

APPROVED MINUTES

MINUTES
OF A WORKSHOP DISCUSSION
WITH THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND
MEMBERS OF THE PLAN COMMISSION
ON
AUGUST 18, 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: PC Chair Jirik, Commissioner Reynolds,
Commissioner Stark

Members of the Strategic Planning Committee: Commissioner Chalberg,
Commissioner Ryan, Commissioner Weiss

STAFF

PRESENT: Joseph Skach, Director, Planning and Community Development
Steven Rockwell, Director, Economic Development
Amanda Browne, Planner
Lori Skotterud, Planner

GUESTS: None

Mr. Rockwell introduced William Weiss, a new Commissioner of the Economic Development Commission. The members of the assembly introduced themselves.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JULY 28, 2003

PC Chair Jirik requested if there was concurrence on the minutes from the workshop held July 28, 2003. The members of both Commissions concurred.

Discussions continued in refining the preliminary Goal Statements. Mr. Skach summarized the past discussion of this area starting with the Maple West Corridor stating that at the previous discussion of this area, there was a feeling that the assembly wanted to not necessarily make any changes and that there was recognition of recent subdivision activity, the existing commercial activity at Belmont and Maple and also some of the merging smaller commercial nodes along Maple and Walnut. Also previously discussed were the impacts of the future Belmont underpass, which would create different land use dynamics. He noted that on Belmont, there are some commercial nodes near the tracks and there had been discussion about whether, at Belmont and Maple, would begin to act as one economic unit from the land use standpoint. Mr. Skach also mentioned that there was concurrence as part of the Ellsworth discussion, that the west side of Belmont would go from an Office, Research and Manufacturing [ORM] land use designation to Commercial [Red]. He explained that after that, the group decided to consolidate these discussions into something called a Belmont Underpass Corridor, which was the recognition of the future underpass, the dynamics of Belmont between Maple and the underpass. He added that there had been discussion of whether that would act as an economic development unit or not and that the group's conclusion was that they would not recommend any changes to the east side of Belmont, and that the change was actually made as part of the Ellsworth discussion on the west side of Belmont.

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The existing uses at this point for the Maple West Corridor would be a “wait and see” as agreed by the group. Mr. Skach noted that because of the existing single family Residential land use designation [Yellow], there was definitely recognition of the single family residential, recognition of the multi-family residential [Orange] as a transition between Commercial uses as well as the Commercial node at Maple and Belmont.

PC Chair Jirik recalled discussing the Ellsworth industrial area as it relates to Belmont, and that a large portion of what may go towards a Commercial land use on the east side of Belmont on hold in deference to the residential and not run it all the way to the south to Maple in deference to that, which still creates a significantly sized Commercial district on the west side of Belmont that could clearly absorb a lot of energy and a lot of possibilities.

Mr. Skach noted that there had recently been inquiries regarding petitions going forward to the County in unincorporated Downers Grove. He discussed a business that is interested in a parcel at the intersection of Chase and Maple, which demonstrates that there could potentially be some downsides to not annexing. Commissioner Reynolds asked if there had been any response to the letter that Mr. Skach had sent. Mr. Skach said that there had not as yet and that he had placed some follow-up phone calls. Commissioner Ryan inquired whether the petitioner already owned the land. Mr. Skach stated that he did not have this information, but the lot is not in the Village, so if the petitioner is coming in by right, the options for the Village are limited to expressing concern and setting up future discussions. Commissioner Chalberg brought up the fact that this group has worked hard to incorporate Mixed Use into many areas, but that this particular area may be an ideal location for transition to a Residential land use designation. Mr. Skach stated that the same issue was raised in a previous discussion regarding the Fairview and Maple area, and that he and Ms. Browne discussed reevaluating some of these land uses and looking at the OR land use as potentially an Office, Research, Transitional or something along those lines. Ms. Chalberg asked if adding the word “transitional” changes something. Mr. Skach replied that it does in terms of adoption of a comprehensive plan and articulating what the intent of the land use is. Commissioner Chalberg asked if that means height restrictions. Mr. Skach replied that it may and that it is also intended to be a transition between higher intensity Commercial as a step down to lower intensity Residential similar to the way the 6-11 dwelling units per acre designation [Orange] has been used. Commissioner Stark asked what category medical offices fell under. Ms. Browne added that medical and dental clinics and laboratories first appear in the B2 zoning district. Mr. Skach noted that Commissioner Stark raised a good point noting that there currently is not an “Institutional” land use designation for these types of uses and that may be an option under future amendments to the Land Use Plan.

Mr. Skach noted another preliminary request for annexing and rezoning in office functions to a commercially oriented use for the area just north of Maple on Belmont, also unincorporated Downers Grove. He suggested that it might be beneficial to have a land use or zoning called “Office Transitional” which would facilitate that use and would be quite beneficial when making a transition from higher intensity commercial areas and then transitioning down to lower intensity residential areas. There was concurrence to evaluate this in the future. Mr. Skach informed the group that having these workshops documented has given this assembly and the Village an advantage in terms of communications with the County. He stated that they would get some preliminary proposals from that potential petitioner. He also pointed out that the discussions here had been in terms of traditional Commercial as opposed to Mixed Use; that the group saw this in the future and largely due to the large redevelopment potential of Ellsworth and the positive impacts that the Metra underpass would bring. Commissioner Chalberg asked, in terms of Commercial, if that meant they were working towards Retail land use. Mr. Skach said that the group had come to a concurrence that at least for the east side of Ellsworth, it wanted to recommend that it change to Commercial land use for the tracts on the west side of Belmont, but on the east side of Belmont, there wasn't a clear feeling that the group wanted to change land use designations, but it is an important area to pay attention to. PC Chair Jirik agreed that it is an incremental step, which provides considerable potential for growth to be forthcoming. He also stated that if the ends of the corridor were of Commercial land use designation, they could be very complimentary to the rest of Ellsworth in terms of that whole area changing to beneficial land uses. PC Chair Jirik noted that, in terms of the market and development forces, this might happen in the near future. Mr. Skach noted that one of the issues worth incorporating into the Goal Statement is that this area certainly remains an area that the Village wants to pay attention to, but to pay attention to it in the context of future transit oriented development stemming from the underpass and also depending on what happens with Ellsworth as a major redevelopment opportunity.

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Commissioner Stark asked which side of the tracks the underpass going to be on. Ms. Browne replied that she understood it was going on the north side. Commissioner Stark noted that due to fact that Belmont will have increased density and traffic flow, he believed the residential aspect would stay more towards Maple if it can hold on. He added that as the traffic gets busier, the residents are going to have a hard time fostering a sense of community. Commissioner Stark expressed concern about how businesses and parking lots are going to be affected by the land that has not been cleared. Mr. Skach replied that the last plan had ramps to the north. He added that there is a temporary lot on the northeast corner now that has a gas station and that the last plan showed that the paint store was part of the land that was going to go as well. Mr. Skach stated that transit oriented development is probably very much what can be expected here.

With respect to the west side of Belmont, Commissioner Ryan requested clarification regarding the specific size needs in terms of a Commercial land uses. Mr. Skach replied that this would depend on the particular type of business going in. He noted that it was discussed by this group that the properties would most likely coming in as a B2 zoning, but that would be subject to the time frame a petitioner comes in. Mr. Skach said that the default position, based on discussions with this group, would come in as traditional Retail and probably B2. He noted that there are two different land use characters, one being the transit oriented development nature on the north [Belmont and Tracks] and the other more of a neighborhood oriented Commercial character on the south [Belmont and Maple] and that the recognition that it will most likely end up acting as a cohesive of unit having beneficial interaction between them.

PC Chair Jirik asked if the group was going to continue to do three separate Goal Statements for the Belmont/Maple area or merge them all into one. Mr. Skach suggested following through with the previous discussions in which they decided to collapse it into the Belmont Underpass Corridor. PC Chair Jirik suggested leaving Belmont and Maple as its own entity, noting that the biggest change is the underpass corridor, and by leaving it as its own entity and changes occur, that module could be easily adjusted. He added that this would help lessen confusion for future petitioners, as the phrase "continue to foster" poses no pressure and signifies what this group is thinking. Commissioner Stark agreed that the areas need to be separated. There was concurrence. He inquired what the group thought would be the highest use for the underpass area. Commissioner Chalberg stated that consistent with the Ellsworth area, this area could be a Mixed Use land use designation.

Commissioner Stark requested a plan for the underpass, and referenced Lisle's. Commissioner Ryan stated that there was not much activity south of the underpass, but to the north, they have a small downtown area. Commissioner Chalberg stated that the access to the commercial district through the underpass can be awkward and that people might avoid it. She noted that it is not noticeable as one is coming up from underneath the underpass, and that it is important to be cautious of where entrances should be as you are getting off a busy street. Commissioner Stark asked if the underpass in Lisle helped the retail there. Commissioner Chalberg noted that the underpass was probably there before the town was attractive. She also noted that there is a 4-5 story condominium just to the north, which is struggling, possibly because it is literally sitting on the tracks

Mr. Skach read the Fairview and Maple Goal Statement as way of comparison noting that there was a distinct hierarchy recognized by the group between the downtown and that smaller downtown area that may not be dissimilar to this area. Commissioner Ryan added that this is a much larger piece of property than Fairview and Maple. Mr. Skach noted that there is a train station there and that one of things that might be served is somehow just recognizing the transit oriented development there, which is a development that feeds off the fact the station is there.

Commissioner Chalberg recommended, in terms of the Goal Statements, that complete sentences be used. Mr. Skach agreed that they should be consistent. Commissioner Chalberg suggested that this area could read "This area should support the transit oriented use of adjacent land and the potential for residential growth in the Ellsworth area directly behind it. She also suggested adding "supportive of existing residential areas, the potential for high density residential growth and a transit oriented use of the adjacent land". Mr. Skach noted that the key word right now is "create". Commissioner Chalberg stated that it is definitely an action-oriented word, which may create consternation on the part of all the four corners of land.

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Commissioner Stark asked if the group supported what was now at Belmont and the proposed underpass. He speculated that it will be completely different, and that everything will be leveled and the businesses that are there will need to make improvements. Commissioner Stark brought up the Lisle underpass again inquiring whether they were having any success with retail. Commissioner Chalberg said that there was not anything that was notable. Mr. Skach added that part of the issue with our location is that it is not recognized as a destination location; but the underpass and station improvements will change that. Commissioner Stark said that he felt this area would most likely be more residential density by development. Commissioner Chalberg added that she could envision low-rise high end use offices combined with attractive 5-9 story residential uses behind it with retail on the front on Belmont.

PC Chair Jirik made a few observations stating the language really talks of the word “surrounded by residential” which is not the dialog he recalls. He discussed that he recalled discussion on an all Commercial [Red] corridor came into existence going along the main traffic ingress, with a lighter Mixed Use behind it and that the Village would hold out for the heavier Commercial right along that main corridor [Belmont]. He also remembered leaving the balance of Ellsworth as a lower scale Mixed Use and agreeing tentatively on the heavier, pure Commercial [Red] land use designation along the west side of Belmont as a better revenue base to sustain it and bring in a very high return. Commissioner Chalberg agreed, but noted that from a reality standpoint, there will be a huge gouge out of Belmont with the underpass which will affect attracting people to businesses and the kinds of businesses that will be in there due to lack of visibility. She did note that we might be able to attract a grouping of stores, which would make it look like a smaller downtown area similar to Fairview. Commissioner Chalberg stated that she would like to see code enforcement enforce façade structure. She also added that there may need to be an interior corridor street and front parking at the entry. PC Chair Jirik suggested installation of a traffic light.

Mr. Stark suggested partnering with Metra and the railroad transportation representatives to implement a new development and higher use for that area. He noted that there is the possibility of Belmont turning into more of an expressway with a tunnel. Commissioner Stark inquired as to what would happen to the residents that lived above it. Commissioner Chalberg replied that people would live above it, live behind it, and that there are many Mixed Use choices. She added that they would not have to be highest and best use, but they would need to be supported by Retail. Commissioner Stark agreed, but noted they probably have funding in this case. Commissioner Stark added that he would like to see the language in the Goal Statement recognize that this is going to be a big project that is going to change the present character of the area. Commissioner Reynolds noted that no matter what, it is still market driven. Commissioner Stark stated that by fostering the development of infrastructure, this would lead to development off of Belmont Road, which would include issues such as drainage and off road transportation.

Commissioner Chalberg noted that she did not feel this would be a destination location for people who live in other areas of the Village. Mr. Skach suggested it might become one with the destination of the train station. He added that it would encourage commuters to take advantage of retail and service uses if located there. Commissioner Chalberg asked if this area could be similar to Fountain Square, which is a destination location. Commissioner Stark stated that it is a limited area. Mr. Skach stated that the bigger picture is that the Future Land Use Plan already contemplates that there is a high-density land use, it's residential, but its high density, 25-60 dwelling units per acre, which is a significant density that the Council looked at in 1995 & 1996.

Commissioner Stark asked if the group thought there was going to be retail from Belmont that turns into underpass, or should there be something like a frontage road. Commissioner Chalberg said that, with the help of a traffic light, there could be. Commissioner Ryan agreed, stating the opportunities are probably going to be there in terms of traffic control. Mr. Stark then wanted to know how to attract retail businesses. Mr. Skach agreed that this is an issue. Commissioner Chalberg noted that there is a light just north of Prairie and Curtiss, which should remain in order to get access to the frontage road. Mr. Skach noted that this is a very large tract that has a lot of potential, but will likely be impacted by Metra's work. Commissioner Stark agreed. Commissioner Reynolds noted that it would depend on what the market says.

PC Chair Jirik stated that there will be an enormous amount of change, and suggested a review of what the market forces say and what is happening in the area as the underpass nears completion. Commissioner Chalberg

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noted that unless the Village actually accumulates those parcels, a developer might come along and buy them. PC Chair Jirik stated that if the Goal Statement stays as it is, and the south area is not successful, then the north side would not be successful. To avoid all the turmoil for the neighborhood, unless there is some greater validation with some real significant activities on the south, there is no point to do anything that could be viewed negatively on the north. Mr. Skach noted that it will just be a matter of time, and when the first task is completed, it would be beneficial to reconvene this group so this group can review the petitions and other things that have come into play. Mr. Skach added that historically, in the Chicago area, a good recipe for things to happen is to be near a train station and have zoning that supports a certain amount of density. Commissioner Stark replied that it is like a time capsule, in need of review when the underpass is completed. He stressed the importance getting involved right now in the planning to support the infrastructure. PC Chair Jirik suggested that the narrative say that this group has identified this site as an opportunity, and has identified important issues that could make this even of greater vitality. Commissioner Chalberg added that accumulation of this opportunity zone should be taken seriously because this will actually cut through the middle of a number of existing industries.

Mr. Skach suggested, with regard to Belmont and Maple on the south end, that there should be recognition of the neighborhood scale. That it is traditional retail Commercial, but gearing toward a traditional neighborhood scale whereas the Belmont underpass is a distinct transit oriented potential, and whether the word Mixed Use is used or not, it is definitely transit oriented Commercial. Commissioner Stark suggested the use of the term "Transportation Oriented Residential", because he does not think people will be able to access the retail unless the access road is changed. Mr. Skach replied asked if it would be a good idea to redesignate that to either a Mixed Use designation or keep it high density Residential [Dark Brown]. Commissioner Stark noted that there is an old park there. Commissioner Ryan added that there is also a gas station, an auto paint shop, and two story apartments.

Commissioner Chalberg noted that the right of ways and the access roads that are going to north of Warren are going to take a significant amount of land. Mr. Skach suggested it might be beneficial for this group to work on setting a direction for the redevelopment to happen and not necessarily get down to site-specific detail. PC Chair Jirik concurred. Commissioner Chalberg made a suggestion for the Belmont Underpass Goal Statement stating "This retail area should support the existing surrounding neighborhoods, the adjacent Mixed Use zoning, and nearby transit system uses". She noted that the last section should include that there is something about it that is desirable. Mr. Skach noted that it is important to recognize the predominance of adjacent residential. Commissioner Stark said he would only be concerned with the sentence of supporting just the residential area. He noted that this area would have the ability to contain a large grocery store. Commissioner Chalberg questioned whether that would exemplify high end residential. Mr. Skach said that the Goal Statement could read, "Create a Commercial corridor that recognizes the increase of the transit oriented development of the area". Commissioner Stark noted that he did not think the word "Commercial" should be used because he does not believe it is a plausible idea with the underpass. Commissioner Ryan suggested that the Village would have an excellent opportunity to put high-rise condominiums at that location as there are units going up all along the railroad in LaGrange, Western Springs and Clarendon Hills. Commissioner Chalberg noted a section near the underpass that could work very well for a grocery store and a possible coffee shop (Starbucks) similar to the area at 63rd and 83. PC Chair Jirik stressed that it is important to not to "write off" any particular area because of particular details.

Mr. Skach suggested focusing on the Commercial node at the future underpass site [Belmont and tracks], stating that the essential question is whether it should be considered a Commercial land use designation anymore. He noted that from the assembly's comments, it appears to be more suited to higher density residential that caters to commuters' interests. Commissioner Chalberg stated, from a real estate standpoint, that she did not see it high density either because of the way it is positioned on the land overlooking the underpass. She added that she felt it would probably be far better as Commercial. Commissioner Ryan asked Ms. Chalberg if that was viable due to the difficulty there would be accessing it. Commissioner Chalberg replied that there has to be opportunities for things that do not need a lot of visibility.

Commissioner Stark asked the group how people would get across Belmont to where the Metra Station is from the southeastern corner. Commissioner Reynolds suggested adding a bridge. Commissioner Chalberg informed

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the group that there is going to be a walkway, because Warren is also up and it stays up on the north side. Commissioner Reynolds asked if it was certain that they were not going to do away with Warren. Commissioner Chalberg clarified that Warren is going to go across along the railroad tracks, that it is part of the underpass. She added that it would have a traffic light as it does now.

PC Chair Jirik suggested that this assembly not recommend changes at this time pending further development of the market, and further interest and understanding of the underpass. He expressed concern that removing the Commercial land use would send a negative message. He added that by not changing the statement, they are sending the messages that options are open. Mr. Skach said that was a valid point in that through the documentation, all these ideas become part of the record and there would at least be a baseline that there was a moving in a particular direction and there is a basis in the future to start from. Commissioner Ryan asked if there was a need to be specific as far as this assembly advising development of a Commercial corridor or a Mixed Use corridor, or can the Goal Statement read “foster the development of the Belmont underpass recognizing the opportunity and potential because of the transit proximity and the high increase in traffic”? PC Chair Jirik explained that the reason he prefers the previous statement is because there will be such a change in such a large area, that he wants to reserve the Commercial land use designation, and does not want it to be a lower impact, lower revenue generator. Commissioner Ryan stated that he is just interested in getting the correct verbiage intact so that the assembly can move forward. Mr. Rockwell referred back to Commissioner Stark’s phrase “foster an integrated development” because he agreed that it is important to acknowledge that the Village has been involved from the beginning, for Metra’s sake. Commissioner Stark added that it also needs to say this group wants to integrate the development of Retail/dense Residential use into the Belmont underpass. He also noted that the Goal Statement should include “enhancement of existing infrastructure”. PC Chair Jirik stated that there should be some other calling of attention to this piece that contemplates the appropriate up front input to maximize the future after that has occurred.

Mr. Skach suggested the sentence “A commercial corridor that recognizes the future transit orientation of this area and that endeavor to integrate future redevelopment of the transit oriented land use” be added to the Goal Statement. Other suggestions were made including a suggestion by PC Chair Jirik regarding the adjacent Residential. Commissioner Chalberg asked what the purpose of the word “recognize” in terms of recognizing the residential area. PC Chair Jirik explained that it demonstrates that the group is considering it in terms of not having an impact on it, noting it is a more sensitive kind of land use. Commissioner Chalberg suggested the sentence: “recognizes adjacent residential uses, existing and future transit orientation of the area while fostering a vibrant mix of retail and commercial uses”. Commissioner Ryan asked if the land use was going fundamentally Commercial or fundamentally Residential. Mr. Skach said that he thought it was fundamentally Commercial. Commissioner Chalberg added that it fosters a vibrant mix of land uses, Commercial or Retail land uses. PC Chair Jirik stated that what motivated him was from past discussions and the idea that the Village could hold out for more intense Commercial and the fact that someone could come in and make a great return on a lower project. Mr. Rockwell stated that he could not support Commercial in this particular area; that a business such as an insurance office would be more successful.

There were more revisions made to the Goal Statement. Mr. Skach noted that if any of the assembly members wanted to review and revise the Goal Statement and bring them back to the group, they were welcome to do so.

PC Chair Jirik requested confirmation that the group had completed areas 8, 9 and 10. Commissioner Chalberg asked for clarification if the group had decided to let the Maple West Corridor go. Mr. Skach summarized that the assembly had not decided to let it go, but rather that it was the issue of making it all Commercial and that the group felt that they did not want to do that. Commissioner Chalberg stated that she could see high end Office Transitional, low rise Office Transitional. Mr. Skach recapped that the group had had a detailed discussion about that and how much would be needed to make that happen with some speculation about the depth, that it may actually need to go all the way down to College Road, and that it made everyone very uneasy. Commissioner Chalberg added that she could see allowing a developer to come in and do another Bending Oaks-like arrangement there, and to maintain it as Residential. Mr. Skach noted that there is interest in it actually coming in consistent with the Bending Oaks on the south side adjacent to the Commercial as a transition to lower density residential.

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Commissioner Ryan noted that the next discussion would be a refinement of the Fairview and Maple Goal Statement. PC Chair Jirik suggested meeting again on September 8, at 7:00 p.m. The group concurred.

Members of the Plan Commission and the Strategic Planning Committee concluded discussions at 9:15 p.m.

ALAN JIRIK, COMMISSION CHAIR, PLAN COMMISSION
AND
MICHAEL RYAN, ACTING COMMITTEE CHAIR, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION