

The City of Lake Forest
Plan Commission
Proceedings of the February 12, 2020 Meeting

A meeting of the Lake Forest Plan Commission was held on Wednesday, February 12, 2020, at 6:30 p.m., at City Hall, 220 E. Deerpath, Lake Forest, Illinois.

Commission members present: Chairman Kehr and Commissioners Jamie Moorhead, John Dixon, Monica Artmann Ruggles, and Susan Athenson

Commissioners absent: Commissioner Michael Freeman and Stephen Douglass

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 January 8, 2020 Plan Commission meetings.

Consideration of the minutes of the January 8, 2020 meeting was postponed.

3. Public Hearing and Action: Comprehensive Plan Update – Route 60 Entrance Corridor Chapter

Chairman Kehr introduced the agenda item and asked the Commission to declare any conflicts of interest or Ex Parte contacts. Hearing none, she noted that she received a call from a resident about the Comprehensive Plan update and directed the resident to contact City staff to submit testimony to be shared with the entire Commission. She noted that the Commission heard an initial presentation on this agenda item at the December meeting and a full presentation from the City's consultants at the January meeting. She stated that the petition is now before the Commission for continuation of the public hearing, follow up on questions raised at the last meeting and action. She noted that the draft document is available on the City's website, at the back of the room and is also available from the Community Development Department. She invited comments by the City Staff.

Ms. Czerniak reviewed that at the December and January meetings, the Plan Commission heard presentations from the City's consultants, Scott Goldstein and Lee Brown. She stated that they were instrumental in the work that was done to prepare the draft update to the chapter of the Comprehensive Plan that relates to the Route 60 Entrance Corridor for review by the Plan Commission. She noted that early in the process, Mr. Goldstein and Mr. Brown conducted individual interviews with key stake holders, held focus group sessions, and supported the

ad hoc Working Group that was formed to serve as an advisory group to staff and the consultants in preparing the draft update to the chapter. She noted that a staff memo was included in the Commission's packet and addresses the comments and questions raised by the Commission and in public testimony during the Commission's previous meetings on this matter. She added that the Commission's packet also includes a copy of the chapter on the Route 60 Entrance Corridor from the current Comprehensive Plan which was previously distributed to the Commission, maps reflecting the zoning and current land uses in the area and general information on wetlands and floodplains in the area. She emphasized that these maps are provided as background and will not be included in the Comprehensive Plan because the Comprehensive Plan is a high level, visionary document. She added that the wetlands and floodplain map is simply an indication of the potential for wetlands and floodplains in the area, and is not definitive for any specific parcel. She noted that a blackline of the draft updated chapter is included in the Commission's packet reflecting the changes made since the last meeting in response to the discussion that occurred. She said that for ease of reading, a clean copy of the chapter as now recommended by staff is also included in the Commission's packet. She stated that a land use designation map and description of each land use are also included in the Commission's packet and will be part of the updated chapter. She reviewed that this is the second chapter, the second phase of the update to the Comprehensive Plan. She said that the Commissioner previously held a public hearing and recommended approval of an update to the chapter relating to the Waukegan/Settler's Square Business District and the surrounding area. She stated that updates to the chapters relating to the Central Business District and Housing are planned followed by general updates to the Comprehensive Plan. She stated that the original intention was to begin the update process with an update to the Housing chapter however, due to active petitions and discussions about parcels in the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District and the Route 60 Entrance Corridor, the City Council advanced the updates to those chapters ahead of others. She stated her hope that work on the Central Business District and Housing chapters can be undertaken in short order. She pointed out that in the discussions of the two chapters to date, there has been a significant amount of discussion about housing as part of the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District and the Route 60 Entrance Corridor. She noted that after the key chapters of the Comprehensive Plan are updated, each will be edited to assure alignment and integration throughout the document. She stated that the updated Plan will also include information on how the Plan should be used going forward as requested by the Commission and will provide a brief look back at the history of the City's Comprehensive Plans. She reviewed that the Comprehensive Plan is not zoning, does not change the zoning on properties, and does not mandate a specific type of development. She added that the Comprehensive Plan does not prevent a property owner or a developer from presenting a proposal for a development that is not consistent with the Plan. She stated however that the approval process for development plans that are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan can be

expected to be more expeditious. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan envisions particular land uses in specific areas. She explained that although the Comprehensive Plan does not change the zoning of a property, the vision described in the Plan once it is adopted, may lead to refinements or updates to the Code or changes to the City's zoning map. She reviewed that as a follow up to the adoption of the update to the chapter of the Comprehensive Plan that pertains to the Waukegan Road/Settler's Square Business District, the B-1 zoning district is being reviewed and recommendations for changes to the text will likely be brought forward for consideration by the Commission. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan looks at the community holistically, over the long term and is intended to set realistic expectations for residents, developers and property owners. She stated that the Comprehensive Plan serves as a guide to the Boards and Commissions in reviewing development proposals and is considered by the City Council in making policy and budget decisions. She stated that a key theme that came out of the discussions to date about the Route 60 Entrance Corridor is that Conway Park is and must remain an active, high quality office park and an important economic engine of the City. She noted that the Working Group received input from various parties who explained that suburban office parks have changed from the isolated areas that they were in the past. She stated that employers in the park have expressed interest in having amenities for their employees nearby; restaurants, banks, gas stations, hotels, meeting rooms, small scale retail businesses, housing and walking and biking trails in the Park and connecting to points outside of the park. She noted that providing for transportation options for employees was also identified as important to the continued success of the office park. She noted that Metra recently added train trips to better meet the needs of employees commuting from Chicago to jobs in Lake County. She stated that many said that the shuttle bus service from the train station to Conway Park is critical in attracting employees. She stated that during the discussions to date, there was agreement that the Entrance Corridor should evoke the quality of development, landscaping and the character of Lake Forest, creating a sense of place as one enters the City. She noted that there are not many developable properties remaining in the Corridor. She pointed out that the areas has developed in a manner that is very consistent with the vision set out in the current Comprehensive Plan. She reviewed the draft land use plan. She noted that the land use plan reflects current uses and provides direction on future uses for undeveloped or under developed properties and in general provides for greater flexibility with respect to the mix of land uses that are encouraged. She noted that the plan calls out the need for some flexibility with respect to the setback from Route 60 if commercial uses are desired on the Amberley Woods parcel in particular. She also pointed out that the Plan identifies the need for appropriate transitions between commercial and residential uses. She stated that the Plan identifies the need to address access issues including limiting cut through traffic in residential neighborhoods, providing for emergency access and encouraging coordination between property owners in areas where adequate access does not currently exist. She acknowledged that in past discussions, the

Commission raised the possibility of incorporating residential development within the office park. She stated that in discussions with the owners and businesses in the office park, serious concerns were raised about locating residential development within the office park. She noted however that there is great interest in providing a variety of housing options near the office park to help attract employees to the area. She stated that the Plan supports easing minimum parking requirements adding that in Conway Park, most businesses have parking that exceed the minimum requirements in the Code. She stated that the Plan as drafted provides the opportunity to redevelop small areas within existing parking lots as outlots if in the future, there is a reduced demand for on-site parking. She stated that in the discussions to date, interest was expressed in establishing clearer development standards to help streamline the approval and to set realistic expectations for all parties from the start of a development discussion. She reviewed the proposed land use designation map noting the increased flexibility provided and the general trend toward mixed use development. She pointed out the Lake Forest Academy Campus noting that the Academy remains strongly committed to maintaining the Campus in its current configuration with a private road and on site housing for faculty. She pointed out the opportunity areas on the plan, in particular the parcels owned by the Messerveys and Lake Forest Open Lands. She noted that potential land uses are identified for these parcels which are located in a transitional area between higher intensity uses to the west and single family homes to the east. She noted that the Plan acknowledges the challenges on these parcels including environmentally sensitive areas and access limitations. She reviewed the Amberley Woods parcel which is also identified as an opportunity area and noted the developed portions of the 40 acre Amberley Woods site and the areas where development potential remains. She stated that the 8.5 acre portion of the Amberley Woods site located at the corner of Route 60 and Saunders Road was identified as an ideal site for commercial development to provide the desired amenities to support the office park. She noted that the Commission considered preliminary plans for this site about a year ago which lead to the advancement of the update to the Route 60 Entrance Corridor Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. She stated that the owner of the 8.5 acre parcel was actively engaged in the discussions to date. She noted the Saunders Road area as a third opportunity area noting that the City extended sanitary sewer and water to the area since the last update to the Comprehensive Plan. She noted that the Plan as now presented identifies the possibility for increased density in this area but acknowledges that the area is impacted by the proximity of the Tollway and wetlands. She concluded her overview of the draft plan and offered to answer questions. She stated that if the Commission is prepared to do so, after hearing additional public comments and after deliberation, it would be appropriate to forward a recommendation on the Route 60 Entrance Corridor Chapter to the City Council.

Chairman Kehr invited questions from the Commission.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that many of the suggestions offered by Ms. Lopat were incorporated into the draft Plan. She noted that the changes made to the document since the Commission's last meeting are highlighted. She confirmed that the updated Plan will include an overview of what was accomplished since the last Comprehensive Plan. She noted that in the Route 60 Entrance Corridor, much of what was envisioned in 1998 and 2001 Comprehensive Plan has been achieved. She confirmed that the Comprehensive Plan is referenced in the work done by the various Boards and Commission and she agreed that information will be included in the updated Plan to more clearly articulate that the Comprehensive Plan should be actively used by the various Boards and Commissions to guide development related decisions.

Commissioner Athenson encouraged a process to be established to assure that the City's progress in relation to the vision set out in the Comprehensive Plan is evaluated periodically, more often than every 20 years. She suggested enhancing the vision to provide more specifics similar to the bullet points offered in the presentation.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak stated that if the Commission so directs, a reference to light rail can be incorporated into the Plan. She offered that an alternative would be to reference "enhancing transportation options" in general without specifically highlighting light rail. She confirmed that the draft Plan recognizes the opportunity for adaptive reuse of the historic residence on the 8.5 acre Amberley Woods parcel but does not mandate preservation of the residence. She confirmed that moderate density and a variety of housing options are encouraged in the Plan. She stated that the permitted density for individual parcels would be determined by the Zoning Code and through review and approval of specific development proposals. She acknowledged that the draft Plan recommends flexibility in the established setback along Route 60 in very limited areas, to support the viability of commercial development. She noted that the Plan details that in exchange for consideration of a reduction in the setback, a high quality plan which offers the desired amenities would need to be presented. She noted that since the last meeting, a sidewalk was added on the south side of Route 60 from Old Bridge Road to Saunders Road. She explained that the pedestrian crossing over the Tollway is on the north side of Route 60 so west of Saunders Road and Field Drive, a pedestrian/bicycle path is only reflected on the north side of Route 60. She reviewed the concept of streamlining the development approval process noting that the intent is not to eliminate Board and Commission review but instead, to allow decisions to be made more quickly. She noted that setting out clearer expectations of what the City desires could help to expedite reviews.

In response to questions from Commissioner Moorhead, Ms. Czerniak explained that the use of the term "first class office park" reflects both the mix of global tenants in the office park as well as the quality of landscaping and architecture.

She confirmed that the office park generates a significant amount of property taxes for the City. She confirmed that in the past, a tree survey was completed on the 8.5 acre Amberley Woods parcel but noted that the condition of some of the trees on the site has likely changed since the survey was completed. She noted that there is an approved plan for the site which would result in the removal of many trees. She explained that the 150 foot setback is reflected on the plat of subdivision for the Amberley Woods parcel and an amendment to the plat of subdivision and approval of a specific plan through a Special Use Permit process would need to be considered by the Plan Commission in order to change the setback. She stated that she is not certain whether there could be an opportunity for historic tax credits or a property tax freeze to support preservation of the historic residence but noted that the other consideration would be whether or not the residence fits into a workable development plan. With respect to Opportunity Area 2, located west of Academy Drive, she stated that to her knowledge, there is not a conservation easement on the property. She acknowledged that cooperation and coordination between several property owners will be necessary in order for that area to be developed.

In response to questions from Commissioner Ruggles, Ms. Czerniak stated that after approval of the Comprehensive Plan, the Zoning Code could be amended to include specific design parameters for entrance features. She cautioned however that without a development plan, it is difficult to pre-determine what an entrance feature or features should be. She stated that the Plan suggests high quality architecture and materials, significant landscaping and an element or elements that evoke the character of Lake Forest.

Commissioner Ruggles agreed that the Plan as drafted offers some good guidance in this area and stated her hope that the entrance feature is more than just a building with a parking lot.

Chairman Kehr offered some comments on the wording of the vision. She suggested that the point be made that the quality of the tenants in Conway Park add to the stature of the City as a whole, not just to the tax base. She stated support for the language that supports consideration of some flexibility with respect to the setbacks if a development plan is presented that offers appropriate amenities and quality.

Commissioner Dixon stated support for the language relating to the setbacks as presented.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak stated that the vision is that the entire Route 60 Corridor, not just Conway Park, becomes active with walkers and bikers.

Hearing no further comments from the Commission, Chairman Kehr invited public comment.

Keith Krebs, 1815 Amberley Court, noted the discrepancy on the map with respect to the numbering. He stated that he has a unique perspective having lived in one of the Amberley Court homes for seven and a half years. He stated that he believes that a cul-de-sac at the west end of Amberley Court would help to support the build out of the residential area along with some certainty on what will be built on the 8.5 acre site. He stated that updating the floor plans for the courtyard homes to add first floor master bedrooms could make the units more attractive. He suggested that consideration be given to moving the fire station into the Route 60 Corridor, on to the compost center site.

Peter Tremulis stated that he is a real estate agent in Deerfield and has been following the update to the Comprehensive Plan. He suggested that a fiscal impact analysis be completed to help guide decisions about the type of development desired on the remaining developable properties with an eye toward the long term financial benefit the development will provide. He suggested that a goal of the Plan should be to transition at least the south portion of Academy Drive to public right-of-way and to provide for a connection from Academy Drive, through the Packaging Corporation of America site. He stated that a third access into the office park would be beneficial. He stated that with the additional access, high density development could occur in the opportunity area. He stated that he does not believe that the existing train use on the Lake Forest Open Lands property has ever been permitted by the City. He stated that in his experience, conducting a visual preference survey is one way to identify images of what the Commission and community may want the Route 60 Corridor to look like.

Kurt Kusick, 1165 Mount Vernon, stated that his family chose Lake Forest five years ago for low taxes, the schools and Lake access. He stated that he is a member of the Caucus. He noted that in his opinion, Lake Forest differs from other communities because of the civic mindedness of the residents and the focus on the betterment of the whole, instead of on individual needs. He noted however that property values are declining. He suggested that the business park be re-thought to appeal to Millennials who may want to commute by bicycle and have local options for food and drink. He stated that "fun" is missing from the community. He questioned whether affordable housing options near the business park is a realistic goal. He stated that the vision is from a 1950's mindset which is contributing to the challenges that Lake Forest is facing and suggested that the Route 60 Corridor is an opportunity to shift the mindset of the community toward more fun and inclusion.

Linda Liang, 75 Ashbury Court, thanked the Commission for the work being done on this important issue. She stated that the plan should offer a sense and feel of

what the community is about. She stated support for a consistent setback along Route 60 noting that a building pushed forward will look out of place. She stated that because the corridor is mostly developed, it is a challenge to infill the remaining sites in an appropriate way. She noted that there should be a significant, welcoming feature along the Route 60 Corridor like the river walk in San Antonio. She expressed concern about zoning being done on a case by case basis. She noted concern about drainage issues noting that adding more hardscape in the area will not be helpful. She expressed concern about traffic as well. She stated that there should be a focus on maintaining the character of the residential parcels as well as the office park.

Deborah Fischer, a Lake Bluff resident and real estate professional, noted she supported the previous proposal that was submitted for the Amberley Woods 8.6 acre parcel which included a senior living facility. She questioned why age restricted housing is discouraged in the entrance corridor noting that in her opinion, there is a huge need for senior housing. She asked that the language be removed. She agreed that there needs to be an openness to reducing the setback along Route 60. She stated that new residents are coming from more urban environments and expect to see more than trees and setbacks. She noted that people want to see commercial activity and she noted that the darkness of the community does not promote vitality. She asked the Commissioners keep an open mind regarding the setbacks. She stated support for providing flexibility with respect to the historic residence on the Amberley Woods property noting that it is in poor condition.

Hearing no further questions from the Commission, Chairman Kehr closed the public hearing and invited final questions from the Commission.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak explained that the hobby railroad on the Lake Forest Open Lands property existed prior to the annexation of the property to the City. She stated that based on advice from the City Attorney, the railroad use is grandfathered in as a non-conforming use. She stated that if the use is discontinued, it could not be re-established. She stated that the update as proposed contemplates a variety of possible uses for the site in the future. She stated that the City is willing to facilitate discussions among the property owners in the area about the future of the opportunity area.

Commissioner Dixon encouraged the City to facilitate discussions among property owners if they are willing, in an effort to plan for the future of the site.

In response to questions from Commissioner Dixon, Ms. Czerniak explained that during the discussions there was great interest in assuring that the few remaining developable parcels along Route 60 be designated for commercial uses to enhance and support the office park and surrounding residential neighborhoods. She stated that is why the Plan discourages use of these key parcels for senior

housing a use which does not require high visibility. She reviewed the language pertaining to the historic residence on the Amberley Woods parcel noting that preservation and adaptive reuse of the house, as part of a commercial development, is called out, but not mandated.

Commissioner Dixon suggested that the language be refined to make it clear that the residence on the Amberley Woods parcel does not need to remain at the expense of a workable commercial development. He stated that the flexibility to remove the house should be provided.

Commissioner Athenson noted that the residence is designated as a Local Landmark.

In response to questions from Chairman Kehr, Ms. Czerniak confirmed that the developer/owner of the Amberley Courtyard home can come forward with further changes to the floor plans or architecture of the homes as has occurred in the past. She stated that depending on the magnitude of the changes proposed, Board or Commission review may be required. She confirmed that financial impact studies are required for significant development at the time plans are submitted. She agreed to refine the map to reflect Old Bridge Road. She spoke to the concept of an entrance element noting that the element would likely be defined and discussed as part of the consideration of any development proposal.

Hearing no further questions from the Commission, Chairman Kehr invited Commission discussion.

Commissioner Dixon reviewed that flexibility should be provided to support the removal of the historic residence, if appropriate. He stated that he is not advocating for the removal of the residence, but would like to see an openness to considering removal if appropriate.

Commissioner Moorhead agreed with Commissioner Dixon that the flexibility to remove the house if necessary to create a viable development should be provided. He stated that although it would be ideal to incorporate the façade of the building into a development as part of an entrance statement, it may not be possible.

Commissioner Athenson disagreed with Commissioners Dixon and Moorhead and suggested adding language that more strongly encourages adaptive reuse of the house. She noted that the community is known for preserving landmark buildings. She expressed concern that by allowing the removal of the building, the community could be opening the door to the demolition of more historic structures. She acknowledged that economically, many historic buildings are facing challenges. She cautioned against changing the community's

commitment to preservation. She said that in her opinion, the developer should be required to give serious consideration to adaptive reuse of the house.

Chairman Kehr commented that it is difficult to require the building to be saved given how the overall area has developed. She stated support for encouraging adaptive reuse, but not mandating it.

Commissioner Ruggles thanked everyone who participated in the process of developing the update to the Route 60 Entrance Corridor chapter.

Commissioner Moorhead stated support for the updated chapter noting that it is important to support Conway Park. He stated support for development of Opportunity Area 3 for commercial uses and for allowing development of outlots in existing parking lots if the demand for parking goes down in the future. He stated support for a cul-de-sac at the west end of Amberley Court and an emergency access connection between the Academy and Conway Park. He also stated support for enhanced bike and pedestrian trails to and through the area. He stated that he is supportive of the revisions discussed by the Commission.

Commissioner Athenson asked that the document be further proofed and refined. She asked that the vision be expanded to make it more specific to Lake Forest and less general. She asked that language be added to expand the discussion of transportation to include alternatives beyond individual vehicles. She asked that the language in the Plan encourage adaptive reuse of the historic residence. She suggested that language be added about maintaining a consistent wooded setback along Route 60 to maintain the character of the area even if the 150 foot setback is not maintained.

Commissioner Ruggles noted that the streetscape is not wooded on the north side. She encouraged flexibility in the document to assure that development plans can be viable. She stated that the language in the draft is well written in her opinion.

Chairman Kehr stated that it is important to be realistic that a commercial development needs visibility. She stated that it will be important for the Commission to see an overall development plan to determine the extent of the setback and landscaping that may be appropriate.

Commissioner Athenson stated that in her opinion, it is important to maintain a landscape dominant feature along the streetscape.

Commissioner Ruggles stated that the language in the draft related to setbacks is clear and appropriate and speaks to the importance of a high quality plan, architecture and landscaping.

In response to questions from Commissioner Athenson, Ms. Czerniak stated that in the opinion of some people, there is no high density residential in Lake Forest. She stated that a three or four story development can be moderate density. She cautioned that "high density" may imply more density than the Commission intends. She stated that the current language provides flexibility in housing types and density.

Chairman Kehr stated support for providing flexibility in the Plan.

Commissioner Athenson suggested extending a sidewalk along the south side of Route 60 all the way to Waukegan Road. She expressed hesitation in including language relating to streamlining the review process in the Plan.

Chairman Kehr noted that the intent of "streamlining" the process does not mean avoiding all public review but instead, allowing developments to proceed through the review process more quickly. Hearing no further comments from the Commission, she invited a motion.

Commissioner Dixon made a motion to recommend approval of the update to the Route 60 Entrance Corridor chapter to the City Council conditioned upon refined language pertaining to: encouraging consideration of adaptive reuse of the historic residence on the Amberley Woods parcel and encouraging exploration of alternative modes of transportation in the Corridor in the future.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moorhead and was approved by a vote of 4 to 1 with Commissioner Athenson voting nay.

3. Additional public comment on non-agenda items

There was no testimony presented on non-agenda items.

4. Additional information from staff.

The Commission approved the Plan Commission meeting calendar for 2020 with changes to the meeting dates in May and November as reflected on the schedule presented.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:62 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Czerniak
Director of Community Development