, but used an empty lot on the west side of town as the location, and asked if it would be a better location for a car dealership. Commissioner Stark stated that it would be. Commissioner Matejczyk noted that there was a sewage issue at that site. Mr. Rathje specified that it would be a great location as far as their ability to afford it.

With respect to the compatibility of an automobile-related emphasis and other, more traditional types of Commercial Retail uses, Mr. Skach added B3 zoning could be compatible, citing an example of outdoor cafés are allowed and noting that they could be compatible with automobile sales and services depending on how the overall environment was designed. He added that it is true that some people would argue that automobile sales centers impact the local neighborhoods and are sometimes considered more of a nuisance than auto repair centers due to the high intensity lighting, intercom systems, drop off car haulers, and test driving; through the neighborhoods, but that may go along with the character of Ogden Avenue and maybe it is part of what the Future Land Use Plan and the code contemplate; however, that does not mean that this direction cannot be modified with respect.

PC Chair Jirik commented that this subject is challenging because it gets into personal views about what the fabric of Ogden Avenue should be. He noted that what he is hearing is that it's important to balance the characters of Ogden to include both automobile as well as a diverse mixed-use environment. Commissioner Matejczyk stated that he didn't think that the current parcels are large enough to support an auto dealership other than those that are very high end. Mr. Skach noted that it poses a dilemma because the smaller parcels aren't necessarily helpful to the issue of higher speed and volumes of traffic, which contribute to some of the problems that we have now on Ogden. He added that if we go in a mixed-use direction, it says something about what we need to be doing in terms of traffic calming to include consolidating tracts and going toward less curb cuts. Mr. Rathje noted that the speed limit is still approximately 35 miles per hour. Mr. Skach noted that handling the coupled with speed is much of the concern and that we may be able to foster and help the traffic issues as well as businesses by slowing down traffic. Mr. Rathje noted that the State of Illinois would not install lights to slow down traffic. Commissioner Stark mentioned that there are services and schools on the outskirts of Ogden Avenue that traffic lights would benefit. Commissioner Matejczyk added that the Belmont underpass would also increase traffic.

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Mr. Skach noted that an interesting development has occurred in terms of these discussions with respect to a Comprehensive Plan and overall vision for Ogden. There doesn't seem to be any disagreement in terms of a distinct Commercial orientation for Ogden and this group acknowledges contemplating auto-related uses in some way; however, from a land use strategy standpoint, the group is at a crossroads: we can either have a consistent land use designation along Ogden, or might elect to have two ends which consist of auto related services and sales and a more Commercial use in the middle section, for example, around Main and Ogden Avenue as advocated by Commissioner Stark. Mr. Rathje noted that would need some zoning overlay or something of that nature to make it clear, and that maybe it would have to be something proactive with the Village. Commissioner Matejczyk added that more signage could be implemented. Commissioner Waechtler asked Mr. Skach if they are considering consolidating some of the small tracts. Mr. Skach responded that it would be a positive move and that the TIF could help, but we would need to consider that a part of an overall strategy.

Commissioner Stark then brought up the idea of incorporating an assisted living center as a possible development on Ogden Avenue. Mr. Rathje cited areas near Walnut Avenue, Warrentown Road, and Finley Road that might be potential locations. Commissioner Kahlke added that if the Ellsworth area might work once it is converted into a Mixed-Use land use designation as previously discussed. Mr. Rathje agreed that it certainly meets the criteria in terms of accessibility.

Commissioner Waechtler referenced the similarity he believed there is between Ogden Avenue and Roosevelt Road questioning whether there have been any improvements made to Roosevelt Road. Commissioner Ryan noted that Roosevelt's land use is deeper. Mr. Skach added that often along its length it has a narrower right-of-way, more streetlights, bigger lots and less curb cuts; but appear to be, whether it is closer to the city or further west, for the most part, vibrant and successful.

Commissioner Nicholaou then began a discussion on different businesses that have maintained their landscape and appearance and what motivates them to do so. Mr. Rathje stated that they are in the business of giving a good impression to people. Commissioner Nicholaou suggested fostering that kind of attitude and expectation and create a guideline. He also noted that it should include signage.

PC Chair Jirik described how Ogden Avenue could be, stating that on the far west end, there is the newly proposed Office, Research and Commercial [ORC] land use designation, then moving east there are the heavy duty automobile dealerships and big lots, then further east are the smaller lots. The small lots would be the areas that would be complementary to the downtown. He added that he would not mind if a high-end auto dealer came in and moved into one of the smaller lots; for those that are less than high-end, and they can be encouraged to move to the more western part of Ogden with the other auto sales and services.

Mr. Rathje asked everyone how they perceive Luxury Motors, citing that some members in the immediate neighborhood do not like it for aesthetic reasons, whereas people from out of town find it very attractive. He added that under today's rules, a lot of their uses would not be permitted; but just because they did it from the point of view of taking advantage of nonconformities, perhaps we could allow some of the other people to do the same by right without it having to be a variation or having it be difficult for them to achieve.

Commissioner Reynolds asked if the same restrictions could be imposed on high-end dealerships. Mr. Rathje responded that they would not have to be high end, that a "middle-of-the-road" used car lot with proper landscaping, fencing, etc. Commissioner Matejczyk added that the used car dealer's problem is low volume high markup business. Commissioner Ryan stated that the Ogden Master Plan addresses a number of these issues, trying to basically make Ogden Avenue more community oriented and beautified.

Commissioner Nicholaou discussed three businesses that, though they were vastly improved to what was previously at those locations, he felt were not handled in the best manner and how can this be prevented in the future. He asked Mr. Rathje why the Plan Commission hadn't had the opportunity to consider this plan prior to this point. Mr. Rathje stated that the developments noted met the criteria that we had available at that time, with vast improvements. Commissioner Nicholaou still felt with the implementation of the Lakota Plan, [Ogden

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Avenue Master Plan] that we lost the opportunity that was within our grasp. Mr. Rathje noted that is why it is necessary to have the resolve and actually adopt the ordinances to make those things happen. Mr. Skach added that it is important to start using the Ogden Avenue Master Plan to our benefit. He also noted that the Ogden Avenue Master Plan gives staff, and the Village overall, as it has been adopted by the Council and hence is Village policy, much discretion and negotiating ability and that the idea of design guidelines and refining the Plan is an important one. It also enables the petitioner to know what services are in place and the structure of the land uses.

Commissioner Waechtler, referring to the Goal Statement, referred to the term “related services” in regards to automobile related services, stating that it was too general. Mr. Skach suggested reviewing the list of permitted uses on Ogden in the zoning ordinance to determine what would really work and what is consistent with the letter, spirit, and intent of the land use designations. He noted that at this point in the discussions, there are two distinct, and possibly competing land use schemes. PC Chair Jirik suggested working on accomplishing both. He stated that he envisions the western part of Ogden Avenue as a high-density destination for cars. He then said that as you move more easterly, the parcels are smaller, which is suitable for shops and businesses and possibly under roof, boutique-like auto sales and auto related services; as long as it remains high-end, which is complementary to the vision of Ogden Avenue.

Commissioner Nicholaou read an idea he was interested in incorporating into the Goal Statement: Continue to foster a district of Mixed Commercial anchored by current automobile enclaves. Mixed Commercial supported by land use and zoning flexibility that promotes a mix of Commercial innovative land uses. He added that it is critical to get this implemented. Mr. Skach agreed that the Ogden Plan is a good start and an implementation strategy is needed. Mr. Skach also suggested that establishment of design guidelines could help create and foster the desirable aesthetic environment. Mr. Rathje noted that there is currently a design commission for the downtown. PC Chair Jirik noted that for this group to amend the Future Land Use Plan and have the proper framing of words, it would need to create concepts and begin to create expectations. Mr. Skach added that the wording is important, and that the Goal Statement creates a mental image for people. He noted the need to articulate specifically the desired uses and characteristics we desire in plain and simple terms.

At this point, Mr. Rockwell took the opportunity to introduce the group to the *180° Old Plank Road Vision Statement* the EDC’s Ogden Avenue Committee had been working on as it pertained to this conversation. He also invited the Plan Commission to attend the EDC’s Board meeting the following Wednesday, where the statement would be presented in its entirety. Mr. Rockwell noted the similarities between the concepts and ideas coming through tonight’s meeting and what the Ogden Committee has been working on.

Commissioner Reynolds asked if removal of the words “focused on automobile sales and related services” from the Goal Statement would be appropriate. PC Chair Jirik added that Ogden Avenue should be “focused” on the strong core areas where there is an existing strong land use. Mr. Rathje stated that what this group needs to make careful analysis of what is needed and what businesses want and what could be brought to a higher level. Commissioner Nicholaou suggested that the signage height issues, especially at the gateway to the community should be noted.

PC Chair Jirik noted that he was sensing convergence from the Commissions regarding the wording of the Goal Statement. He asked everyone if they were ready to move on. Commissioner Waechtler questioned whether it was prudent to finalize in regards to the EDC’s Ogden Committee. Mr. Rockwell stated that he just wanted this group to hear some of what the Ogden Committee was working on. Commissioner Nicholaou stated that providing a list of desirable uses and potentially revising the permitted use table is a good idea. Mr. Skach agreed. PC Chair Jirik stated that it might be detailed beyond what we would need at this stage. Mr. Skach noted that the Future Land Use Map designates Ogden Avenue as essentially one land use [Commercial] all the way through, and the discussion here is that it may be something different. He added that it is primarily B3 zoning with some Manufacturing type zoning on the westerly portions. PC Chair Jirik cited that it is going take a lot of work to get into that detail, and we’re not going to go that deep here, leaving open that possibility that the work would generate possibly subclasses or subgroupings of this Ogden concept, and create the concept that it would be done and then there would be detail to address at a later time. Mr. Skach suggested clarifying that the core area will be different. Mr. Rathje noted that we might have to get some zoning district overlays.

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Commissioner Waechtler wanted to know if the Goal Statement allowed for flexibility. He added, to reiterate Commissioner Nichalou's point, that this almost necessitates review of the permitted and special uses.

Commissioner Waechtler then asked Mr. Rockwell if the EDC had gotten any feedback from Ogden Avenue business owners. Mr. Rockwell said that the EDC met with all the car dealerships and approximately 15 companies who specified their needs, which included having other car dealerships, restaurants, upscale women's clothing, banks, and small office buildings. They said the things hindering their businesses were the poor overall appearance of the streets, cars parked in parkways, used car lots, unattractive signage. Mr. Rockwell also noted that there had been 292 traffic accidents on Ogden Avenue last year, and that there is traffic gridlock, especially between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. He added that they requested design guidelines and more attractive landscaping to attract people into the area. Mr. Rathje asked about the dealerships that put their cars on their lawns. Mr. Rockwell stated that Code Enforcement had done a great job and issued tickets, and that stopped the problem.

Commissioner Ryan asked if the conversation had concluded on Ogden Avenue. PC Chair Jirik responded that the concept will be reflected in the minutes and that the Commercial will resolve itself as these words are executed. He added that the words would generate the appropriate study that will come up with a definition.

PC Chair Jirik suggested meeting again on June 2, 2003 at 7:00 p.m. PC Chair Jirik said the next meeting discussion would be on 31st Street and then the Downtown. The group concurred.

Members of the Plan Commission and the Strategic Planning Committee concluded discussions at 9:10 p.m.

ALAN JIRIK, COMMISSION CHAIR, PLAN COMMISSION
AND
MICHAEL RIORDAN, COMMISSION CHAIR, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION