

The City of Lake Forest
Plan Commission
Proceedings of the April 10, 2019 Meeting

A meeting of the Lake Forest Plan Commission was held on Wednesday, April 10, 2019, at 6:30 p.m., at City Hall, 220 E. Deerpath, Lake Forest, Illinois.

Commission members present: Chairman Kehr and Commissioners Michael Freeman, Monica Ruggles, Guy Berg, Stephen Douglass and Susan Athenson

Commissioners absent: Commissioner Remo Picchiatti

Staff present: Catherine Czerniak, Director of Community Development

1. Introduction of Commissioners and staff and review of meeting procedures.

Chairman Kehr asked the members of the Commission and staff to introduce themselves and reviewed the meeting procedures followed by the Commission.

2. Consideration of the minutes of the March 13, 2019 Plan Commission meeting.

Consideration of the minutes of the March 13, 2019 Plan Commission meeting was postponed.

3. Introduction and Opening of Public Hearing: Consideration of an update to the chapter of the City's Comprehensive Plan relating to the Waukegan Road/Settlers' Square Business District and the surrounding area. *No Commission action is requested at this time.*

Presented by: City Staff

Chairman Kehr introduced the agenda item and asked the Commission to declare any conflicts of interest or Ex Parte contacts. Hearing none, she swore in all those intending to speak.

Ms. Czerniak explained that at the City Council's direction, an update to the City's Comprehensive Plan is underway. She stated that the Plan was last adopted as a whole in 1998 adding that various chapters have been updated and amended since that time. She stated that historically, the City has undertaken a complete review and update of the Comprehensive Plan about every 20 years. She explained that the current update is occurring in phases, with each phase, or chapter, adopted individually as the process moves forward. She stated that at the end of the process, the various chapters will be integrated and the Plan re-adopted as a single comprehensive document. She stated that the goal is to integrate topics such as sustainability, transportation and stormwater management through the document. She stated that once approved, the updated Plan may lead to consideration of amendments to the zoning chapter or other chapters of the City

Code, policy changes, infrastructure improvements and will be useful to the City Council in determining the priority for capital expenditures. She said that adhoc citizen working groups will be appointed to advise staff and provide early opportunities for public input and, as an outcome of the working group process, staff will develop a draft of an update to each chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. She stated that a draft of each chapter will be presented to the Plan Commission for formal review through a public hearing process, Commission deliberation and ultimately, a recommendation to the City Council. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan does not carry the weight of zoning but instead, establishes a vision for the community that will help guide future development decisions. She reiterated that as each chapter is updated, a framework will be in place for actions to help move toward the adopted vision. She stated that the first chapter presented to the Commission for review is related to the Waukegan Road/Settlers' Square business district. She stated that in addition to the draft update of the chapter related to the Waukegan Road/Settlers' Square Business District, the current chapter of the Comprehensive Plan that pertains to this area was also included in the Commission's packet along with a map showing existing land uses and residential densities in the surrounding areas. She clarified that the vision presented in the draft update is intended to guide decisions as new development and redevelopment occurs in the area with a focus on how future changes in the area can support and enhance the business district. She added that the Comprehensive Plan is intended to identify opportunities and, to the extent possible, suggest ways to address challenges in the area. She reviewed the Waukegan Road/Settlers' Square business district noting that Waukegan Road, a State highway, and the rail road tracks extend through the business district in a north/south direction. She stated that the Waukegan and Everett Road intersection supports considerable traffic especially during peak commuting times and pointed out that its proximity to the at-grade railroad crossing causes congestion in this area. She noted that an intersection improvement project is pending which will add right turn lanes to southbound Waukegan Road and eastbound Everett Road. She stated that the project is currently targeted to begin in summer, 2020. She pointed out some of the existing businesses in the area and landmarks to orient the group. She explained that the colors reflected on the map represent the proposed land use designations which resulted from the discussions of the Working Group and public input to date. She noted that Waukegan Road is a major traffic corridor and that the railroad tracks create a barrier for vehicles and pedestrians. She stated that the draft update recommends providing the opportunity for increased residential densities in and around the business district in order to support a variety of businesses and make the business district more viable. She noted for example a new restaurant, Little Tails, recently opened in the Forest Square commercial center however, it will only survive if local residents and residents from the larger region patronize it. She added that the draft document also supports greater flexibility in the business district to allow a mix of different types of uses: retail, restaurants, offices and residential. She noted that the draft document encourages increasing pedestrian connections to and through the area to encourage people who live nearby to walk to the area and to encourage people at the train station or at various businesses, to patronize

surrounding businesses while they are in the area. She noted that providing for safe pedestrian crossings at streets and the railroad tracks was a topic of discussion recognizing that the wide, higher speed road and the railroad tracks present obstacles for pedestrians. She noted that the draft document speaks to considering ways to slow traffic through the area recognizing that Waukegan Road is a State highway intended to move traffic efficiently through the area. She noted that several years ago, the City was successful in convincing IDOT to reduce the speed through the area from 45 to 35 however, further reductions may be difficult to achieve. She noted that consistent signage and identifying the entrances to the business district to the north and south along Waukegan Road may be helpful in creating an identify and slowing traffic to some extent. She reviewed the areas recommended for mixed use; the east side of Waukegan Road the full length of the business district and the southwest corner of Waukegan and Conway Roads. She noted that the intention is that mixed use developments could provide employees and residents nearby to support businesses in the immediate area as the area changes over the next 5, 10 or 20 years. She noted that the draft document recommends that the area west of Waukegan Road, adjacent to the railroad tracks, should remain residential due to the limited access, narrow configuration and adjacency to the railroad tracks. She noted however that the recommendations encourage shared parking and pedestrian pathways to allow people to move from business to business easily and safely. She stated that the updated document recognizes that in order for the business district to be successful and provide the goods and services desired by the community, it needs to attract people from the larger community and from surrounding communities, not just from the surrounding residential neighborhoods. She noted that the City owned property west of the railroad tracks, the train station and parking lots to the north and south, is recognized in the draft document as having the ability to support parking needs not only for commuters, but also for employees in the business district. She noted that over the long term, the draft document recommends that if additional parking is needed to support the business district, consideration be given to building below grade or above grade parking within the foot print of the existing surface lots, perhaps in combination with one of more other uses; residential or small scale retail or office. She noted that the working group discussed the City owned, vacant parcel located on the northwest corner of Telegraph and Everett Roads. She stated that a number of years ago, the City Council directed that the property be land banked in the event that additional parking is needed for commuters using the train station. She stated that the current recommendation is that the existing surface parking lots provide sufficient opportunity in their current form, or with future enhancements, to meet current and future parking needs. She stated that the Working Group was split however on whether the corner parcel should be designated for moderate density residential development or for small scale office or retail use. She stated that discussion and direction is needed on this question from the Plan Commission. She noted that the site is currently zoned for commercial use. She noted that the draft document includes a recommendation on a ten acre parcel located on the south side of Everett Road, east of Waukegan Road. She stated that the property is currently configured as two five acre parcels, in a single

ownership, each developed with a home. She noted that the property is currently zoned for 60,000 square foot, single family lots. She stated that the draft document recommends designating this parcel for moderate density residential recognizing that it is located between townhome developments that range from 4.5 to 6 units per acre and a single family residential neighborhood with acre and a half lots. She added that the long, narrow configuration of the parcel does not lend itself to development with acre and a half lots. She added that consideration of tying any new development in this location into existing developments is also recommended. She reiterated that the recommendations include providing for pedestrian access from the residential neighborhoods to the business district. She stated that the draft document is presented to the Commission at this time for initial consideration, questions, direction and comments. She stated that after discussion, and after hearing public input, it would be appropriate to continue this matter to allow refinement as directed and further review at an future meeting.

At Chairman Kehr's invitation, Commissioner Douglass noted that he was a member of the Working Group that served in an advisory role to City staff as the draft update to the Comprehensive Plan for the Waukegan Road Business District was developed. He commented that the opportunity to bring multi-family development and increased residential density into the area will add to the vibrancy of the business district. He confirmed that the Working Group was divided on whether the City owned parcel located on the northwest corner of Everett and Telegraph Roads should remain designated for commercial uses or be designated for moderate density residential use. He stated that in his opinion, the property is too far west to attract a viable commercial use. He stated that the process to date, including the Working Group and community input opportunities, established a strong framework for the Commission's discussion.

Chairman Kehr invited questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Freeman expressed concern that the mixed use designation, if a corresponding zone change was implemented in the short term, could result in only a small commercial district remaining over time with businesses being displaced by residential development. He stated that it will be important to send a message that the intent is for residential development to augment, but not replace, a viable commercial district in the area. He noted that only the west side of Waukegan Road is identified in the draft document for solely commercial uses adding that it is a small area currently dominated by banks. He stated that it is unsettling to think that the size of the business district could be reduced to accommodate residential development. He stated that businesses in the area should not be foreclosed from locating in the area adding that the Code should be written to make it easier for desired businesses and developments to receive approval without a public hearing process. He observed that a portion of the property on which St. Patrick's Church is located is designated for commercial use in the current Comprehensive Plan but is developed with the Church, an institutional use. He stated his appreciation for the work of the adhoc group and the input received from the public to date.

In response to questions from Commissioner Freeman, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the intent of the mixed use concept is to provide opportunities to enhance the area by adding residential density. She clarified that the Comprehensive Plan presents a vision for the future and does not mandate immediate change. She stated however that it is reasonable to expect that the City Council may direct the Plan Commission to review the language of the B-1 zoning district, after the Comprehensive Plan update is approved, to determine whether changes to the Code are needed to support, encourage and direct the type of development that is desired. She stated that the draft language now before the Commission can be modified to make it clear that commercial uses are intended to be the dominant use in the business district. With respect to the 10-acre parcel on the south side of Everett Road, she confirmed that the intent of the draft is to support development of that parcel with a residential density and product type that creates an appropriate transition between the existing residential developments to the east and west.

In response to comments from Commissioner Freeman, Commissioner Douglass clarified that the intent of the mixed use designation is not to reduce the amount of commercial development in the area but instead, to increase residential densities in the area with the hope of eventually attracting more retail to the area than exists today and with the intent of supporting a vibrant business district in the area.

Commissioner Athenson commented that the vision presented in the current Comprehensive Plan for the Waukegan Road business district is spot on. She expressed disappointment that the vision presented, with businesses fronting on the streets, rather than parking in front of the buildings, was not achieved. She stated that the updated Comprehensive Plan needs to be more fully integrated into the work of the other Boards and Commissions to assure that the established vision is achieved. She stated that having the Comprehensive Plan to support her comments in her earlier role on the Building Review Board, would have been helpful. She noted that development along Waukegan Road is vehicle oriented rather than pedestrian oriented as a result of the current development pattern.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that during the Plan Commission's discussions about the Forest Square development, there was significant discussion about locating the buildings near Waukegan Road and the parking to the rear of the buildings. She noted however that ultimately, the developer at that time presented a convincing case for the site plan that was ultimately approved by the Plan Commission and City Council which locates parking in front of, behind and underneath the development and locates a majority of the building back from the streetscape. She reiterated that the Comprehensive Plan is intended to establish a high level vision from which amendments may be made to the requirements in the Zoning Code. She added that balancing regulation with an appropriate amount of flexibility is important to attract and support commercial development. She explained that the potential for a pedestrian underpass, to provide access from the train station on the west side to

the businesses on the east side, has been discussed and is being explored through engineering studies. She stated that the City Council has not yet taken a position on whether a pedestrian underpass should be pursued. She confirmed that as part of the working group discussions, the vision of a vehicular underpass on Everett Road, to eliminate the at grade railroad crossing, was discussed. She acknowledged that such a project would be very expensive, would require that a significant amount of land be acquired from adjacent private properties and is not currently in discussion or exploration stages.

In response to questions from Commissioner Ruggles, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that currently, the B-1 district permits multi-family residential development but does not include language encouraging a mixed use type of development. She confirmed that adding outlots, near the streetscape, in existing developments along Waukegan Road is possible however, parking would be displaced and at least on some sites, parking is at a premium. She stated that it is important that parking is adequate and functional for both employees and customers to support businesses. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan and zoning can encourage and provide opportunities however, decisions on whether to make changes to existing developments would be up to the private property owners.

Chairman Kehr stated that it is her assumption that residents in the surrounding area would like to see more commercial businesses in this district. She agreed that in order to support additional businesses in this area, more residential density is needed which will likely need to come in the form of multi-family housing. She suggested that the updated Comprehensive Plan could offer strong support for appropriate multi-family developments in the area. She acknowledged that additional residential density and businesses will generate more traffic in the area which is also a concern for some people. She also acknowledged that since most of the area is already developed, there are limited options for adding residential density to the area. She suggested that a map reflecting existing and potential pedestrian walkways and cross walks be added to the draft document. She observed that there are ample sidewalks in the area however, the crosswalks could benefit from being more clearly marked both for pedestrians and to be more noticeable to oncoming traffic. She stated that improved walkability through the area and increased residential densities in and around the area will both help to support and attract businesses. She also stated support for identifying the entrances to the business district with consistent signage.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak agreed to verify whether or not old St. Patrick's Church or the Rectory are locally designated landmarks or on the National Register. She stated that she is not aware of any signage that speaks to the history of the area.

Commissioner Athenson stated that the area has an important history that should be documented adding that the area was home to many Irish Catholics who have farms throughout the area. She noted that St. Patrick Church was one of the first

churches in Illinois and the Church of St. Mary was its mission Church. She stated that the history is part of the character of the area and should be considered and documented as development continues. She stated that if St. Patrick Church is not designated as an historic structure, it should be.

In response to questions from Commissioner Freeman, Ms. Czerniak stated that it is reasonable to expect that some environmental clean-up may be needed on the site at the southeast corner of Everett and Waukegan Roads. She stated that at this time, there is no information to indicate that the site would not be appropriate for a mix of uses. She clarified that the mixed use concept is intended to provide an opportunity to add some residential development, but not a mandate to do so on any specific parcel.

In response to questions from Chairman Kehr, Ms. Czerniak agreed that with respect to development of the 10 acre Everett Road parcel, two access points would be beneficial. She confirmed that the Fire Department prefers two access points into and out of a neighborhood when possible. She noted however that the roads in the adjacent developments to the west of the 10 acre parcel are private roads, not public roads. She noted that the Working Group suggested that the Comprehensive Plan could encourage exploration of the potential for an integrated approach to development of the parcel with the adjacent developments.

Chairman Kehr suggested that some reference should be made in the document about drainage issues and encouraging less impervious surface. Hearing no further questions from the Commission, she invited public comments and swore in all those intending to speak.

Mike Adams, Ward 1 resident and the owner of a business located in Forest Square, stated concern about traffic speeds on Waukegan Road. He stated that additional enforcement of the speed limit should be encouraged to help slow down traffic and make the area more friendly to pedestrians.

Deborah Fischer, Lake Bluff resident, stated that she is a real estate broker in Lake Forest and Lake Bluff. She stated that she sat in on the discussions of the Working Group. She noted that she has been involved in the City's Welcome Home Campaign and noted that recently, three community events were held at the train station to bring community activity to the area. She noted that events included a wellness event, a volunteer event and a food fair. She stated that it was good to see the train station used by the community.

Hearing no further public comment, Chairman Kehr invited direction from staff. Ms. Czerniak asked the Commission for direction on any edits, refinements or additions that should be made to the draft document. She acknowledged the Chairman's request for information on existing and potential pedestrian connections and requests for further clarification that the mixed use areas are intended to

provide the opportunity for residential development to augment the area, but not displace commercial development.

Chairman Kehr invited final comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Freeman stated support for the designation of the transitional properties, the City owned property on the northwest corner of Telegraph and Everett Road and the 10-acre parcel on the south side of Everett Road, for moderate density residential development. He noted that development of this type is appropriate to bridge the different uses and densities on either side of these properties. He stated that it would be helpful to seek direction from the City Attorney on whether the privately owned roads can be leveraged to improve access to future development on the 10-acre site. He stated support for the mixed use concept with the clarification that the size of the commercial district and opportunities for businesses in the area would not be reduced. He stated that he worries about the lack of visibility for businesses because the buildings are set back from the street. He suggested that mixed use development, with second floor offices or residences, and buildings that front on the street, could dramatically change the character of the area. He recognized that there may not be developer interest in the short term but noted that the Plan is intended to be forward looking. He noted that enhancing the pedestrian nature of the area is difficult in part due to the grade change between the sidewalk and the parking lots. He noted that development of outlots, near the street, with new buildings, could help to address that issue. He stated that there are adequate sidewalks in the area, but they are not used much except by people who are walking to or from the train. He suggested that overall, the Comprehensive Plan and the Code should do a better job of setting out what is permitted to allow projects to be approved without extensive public hearings. He stated that the B-1 zoning district could do a better job of laying out the type of uses and development that is desired. He stated that the City should explore with IDOT ways to transition the speed limit in advance of the business district to slow down traffic. He noted that when approaching from the south, there is a long stretch of road that encourages vehicles to speed up as they go into the curve just south of the business district. He agreed that giving the area a sense of historic character and telling a story could help attract retailers.

Chairman Kehr noted that in Deerfield, the area at Waukegan and Deerfield Roads was developed decades ago, before development in this area. She agreed that parking availability is a concern noting that there are times when the entire parking lot at Sunset is full. She questioned whether there would be room for the development of outlots on that site.

In response to comments from Chairman Kehr, Commissioner Douglass, stated that parking is in short supply at Forest Square as well. He agreed that ideally, the commercial developments would have parking directly in front of the buildings and parking behind the buildings however the due to the size of the parcels in this area, space is limited. He stated that the ideas presented are intended to guide the

development of vacant parcels in the area and guide future redevelopment in the area. He stated that in the short term, the existing developments are not likely to change much. He suggested that the focus should be on the properties with development potential and efforts should be made to get those right in the short term.

Chairman Kehr noted that the parcel on the southeast corner of Everett and Waukegan Roads is an opportunity in the short term. She stated that parcel is near residential development and could provide the opportunity for streetscape and pedestrian enhancements.

Commissioner Ruggles noted that downtown Libertyville is also on a “drive by” street where older buildings flank the street. She noted that in that area, there is on street parking and parking lots behind the buildings. She stated that the businesses along Waukegan Road could benefit from amenities that could unify the district such as consistent signage, lighting and hardscape treatment. She agreed that there may not be short term changes to some of the established developments but stated that those developments will not always be there so the Plan is an opportunity to look forward. She noted that today, many people drive right through the area. She stated that increased residential densities in the area will bring people into the area at all times of day.

Chairman Kehr noted that although there is parking available at the train station, particularly on the weekend, it is not easy to get from the train station to the businesses.

Commissioner Athenson stated support for the draft document and agreed that the key is encouraging mixed use development to support the businesses. She stated that Libertyville is a good example of a vibrant business district. She stated that in her opinion, Deerfield is not a good example. She stated that Libertyville honors and builds on the historic character of the area and noted that a parking facility was built away from the streetscape, behind the historic buildings, to preserve the character. She stated support for development that would allow people to live above the businesses noting that the residents would be nearby to support the businesses. She noted that adding small, affordable housing units in the area would increase the housing options available in the community. She agreed that the zoning district should more clearly detail development parameters and regulations to assure that the vision established in the Comprehensive Plan is achieved. She stated that as redevelopment occurs, parking decks should be encouraged to provide more opportunity for buildings along the streetscape and denser development.

Commissioner Freeman noted that there could be future opportunities on some of the parcels that are currently developed with banks. He noted that if the Plan is intended to look long term, the Commission should assume that all of the parcels may be in play.

Commissioner Athenson noted that in the past, the Building Review Board discussed streetscape improvements along Waukegan Road and suggested the installation of a traffic light at Conway Road to support a pedestrian crossing in that area, and a median on Waukegan Road with planters. She acknowledged that both of those efforts require IDOT involvement but stated that persistence may pay off. She noted that the Board was successful in getting sidewalks installed on either side of Waukegan Road and trees planted in the parkways. She stated that patios and outdoor gathering areas should be encouraged. She noted that Everett Park is some distance away and consideration could be given to adding open space or a park in the area. She stated that the square area, on the east side of the railroad tracks, near the train station, was envisioned in the current Comprehensive Plan as a gathering area but it has not taken on that role. She suggested that consideration should be given to how to activate the square with a destination use such as a satellite library. She noted that a pedestrian underpass in that area could support increased activity. She stated that the zoning district should be more specific to restrict uses that do not promote pedestrian activity.

Chairman Kehr noted that when traveling through Deerfield there is considerable enforcement of the speed limit and stated that perhaps more focus on enforcement is needed along this stretch of Waukegan Road.

Commissioner Freeman questioned whether open space would be a draw to the area given the traffic and noise. He stated that guidance on how to encourage the development of first floor retail, with residential above, would be helpful.

Commissioner Athenson suggested that consideration be given to a heritage walk with plaques installed on the sides of buildings to highlight the history and character of the area. She stated that improved pedestrian connections are needed throughout the area including to the train station and to Everett School to make it easier for pedestrians and bicycles to get around.

Chairman Kehr acknowledged that sometimes market forces intervene and may not allow a vision to be fully realized. She reviewed five major points identified by the Commission: a strong interest in encouraging mixed use development in the form of first floor retail and second floor residential, support for increased residential densities in the area to support the businesses, improvements to the walkability of the area including exploring the possibility of lowering the speed limit through the area and creating a unified identity for the area.

In response to questions from Commissioner Douglass, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that as the various phases of the Comprehensive Plan are reviewed and updated, a cohesive document will be prepared and ideally, made available in a digital form. She confirmed that one or more consultants will be engaged as the process moves forward. She clarified that the regulatory mechanism is the Zoning Code and the Comprehensive Plan sets out a high level vision. She stated that based on the

updated Comprehensive Plan, once it is adopted, review of the Zoning Code as it pertains to different areas will likely be an action step directed by the City Council.

Commissioner Freeman thanked Commissioner Douglass and the entire working group for their efforts on this project.

Hearing no further discussion, Chairman Kehr invited a motion to continue the matter for further Commission review.

Commissioner Freeman made a motion to continue the Commission's deliberations on the update to the Comprehensive Plan as it pertains to the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square business district and direct staff to edit and refine the draft document to reflect the Commission's discussion and conduct further due diligence as appropriate.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Athenson and approved by the Commission in a 5 to 0 vote.

4. Additional public comment on non-agenda items

There was no testimony presented on non-agenda items.

5. Additional information from staff.

No additional information was presented by staff.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Czerniak
Director of Community Development