

CITY OF AURORA
OHIO
Master Plan Review Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 9, 2017

The Master Plan Review Commission met in a scheduled meeting on Tuesday, May 9, 2017, in Council Chambers of City Hall. Laura Stith, Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Present:	Nick Austin Matt Gilmore Shannon Keibler Dale Moravec, Vice Chairman Jennifer Stanley Laura Stith, Chairman Joan Tomko
Absent:	Lucy Zmary Evan Webster
Also Present:	Denise Januska, Director of Planning, Zoning, & Building Division Ann Womer Benjamin, Mayor John Trew, Director of Public Services Jeff Clark, Chairman, Landmark Commission John Kudley, Vice Chairman Landmark Commission, Councilman At Large Lauren Broderick, Landmark Commission Member Marie Lawrie, Secretary

ADOPTION OF MINUTES:

Motion: To adopt the minutes of the April 11, 2017 meeting, as submitted

Ms. Stanley moved; Ms. Tomko seconded and the motion carried, 6-0-1, on a voice vote.

Yeas: Ms. Stanley, Ms. Tomko, Ms. Stith, Mr. Moravec, Mr. Gilmore, Ms. Keibler

Nays: None

Abstentions: Mr. Austin

SUMMARY OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY ACTIVITY:

At the April meeting, the members were asked to place stickers numbered 1-4 on the infrastructure subcategories of their choice, with number one being the highest priority and number four being their lowest priority. Emil Liszniansky, of Envision provided a chart of the findings. They were also asked to draw lines on a map of the City showing

where they would most like non-motorized connections. He provided a map of those connections within the City. The thicker lines equaled common requests for connection.

SHARING OF HOMEWORK – FAVORITE HISTORIC STRUCTURES:

Ryan Smalley, of Envision asked the members to place stickers 1-3 on the Town Center historic structures that they chose as favorites on their homework pages. They gave a brief explanation as to why they liked the buildings. Some structures were chosen for their use, while others were chosen strictly for the architecture of the building. The same activity happened for the Station District historic structures. Comments were made about the Station District being a little off the beaten path with travelers leaving Aurora as they travel that direction from the City. There was some discussion about the need for cohesion, which Mr. Smalley described as the area possibly needing a sense of place or theme with design standards.

Wendy Naylor and Diana Wellman, Historic Building Preservationists from Naylor Wellman LLC were asked what thoughts they had about the structures people liked. Ms. Naylor commented that as they toured the area they noticed the Connecticut Western Reserve architecture prevalent in the area. She spoke about how people come through Aurora on their way to another place. She discussed the idea of creating a sense of arriving in a historic district and encouraging travelers to stop and enjoy the area. Ms. Wellman spoke about the Greek Revival structures in the area and the beautiful Queen Anne residence. She further observed that the Station District has an entirely unique feel as a working/building area with the train depot and that both areas were liked even with the different functionalities. She noticed how many members mentioned that the Station District was charming.

SHARING OF HOMEWORK – PREFERRED ADAPTIVE REUSES:

As part of the homework from the April meeting, the members were asked to rate their top 5 additional amenities for the Town Center and the Station District. Choices included boutique retail, office space, green space, dining, fitness areas, housing etc. Members were asked also to invite 5 other residents to complete a survey as well. The members were asked to place stickers of their own top 3 choices on a large display board. Comments made by members as they placed their stickers including a desire for non-chain dining options, small quaint boutiques, small group meeting areas, and public space. There was a desire for a fun, walkable atmosphere. When asked, members wanted a balance between dining in the Town Center and the Station District. Many members were looking for outdoor park space and indoor community space in the Station District. Many were looking for a brewery in that same area.

Mr. Smalley summarized the trends he was seeing by stating that the Station District seemed to be community oriented choices and the Town Center seemed to be retail driven.

Mr. Liszniansky mentioned that it was insightful that the Station District was viewed as more isolated. The fact that most traffic tends to be North-South on State Routes 43 and 306, shows a difference in market demand for this area. He stated that a trailhead for a rail-trail conversion, would give that district more identity. He mentioned the possibility of retail in that area having even more purpose, such as a bike shop.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION OVERVIEW:

Ms. Naylor and Ms. Wellman, gave an overview of the work that has been prepared to date. They reviewed the 1989 Preservation Plan, 2001 Preservation Plan Update, 2005 Aurora Streetscape Historic Scenic Enhancement Program & Preliminary Alternative Development Document, and the 2013 Master Plan. They reviewed ABR & Landmark Commission codified ordinances and design guidelines. They looked at the National Register nominations, and buildings documented on the Historic American Buildings Survey. They read over the proposed Overlay District plan, met with Planning Staff, and walked and photographed the Aurora Center Historic District.

Creating a Historic Town Center Identity, Heritage Tourism, National Register and Local Landmarks, Rehabilitation and Maintenance of Historic Resources, Historic Design Review and Implementation and Funding were discussed.

Aurora was established in 1799. The major intersecting roads of State Routes 306, 43, 82 and Pioneer Trail were established between 1802-1806. It was stated that many towns have re-routed this type of traffic out of the center of town. It was further stated that it was good to have that traffic through town and a discussion ensued about how to get those travelers to stop and patronize the community amenities. Expansion of the historic districts was mentioned.

The National Register of Historic Places was explained and the benefits and incentives of this listing were discussed including increased property values, low interest rate loans, design assistance etc. Federal and State Tax Credits were explained. These tax credits require that projects follow the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. These tax credits are available for a substantial rehabilitation project of an income producing historic building.

The Pipeline Initiative Grant program was discussed. This program offers grants through the Ohio Development Services Agency. A \$12,000 grant is available for increasing the boundary of or listing a historic district on the National Register. Listing buildings on the National Register makes them eligible for state and federal tax credits. The Pipeline program is not competitive and takes 6-8 weeks to process. This is a rolling program without specific application deadline dates.

Historic Design Review was discussed. Ms. Naylor stated that historic design guidelines have been proven to stabilize and protect the value of properties in that district. It provides predictability about the appearance of the district and what will happen if construction projects commence. It will encourage investment in your historic area. She recommended historic district design guidelines for the Town Center tailored to Aurora showing the styles and character defining elements we currently have in Aurora.

Implementation and Funding was a topic of discussion. Certified Local Government grants, Federal and State Tax Credits, Heritage Home Loan Program with the Cleveland Restoration Society, and Certified Local Government grants were all mentioned as options. Downtown Redevelopment District and Main Street Program – Heritage Ohio were discussed to aide with streetscape improvements. *Ohio. Find It Here* – ODSA and Main Street Program – Heritage Ohio can help with Heritage Tourism.

All of this information was discussed to give Commission Members information to aide them in their coming recommendations for Historic Preservation in the Master Plan. They would like to provide tools that can be included in the Master Plan. There was also discussion about providing this information to the Department of Economic & Entrepreneurial Development to aide in networking.

There was a discussion about allowing current construction that is respectful of the historic character of Aurora and not overbearing. It was suggested that zoning and design guidelines would steer this type of historic compatible development. Mayor Womer Benjamin commented on just how vigilant the City has to be with current projects to protect the character of Aurora. With the increase in development in the last few years, the City has had to decline projects that would not be compatible. This can be challenging with the determination of developers. With the upcoming redevelopment of the Geauga Lake area, design standards are in place and the first project underway is being held to these standards.

Members of the Landmark Commission were present at the meeting. They were invited to ask questions. Jeff Clark, Chairman of the Landmark Commission invited everyone

to attend their upcoming meeting. He also thanked the Mayor for her focus on the historic district. He mentioned that there is currently no bank committed to supporting the Heritage Home Loan Program in Portage County. With his experience over the years with the Landmark Commission, there have been programs in place that no one took advantage of primarily because of stipulations and requirements.

Lauren Broderick, Landmark Commission Member stated that something which has worked well of late has been to have projects come before the Commission preliminarily to open up a dialog and an opportunity for feedback before a project is officially submitted.

She also stated that as a homeowner in the district, she is not interested in a commercial use for her property and has concerns about parking, lighting, and after-hours uses for other homes in the district, as it relates to property owners who want to remain residential. She stated that current property owners might be open to the overlay district if it is handled in a respectful way that does not force them out. She further stated that she agreed with the Mayor that detailed design standards would be needed to guide and protect the vision of the district now and in the future. She has seen other communities with similar plans which were unsuccessful. The commercial uses were not sustainable and the buildings were not maintained. She reported that as a member of both Landmark Commission and Architectural Board of Review, it can be very difficult to enforce certain aspects of design without strict guidelines to support those decisions.

The consultants from Naylor Wellman LLC stated the importance of having design guidelines or a resource available to point out appropriate infill architecture as it pertains to scale, mass, proportion in relationship to historic architecture. A document that identifies specific design elements of the current dwellings will be very useful.

Ms. Broderick stated that she was surprised that Streetscaping was not a higher priority or value in the homework that was shared. A discussion ensued about the balance that was considered between the infrastructure needs verses wants for that particular topic. The administration must consider what we would like to have with what is needed within a responsible budget. Streetscaping was certainly a high desire discussed in previous meetings of the Master Plan Commission. In the context of Infrastructure, it did not score as high as Stormwater Management, Paths and Trails, Sanitary, Sidewalks and Crosswalks, or Roadways.

Mayor Womer Benjamin gave an overview of the recently constructed Pioneer Park in Town Center. Mr. John Kudley gave a brief history of Aurora as it pertains to the three historical areas of the City including Town Center, Station District, and Geauga Lake.

He further stated that property owners are reluctant to have their buildings landmarked because they fear that they will not be able to change their building to fit their needs. He further stated that the authority of the Landmark Commission pertains to the exterior only of the building and is limited to a delay of 6 months, after which time, the property owner could go forward with their plans. He mentioned that without a maintenance code, there is no ability to enforce repairs.

Mr. Clark expressed a desire for the residents of the historic district to be more informed of the Overlay plans. He also suggested that residential property tax owed within the district could be used for exterior maintenance similar to a tax abatement for a business.

Commission members asked for clarification on their role as Master Plan Commission Members. Ms. Januska explained that the exercises and homework of the Commission is designed to pull information and ideas from the membership to create recommendations for the Master Plan Review. The idea is to review what has been accomplished and come up with additional recommendations. After the review is finished, the plan will be presented to Council. Once it is adopted by Council, the goal is to work toward as many of the recommendations as possible in the coming 5 years.

Previous recommendations are currently in place. The administration has been implementing many of those recommendations over the last three years. Mayor Womer Benjamin gave a testimony about how she and administration have used the Master Plan as a guide and reference to implement as many of the recommendations as possible. Examples of these recommendations are enhancing the Town Center, Sidewalks, and Off-Street Parking. Additional plans include Streetscaping along the historic section of State Route 306. Ms. Januska spoke about work being done for Design Standards through the Overlay District, and the possibility of Design Standards for the Station District. The importance of the review and additional recommendations was confirmed.

Mr. Liszniansky presented an overview of a Downtown Redevelopment District (DRD). This is a new program authorized by the Ohio General Assembly last year in House Bill 233. It functions similar to Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Tax increment financing is a public financing method that is used as a subsidy for redevelopment and infrastructure projects. Property Owners within the DRD make service payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs) on a tax exemption up to 70% of the increased value of the real estate over the 10 year period.

Proceeds from a DRD can support loans and grants for historic rehabs and loans for non-historic rehabs, public infrastructure improvements, and Special Improvement District (SID) or Community Improvement Corporation (CIC). Requirements for the program include location within a municipality, maximum of 10 acres, and must include

at least one qualifying historic building to be rehabilitated. The area cannot be exclusively residential and cannot include parcels that are part of an active or former TIF. You must have an Economic Development Plan for the area. A Redevelopment Charge with property owners may be put in place to create addition revenue. This covenant would run with the land for a period up to the term of the DRD.

Mr. Liszniansky explained that there is a Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) that offers an 80 percent grant toward Streetscape Improvement Projects on Federal-Aid (e.g. State) Routes. He mentioned that the next time that money would be available might not be until 2023. This DRD proceeds could be applied toward the 20 percent matching funds a TAP would require.

DRD is a new program and is much smaller scale than a TIF. A DRD is 10-acre max verses a TIFF 300-acre max. Cities may create more than one DRD. A DRD is compatible with the existing Community Reinvestment Areas (CRAs) existing in Aurora currently.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Ms. Stith inquired about additional public comments. There were none.

HOMEWORK:

The members were given packets with pictures of some of the parks within the City of Aurora. They were asked to rank their top 3 desires for both passive and active amenities within the parks. They were also asked to provide feedback on which smaller parks they would like to see additional investments made in. Finally, they were given a copy of the Hartman Park development plans that are currently underway.

Mr. Liszniansky also asked the members to think about a name for the former golf course park.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Keibler moved to adjourn; Mr. Moravec seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m. on a unanimous voice vote.

Laura Stith, Chairman

Marie Lawrie, Secretary