

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

A meeting of the Lake Forest Plan Commission was held on Wednesday, July 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, John Dixon, Stephen Douglass and Susan Athenson

Commissioners absent: Commissioners Remo Picchiatti and Monica Ruggles

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 June 20, 2019 Plan Commission meeting.

Consideration of the minutes of the June 20, 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. She invited a presentation by City staff.

Ms. Czerniak stated that as a follow up to the April Plan Commission meeting, the draft update of the chapter of the Comprehensive Plan that relates to the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District and the surrounding area was revised to incorporate the Commission's comments and is now presented for further Commission review. For those not familiar with the Comprehensive Plan update process to date, she reviewed that the City Council directed staff to undertake an overall review and update to the Comprehensive Plan. She stated that the Plan was last comprehensively reviewed and updated in 1998 adding that since that time, individual chapters of the Plan have been updated and new chapters adopted however, she noted that the Plan has not been looked at as a whole in about 20 years. She stated that Comprehensive Plans are intended to look out 20 or more years and establish a vision, desired outcomes, for specific areas of the

community, and the community as a whole. She stated that the current review and update is being done in phases, with adoption of the various chapters occurring over time to allow follow up actions to get underway. She explained that at the end of the review and update of key chapters; the separate chapters will be integrated into a comprehensive document. She noted that topics including infrastructure, sustainability, public safety and parks and open space will be addressed as well as part of the overall document. She stated that to assist and advise staff in developing a draft update to the chapter of the Plan that relates to the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District and surrounding area, a working group of residents and property owners familiar with the area was appointed. She noted that some members of the group are in attendance at the Plan Commission meeting. She stated that the working group toured the area, held community input sessions, assessed the existing conditions, discussed desired outcomes for the area, and identified challenges and opportunities as they relate to the desired outcomes. She stated that the draft document that was presented to the Commission in April was the result of the work of that group. She emphasized that the Comprehensive Plan is not regulatory like the Zoning Code, but instead, establishes a vision and identifies desired outcomes for the future if a site becomes available. She added that the Plan can serve as a guide for developers by identifying what the community wants to see in the area. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan is an opportunity to look ahead rather than simply react in the short term to a specific development proposal that may come forward. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan can be helpful in setting realistic expectations for property owners, developers, potential buyers and residents in the area about what is desired and intended for the area in the future. She explained that the Comprehensive Plan establishes a framework for future decisions and should be referenced by the Commission, other Boards and Commissions, the City Council and City staff in making those decisions. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan should ideally help to inform future decisions around land use and development, but also other decisions such as the City's capital budget expenditures, infrastructure improvements, public safety, and parks and open space. She spoke to the recommendations now before the Commission relating to the first phase of the update process, the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District and the surrounding area. She reviewed the key ideas recommended for the area including; flexibility, opportunities for a mix of uses, increased density, pedestrian safety and access, and increased community activities in the area. She stated that in response to comments from the Commission at the April meeting, the document has been revised to clarify that the intention of the mixed use designation is not to displace or reduce commercial uses in the area, but instead, to provide the opportunity for additional uses and increased density to support the business district. She noted that based on the Commission's last discussion, the City owned parcel on the northwest corner of Everett and Telegraph Roads is designated to provide the option for a variety of uses; small scale office, retail or service businesses and/or moderate density residential use. She noted that the Commission also indicated support for the designation of a 10 acre parcel on the south side of Everett Road, east of Waukegan Road, for moderate residential density as a transition from the

higher residential densities to the west, to the lower density of the Evergreen Subdivision. She noted that language was also added about finding a way to “tell a story” about the area, to establish a defining character, ideally with a reference to the important history of the area. She noted that the recommended update identifies consistent signage as a potential way of creating a more identifiable character for the business district including signs at the north and south entrances to the business district, along Waukegan Road. She noted that the Building Review Board recently approved updated signage for Forest Square and signage of a similar design for the adjacent property to the north. She noted that the signs provide a higher level of visibility for the businesses. She noted that a similar design could be considered for entrance signs at the north and south ends of the business district. She noted that the draft update presented to the Commission encourages collaboration with IDOT on various issues including reducing the speed limit on Waukegan Road, through the business district, and improvements to make pedestrian cross walks more visible and safer. She stated that at the request of the Chairman, a map of existing pedestrian connections and potential areas for future connections was added to the document. She stated that the Commission is asked to review the revised draft and if it is satisfactory, to forward a recommendation in support of adoption of the update to the Comprehensive Plan as it relates to the Waukegan Road/Settler’s Square Business District to the City Council. She noted that since Commissioner Ruggles was unable to attend the meeting, she provided written comments which were distributed to the Commissioners. She stated that concurrent with adoption of the update, the City Council will likely direct some follow up actions for instance, the Council may direct City staff to initiate a Plan Commission review of the B-1 zoning district to determine whether amendments are needed to align the Code with the updated vision for the Waukegan Road/Settler’s Square Business District and surrounding area. She noted that amendments to the B-1 District could include performance standards and a streamlined approval process for development proposals that comply with the Code and are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. She stated that other action steps are likely as well. She invited Commission discussion on the draft update as presented.

Chairman Kehr noted that a letter was submitted by Deborah Fischer, a local realtor and Lake Bluff resident. In response to questions in the letter, she noted that at the last meeting, at least one Commissioner noted a preference for a cohesive commercial district on the east side of the railroad tracks rather than expanding commercial uses to the west side of the tracks onto the City owned parcel. She stated however, that the update as proposed, allows the opportunity for a variety of uses to be considered for the City owned parcel on the northwest corner of Waukegan and Telegraph Roads.

Commissioner Freeman stated that the revised draft appears to adequately incorporate the Commission’s comments from the last meeting. He emphasized that amendments to the B-1 District of the Zoning Code are not before the Commission at this time. He noted that with respect to the City owned parcel, if the City Council is anxious to market the property, it could be marketed with the current

B-1 zoning with the knowledge that the Comprehensive Plan designates the property for various uses. He noted that if the marketing is not successful, the City Council could then initiate a zone change for the property. He stated that the update to the Comprehensive Plan opens the door for a variety of uses. He stated that in his opinion, the B-1 Zoning District as currently written has not been helpful to developers, residents or the Commission. He encouraged the City Council, upon adoption of the update for the area, to direct a review and amendments to the B-1 Zoning District to better align it with the vision set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. He acknowledged that the Commission was able to achieve a walkable site for the new Chase Bank based on the current Code language but stated that in his opinion, the Code needs to be more definitive. He stated that ideally, the Code will provide sufficient specificity to allow developers to obtain approvals through a streamlined process if the Code requirements and the vision are met. He encouraged conversations with IDOT to begin now.

In response to comments from Commissioner Freeman, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that City staff has been meeting regularly with IDOT representatives about the planned improvements at the Everett and Waukegan Roads intersection opening the door for discussions about the issues addressed in the Comprehensive Plan update.

Commissioner Freeman commented that if the speed limit on Waukegan Road is reduced, the City can begin aggressively enforcing the limit noting that the Village of Bannockburn is aggressive in enforcing speed limits.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak stated that updated language in the Comprehensive Plan will be shared proactively with the various Boards and Commissions and made available on the City's website for developers and residents. She noted that when Forest Square was presented for review, the Building Review Board referenced the Comprehensive Plan and had an extensive discussion about the site plan and the location of the parking. She stated however that ultimately, the decision was made to approve a plan with parking primarily on the street side of the development despite the vision set forth in the current Comprehensive Plan. She agreed that the City overall needs to be more mindful of referencing the Comprehensive Plan during various discussions.

Commissioner Athenson stated that the Comprehensive Plan that was adopted in 1998 was forward thinking and she expressed disappointment that the visions and community character ideas included in that Plan were not implemented. She stated that the City needs to have the ability to implement the vision in the Comprehensive Plan, the ability to assure that development is not only done in a way that is good for the developer, but also good for the community. She suggested that an evaluation process be put in place to gauge, over time, whether or not the vision in the Comprehensive Plan is being realized.

In response to comments by Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak stated that a chapter can be included in the Comprehensive Plan that speaks to ongoing evaluation of the progress being made toward the vision described in the Plan.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Commissioner Douglass confirmed that the Working Group reviewed the 1998 Comprehensive Plan as it relates to the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District at the start of its work.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Commissioner Freeman stated that the vision established in the Comprehensive Plan will be implemented by modifying the B-1 zoning district to align with the vision.

Commissioner Douglass explained that the reason this process was initiated for the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District at the front end of the Comprehensive Plan update process is because there was recognition that the B-1 Zoning District is not achieving the desired vision for the area. He stated that after the vision is updated, the B-1 District will need to be reviewed and amended to provide the tools necessary to achieve the desired vision.

In response to questions from Commissioner Douglass, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that a consultant is assisting staff and the working group on the update of the next chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. She confirmed that as the various pieces of the update are completed, a consultant will likely assist with compiling the various chapters into a unified document. She stated that it is her expectation that a review of the B-1 Zoning District will likely be advanced after the current chapter is updated.

Commissioner Dixon recognized the efforts of all those involved in the process to date and in developing the draft document. He noted that he is new to the discussion.

In response to questions from Commissioner Dixon, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that parking at the Telegraph Road train station is adequate to meet current demand. She noted that the update to the Plan recommends that if additional parking is needed to serve the area, it should be accomplished by using the existing surface parking lots by either adding below grade or above grade parking, perhaps in combination with small scale retail or residential uses. She noted that there is space available to expand the surface parking lot that is located just north of the fire station. She explained that currently, the City owned parcel on the northwest corner of Everett and Telegraph Roads is land banked, at the direction of the Council, in case additional parking is needed to serve commuters at the train station. She noted however that the updated Plan recommends that the City market the property and accommodate any additional parking needs by enhancing the existing surface lots. She stated that whether or not to sell City owned property and the timing for doing so is up to the City Council.

Commissioner Dixon stated support for the mixed use concept and for offering the City parcel for sale. He stated support for providing the opportunity for increased residential density on the 10-acre parcel located on the south side of Everett Road, east of Waukegan Road. He stated that in his opinion, the key to the success of the business district is in improving circulation and infrastructure. He stated that in addition to considering a reduction in the speed limit on Waukegan Road; crosswalks, tunnels and turn lanes should also be areas of focus.

In response to questions from Chairman Kehr, Ms. Czerniak reviewed that the updated Plan designates portions of the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District for mixed use development. She explained that after adoption of the Plan by the City Council, amendments to the B-1 Zoning District may be appropriate to put the tools in place to achieve the desired mix of uses. She acknowledged that there is a desire by residents in the area to not have any additional banks. She stated that a prohibition on banks in the B-1 District, or minimum separation distances between banks, could be incorporated into the Zoning Code. She stated that the Plan Commission will need to have a discussion about how tightly to regulate uses and the appropriate balance between regulation and allowing market forces to play a role. She noted that performance standards or incentives can also be used to achieve desired outcomes. She confirmed that neither St. Patrick's Church nor the Rectory are currently designated as Local Landmarks or included in a Local Historic District. She confirmed that with respect to the 10-acre parcel on the south side of Everett Road, east of Waukegan Road, the updated Plan provides the opportunity for increased density on that parcel as a transition from the lower density development to the east, to the higher density developments to the west. She added that the updated Plan encourages new development to be integrated and linked to the existing developments. She noted however, the City cannot mandate a connection to private roads; a developer would need to negotiate with the adjacent developments on that point.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak explained that the owner of the St. Patrick's Church and Rectory property could nominate the structures for local landmark designation. She explained that the City's Historic Preservation Commission would evaluate the request based on the criteria for designation in the Code. She stated that if the designation is approved, any significant changes to the structures would be reviewed by the City's Historic Preservation Commission, not the Building Review Board. She confirmed that any request for demolition of the structures would require review by the Historic Preservation Commission. She stated that designation does not prevent a property owner from requesting approval of demolition although it does make approval more difficult.

Commissioner Athenson commented that there is no significant open space in the area and suggested that the 10 acre parcel, or a portion of it, could be designated for open space or a park.

Commissioner Douglass noted that detention will be required on the property if it is developed with moderate density residential uses which will create some open space on the property.

Commissioner Freeman stated that highlighting the transitional nature of the parcel makes sense. He noted however that if a future developer is not able to reach agreement with the neighboring developments to the west, there will need to be a creative solution for development of the property. He stated that the City could initiate the rezoning of the property to help attract a developer.

Chairman Kehr noted that the proposed language in the updated Plan clearly calls out the property as transitional between the different residential densities to the east and west. She stated that will send a message to potential developers. Hearing no further questions from the Commission, she invited public comments and swore in all those intending to speak. She recognized the individuals who participated in the Working Group and thanked them for their work.

Richard Sugar, 1059 Mar Lane, thanked the Commissioners for the thoughtful review of the draft document. He stated that the Working Group spent a significant amount of time discussing how to enhance the area. He stated that he is speaking on his own behalf, not on behalf of the Working Group. He stated that it is important to create an identity for the area adding that today, the area is a plain vanilla shopping center. He stated that it could be helpful if the commercial area was identified at the north and south ends and unified as a whole. He noted that today, the area has two separate segments, the east side of Waukegan Road, and the west side. He suggested that to make the area cohesive, a pedestrian bridge from one side of Waukegan Road to the other could be considered in the location of the existing crosswalk. He stated that in addition to using the Comprehensive Plan as a planning and evaluation tool, it should also be used as a marketing tool. He noted that a developer should be able to read the Comprehensive Plan and understand what is desired. He reviewed some history of the area noting a link to two merchant sailors. He suggested that the character of the area could build on that connection and emphasize a lake, waterway and navigation theme.

Hearing no further requests to speak, and no additional questions from the Commission, Chairman Kehr invited final comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Freeman stated that the first challenge is to draw people to the area. He stated that in addition to moving the updated Comprehensive Plan language forward to the City Council, a sense of urgency should be communicated to the Council on three specific points because there are developable parcels in the area. He stated that upon adoption of the updated Plan, the B-1 Zoning District should be reviewed and amended as needed to align with the updated vision for the area. He stated that priority should also be given to considering marketing the City owned parcel and the desired development for the 10 acre parcel. He noted that to date, the business district has not developed in a way that is satisfactory to the residents in

the fourth Ward. He noted that the sidewalks along the street are adequate in the area, but they do not directly access the buildings. He stated that having buildings and businesses with more streetscape presence would be beneficial. He stated that businesses are needed to draw people to the area. He stated that it is not an infrastructure problem, but a lack of businesses that draw people to the area. He noted that the Sunset parcel is challenging due to the grade change and adjacent residential development. He reiterated that in addition to recommending approval of the updated Comprehensive Plan to the Council, follow up action on the three items mentioned should also be encouraged.

Chairman Kehr added that action should be encouraged to identify the north and south entrances to the business district and to improve the markings at the crosswalks in a way that raises awareness of the crosswalks and unifies the area.

Commissioner Athenson reiterated that the Comprehensive Plan should be the guiding document for this area and should provide direction for defining and maintaining the character of the area. She stated that the historic nature of the area is part of the character and part of the attraction to the area. She stated that the area needs a destination, something that will draw people and give them a reason to stay. She stated that the B-1 Zoning District needs to be amended to strike the right balance between what benefits the developers and what benefits the community. She stated that past decisions have been “pro-development” decisions made to promote activity in the area and the character has been lost and as a result, the area is a “pass thru” and not a destination.

At the request of Chairman Kehr, Commissioner Douglass explained that it has been a challenge to attract retail tenants to Forest Square adding that the majority of tenants today are service or food businesses.

Chairman Kehr noted that if the regulations are drawn too tightly, and the City is too restrictive, there will not be the capacity to respond to changes in the market.

Commissioner Dixon commented that the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to establish a vision and desired outcomes for the area without being restricted by current market trends or discouraged by challenges that may need to be faced. He stated that he appreciates the desire to capture or recreate a character for the area but stated that this section of the Comprehensive Plan is not the place to detail how that will occur. He stated that the draft update captures the spirit of what is desired in that area for the future. He agreed that the B-1 Zoning District should be examined to put better controls in place for future developments. He agreed with the comments about improving safety and accessibility noting that those types of improvements will support businesses.

Chairman Kehr pointed out that the draft update increases the opportunity for a mix of uses in the area and gives broad direction under which the City can adapt to

market changes while at the same time paying attention to the character of the area.

Commissioner Freeman stated that first and foremost, people need to be drawn to the area. He reiterated that there is an urgency in reviewing the B-1 Zoning District noting that it is possible that there may be some vacancies in the area in the near future as the market continues to shift. He stated that the City needs to be ready for those changes.

Commissioner Athenson reiterated the need for an ongoing evaluation process to assess how development is performing against the Plan. She stated an interest in adding something to the Plan that establishes the character of the area and identifies what is significant about the area. She agreed with the need to establish the area as a destination, like Market Square. She noted that the existing developments do not attract people to the area.

Chairman Kehr commented that currently, there is limited land available for development in the area. She noted that in her opinion, Forest Square is a high quality development. She reminded the Commission that the Building Review Board, based on input from the Commission, worked with Chase Bank to completely redesign the building so that it relates to Forest Square and gives the appearance of a unified development.

Commissioner Freeman commented that the geography of the Waukegan Road area is different from Market Square. He noted that the fundamental concepts included in the updated Plan speak generally to the desired character. He stated that amendments to the B-1 Zoning District are needed to achieve the desired outcome. He stated that staff should be directed to provide the updated Plan to the other Boards and Commissions as they consider developments in the area. He agreed that there is a need to create a culture in the area, a need to draw businesses to the area to draw traffic. He stated that the tools to do that need to be incorporated into the Zoning Code.

Commissioner Athenson stated that multi-family housing is needed in the area to increase the density and provide more people to patronize the businesses. She stated that the challenge is how to get the right mix and establish a character.

Commissioner Douglass agreed that the first step is to bring more residential density into the area. He said that more people will make the area attractive to businesses which will create a character if steps are taken to unify the district and make it more fun. He commented that in his opinion, people go to Market Square for two reasons; to patronize one or more businesses and because of the quaint character.

Commissioner Dixon agreed that the fundamental concepts included on pages 2 and 3 of the document highlight the points raised by the Commission in a broad sense.

Commissioner Freeman stated that the updates as proposed move in the right direction. He stated that he is prepared to move the update forward to the City Council with the recommendations for follow up actions on the B-1 Zoning District, the City parcel and the ten acre parcel as the priorities.

Commissioner Douglass asked if the Commission is comfortable with a mixed use designation on the City parcel to provide the flexibility to attract a workable use.

Commissioner Freeman stated that flexibility should be provided to let the market determine what it should be. He noted that as drafted, the update to the Plan provides opportunities for various uses or a mix of uses on the parcel.

The other Commissioners concurred.

Hearing no further discussion, Chairman Kehr invited a motion.

Commissioner Freeman made a motion to recommend approval of the update to the Comprehensive Plan for the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District and surrounding area to the City Council and to urge the City Council to direct a review of the B-1, Neighborhood Business District parcel, to consider marketing the City owned parcel and to further detail the intended use of the 10-acre transition parcel on the south side of Everett Road.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dixon.

Commissioner Athenson directed staff to incorporate the updated Plan into the reviews conducted by the other Boards and Commissions.

The Commission approved the motion in a 6 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