



rRemarks Data for June 20, 2023 Village Council Meeting

Agenda Section: Manager's Report

Agenda Item: A. Report: Long Range Planning: Key Trends and Issues

Commenter: Ken Lerner

Comment: June 19, 2023

Please accept these comments on the topic of implementing the Greenest Region Compact (GRC) through sustainability planning and restitution of the Environmental Concerns Commission.

1. We should develop and adopt a sustainability plan, based in part on the GRC, and integrated with other village comprehensive and long-range planning.

The Village interacts with the environment in three ways, all of which offer opportunities for sustainable planning and policies.

- First there are the village facilities and operations – are we designing and maintaining our facilities in a green way? And how are we managing the village's operations? For example, we integrated features into the new civic center for energy conservation, and we have won awards for maintaining a "green fleet" of public works vehicles.
- Second, there is how we manage open spaces that the village owns. For example we are restoring a native plant community in village-owned land at 40th and Glendenning, and we own (along with the Park District) a beautiful oak grove at the corner of 39th and Highland, across from the fire station.
- Lastly, the village adopts policies that affect how the residents and businesses within it live. Everything from zoning and building codes to plant sales to recycling events and even the refuse collection contract provides opportunities to incentivize, encourage, and show leadership in environmental sustainability. There are more things to consider: for example Naperville has incentive programs for residents and businesses to promote electric lawn equipment, smart thermostats, electric vehicle charging stations, solar panels, renewable energy, and energy efficiency.

In Downers Grove we have a history of taking individual measures to promote sustainability. Along the way we have learned that often we can “do well by doing good” – these practices wind up saving us money. But we have no systematic policy that lets us plan and prioritize sustainability in an organized way. Having a sustainability plan will do that. It will ensure that sustainability is integrated into long range planning, give us a yardstick against which to measure progress, and a mechanism to prioritize measures going forward.

The manager’s report from March assessed our current operations against the GRC goals, objectives and policies – the first step in the planning process. (By the way, this report is now listed on the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus GRC website as an example of sustainability reports and plans.) We should take the logical next step by developing a sustainability plan.

2. This is a natural role for a revived Environmental Concerns Commission (ECC). Having the ECC involved should be regarded not as a burden, but as an advantage – there is substantial expertise available in that group, who work on a volunteer basis. Much of the work of implementing the GRC, including drafting and reviewing a sustainability plan and identifying priorities and proposals for future implementation measures, could be “outsourced” to the ECC in an economical way.

Many of the larger communities in the Chicago area have an environmental commission, and some nearby communities that are nowhere near us in size – for example,

- Aurora
- Buffalo Grove
- Elgin
- Geneva
- Glen Ellyn
- Highland Park
- Hoffman Estates
- Joliet
- Lombard
- Northbrook
- Oak Park
- Park Forest
- Park Ridge
- Schaumburg
- Skokie
- St. Charles

- Villa Park
- Westmont
- Wilmette

We should look critically at the amount of staff support needed in order to have an active environmental commission. The manager's report stated it would likely require a hire – and while we're not opposed to that, it is worth a closer look whether supporting the ECC could become part of someone's portfolio along with other duties.

Thank you,
Ken Lerner
Chairman, Pierce Downer's Heritage Alliance

Agenda Section: Active Agenda

Agenda Item: B. MOT 2023-9974 A motion directing staff to publish a request for proposals for the redevelopment of Lot 2 of the Civic Center Project.

Commenter: Joy Matteson

Comment: Everyone says they want affordable housing, and so few villages make it a priority. It's beyond time to make this a priority for Downers Grove. When my 1st grade daughter will be losing her close friend this summer because her parent's landlord couldn't pay for their home right here on Belmont and they have no affordable options, that's a real problem. I've lived here over 10 years- I'm here to support this initiative.

Agenda Section: Active Agenda

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Commenter: David Rose

Comment: Comment on Token Gestures

Some token gestures are more acceptable than others to Republicans.

We saw that reality on display in the discussion sparked by Comm S-F's suggestion that VC include 'affordable housing' as part of the requirement for the building the developer who buys Lot 2 will construct.

Lot 2 is the property VC intends to sell to generate the revenue it needs to make up for its past failure to tax adequately to fund the new facility it is building.

S-F's suggestion was quickly shot down by Comm T and CC, both staunch Republicans, on the grounds it would threaten to reduce the amount of money the sale would generate. T went so far as to claim VC had made a promise to property taxpayers VC would maximize revenue from the sale, and S-F's proposal would break that promise.

Since pols break promises all the time — look no farther than the Lngf sale for a tragic example, take T's claim as typical Republican theatrical BS.

Or rather take it as a reflection of Republican values and priorities.

T of course prides himself on his Republican understanding that being financially responsible means getting someone else to pay for it.

CC joined in rejecting S-F's idea, essentially discounting it as little more than a token gesture, one he disapproved of. Which I found interesting in light of the token gesture of which he approved, namely requiring the developer/owner of the Meadowbrook site to replant trees in the shopping center's parking lot when some trees 'don't make it.' Out of his great concern for the environment.

The need to maximize revenue in selling Lot 2 is less a promise than an example of the Republican mantra that got DG into the financial hole which VCs and other taxing bodies dug themselves in the first place, keep property taxes low. Aka an inability to plan and tax properly.

Taxpayers for the past 20-25 years have been making up for VCs' failure to collect adequate tax over the prior decades to pay for identifiable, predictable expenses, such as the decision to refurbish its existing space or build anew.

The new village hall did NOT get built until now because every entity on which VC had placed its hope as that 'someone else' did NOT pan out.

Until the federal government, thanks to the pandemic, dumped caravans of truckloads of money — trillions of dollars — on the US economy, much to the fiscal benefit of private businesses and individuals, and local governments, especially in property-rich towns like DG.

That generosity, and the fact that other projects for which VC had borrowed to build are close to being paid off, opened the way for VC to move forward on the new facility.

My guess: The revenue-maxing objective of selling DG's public land reflects real trepidation Republicans feel thanks to the tax increases coming in order to pay for underfunded pension obligations: we love our police and fire personnel, we just don't have the money to keep our pension promises to them. That's the danger!

That's a funding obligation VC can NOT push off to someone else by selling property and setting up some lamely justified TIF.

Agenda Section: Active Agenda

Agenda Item: B. MOT 2023-9974 A motion directing staff to publish a request for proposals for the redevelopment of Lot 2 of the Civic Center Project.

Commenter: David Rose

Comment: RFP criteria for Lot 2 should be taken with a huge spoonful of salt.

Looks goods, sounds good, but as VC's recent history has shown, it's all for show. Political theatre.

Show me one example where VC enforced a deadline, clawed back a rebate, or provided actual data that established the soundness of its decision.

Since the vast majority of residents in DG don't vote in local VC elections, and since those who do are mostly low information voters, that is, they pay little to no attention to VC's proceedings, why should VC behave differently?

Agenda Section: Active Agenda

Agenda Item: C. MOT 2023-9973 A motion authorizing staff to 1) take steps to create a tax increment financing district for the Meadowbrook Shopping Center; and 2) negotiate a redevelopment agreement in accordance with the key terms listed in the staff report.

Commenter: David Rose

Comment: Why is Meadowbrook a TIF?

Another example of why TIFs in IL have failed to achieve their objective of helping economically depressed communities.

Local media give a lot of attention to the Chi Bears shopping for the best deal from the towns desiring to hook up with them, however much they may have to shame themselves in tax concessions and other support to do so.

But how different is that well-known example from what goes on all the time in places like DG and projects like the Meadowbrook Shopping Center?

How does one TIF differ from another if the purpose of a TIF is to entice a developer to build a project, when a developer knows it not the municipality is in the stronger bargaining position?

Just another example of the combined failure of TIFs and IL's property tax arrangement to rectify the growing and abysmal economic and financial imbalance in IL.

No one on VC will object of course because the current system 'works' to the advantage of places like DG.

The location is a ""catalyst site."" Which is simply a fancy name for a strip mall that will somehow generate tax revenue VC would not otherwise collect.

One proposed revenue generator caught my eye: a medical facility or carwash. How about a medical facility with a carwash; it could be a real draw.

Throw in some video gaming, and you might not even have to resort to Hooter's-like attendants, nurses or MDs to draw customers from miles around.

Agenda Section: Manager's Report

Agenda Item: A. Report: Long Range Planning: Key Trends and Issues

Commenter: Louise Kelly

Comment: We need affordable housing in our community to work towards a more diverse and inclusive community. I am asking that this council dedicate the 8-10 units of the new development for people who could not otherwise afford the market value. I understand one of the arguments being made against this designation is that since 8-10 affordable units doesn't make a dent in the need in DG, it's not worth doing.

Furthermore, 8-10 units doesn't make a dent in the national housing shortage, so it's not

worth doing. This argument, if I understand the village's position correctly, sounds like an "imperfect solution fallacy." (Criticizing a solution to a problem because it is imperfect and does not match up with other perfect, but unrealistic, solutions). Let's consider these 8-10 units as a step toward housing justice. Perhaps it's not a perfect solution, although it will be for the 8-10 families that will live there. And for the community as a whole it's a step toward making DG affordable for all, not just the wealthy. It's like we are opening our arms to a more diverse range of people. This vision of community is one that residents can be proud of.

Agenda Section: Active Agenda

Agenda Item: B. MOT 2023-9974 A motion directing staff to publish a request for proposals for the redevelopment of Lot 2 of the Civic Center Project.

Commenter: Sharon Grimm

Comment: Hi, my name is Sharon and I've been a resident of Downers Grove for 10 years and it's the first time in my life a town has truly felt like home to me. I'm privileged to live in such a wonderful place! I work at Rush University Medical Center as an assistant coordinator for a healthy aging study, specifically looking at Alzheimer's in the Chicago area. I work with a lot of senior citizens, and one thing that a lot of us have in common is that we can't afford to live in downtown Downers Grove. I graduated college five years ago, and I'm currently paying back student loans. There is no way that with my salary I could afford to live in downtown Downers. Students like me who are just starting out, or even the seniors I see on a daily basis with a fixed income, have such limited options for housing. Affordable housing is an issue near and dear to my heart. I would love to see this lot become a place for more residents to live, because it's an amazing location and an amazing town. My sincere hope is that just some of this housing could be made into affordable spaces for people like me. Please consider this as you make decisions regarding this space. Thank you for your time.

Agenda Section: Active Agenda

Agenda Item: B. MOT 2023-9974 A motion directing staff to publish a request for proposals for the redevelopment of Lot 2 of the Civic Center Project.

Commenter: Angela Busboom Yackley

Comment: Please include affordable housing units in the Lot 2 RFP.

I've been in Downers Grove as a renter, then as a townhome owner, and now as a single-family home owner. And it's important to me that my community can support folks in all walks of life and income brackets.

I want DG to be a place where affordable housing is available for young people, young families looking for starter homes, seniors who need to downsize, folks with disabilities, any population who may not be able to afford current market prices, etc.

Lot 2 may not check all of those boxes, and it certainly won't fix the larger affordable housing issue. But every little bit helps. And I want our Village's leadership to stand up for these folks and their needs, and do it in tangible, meaningful ways. Not doing so is shameful and erodes the vibrant community we want DG to be.