

**CITY OF AURORA  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
June 19, 2019**

The Aurora Planning Commission met in a regularly scheduled meeting on Wednesday, June 19, 2019, in the Council Chambers of Aurora City Hall. The Planning Commission Chairman Kathi Grandillo called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

**ROLL CALL:**

Present: Laura Duguay  
Peter French  
Sarah Gilmore  
Kathi Grandillo  
Dixie Benshoff

Also Present: Denise Januska, Director, Planning, Zoning & Building Division  
Justin Czekaj, City Engineer  
Sarah Cooper, Engineer  
Jack Burge, Director, Economic & Entrepreneurial Development  
John Kudley, Council Member  
Amy Eckard, Council Member  
Laura Holman, Director of Parks and Recreation  
Dean DePiero, Law Director  
Marie Lawrie, Secretary  
Ken Lahmers, Aurora Advocate

Mr. DePiero, Law Director swore in those in attendance who wished to speak.

**SUBMISSION OF SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION**

**MOTION: To accept a letter from Deb Conti, 234 S. Chillicothe Road, for consideration**

Dr. Benshoff moved; Ms. Gilmore seconded, and the motion carried 5-0 on a roll call vote.

Yeas: Dr. Benshoff, Ms. Gilmore, Ms. Duguay, Mr. French, Ms. Grandillo

Nays: None

**MOTION: To accept a letter from Twinsburg Development Corp and the presentation from Pulte Group, for consideration**

Mr. French moved; Ms. Duguay seconded, and the motion carried 5-0 on a roll call vote.

Yeas: Mr. French, Ms. Duguay, Ms. Gilmore, Ms. Grandillo, Dr. Benshoff

Nays: None

**AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA**

None

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION: To adopt the minutes of the June 5, 2019 Meeting, as submitted**

Mr. French moved; Ms. Duguay seconded, and the motion carried 4-0-1 on a roll call vote.

Yeas: Mr. French, Ms. Duguay, Ms. Gilmore, Ms. Grandillo

Nays: None

Abstention: Dr. Benshoff

## **AGENDA ITEMS**

### **Joe and Amy Jenyk, 219 N. Bissell Road – Wetland Setback Variances in Conjunction with a Driveway for a Proposed New Residence (1905015)**

Amy Jenyk was in attendance to answer questions. She is under contract to buy the property, contingent upon getting the wetland setback variances pertaining to the driveway for the parcel.

Ms. Januska explained that this is the last lot of the previous Palmer Woods area. There are two wetlands that the driveway will need to cross. At this time she was asking the members to accept it for study. Included in the packet was a memo from the Chagrin River Watershed Partners addressing their recommendations for the driveway in the event that variances are approved. A public hearing will take place at a future meeting for the project.

Ms. Grandillo opened the floor to questions of the members. Dr. Benshoff asked if the lot was flag-shaped. Ms. Januska explained that it is, however; the frontage is approximately one foot short of the required frontage for a lot. That one foot variance was approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals at the time of the lot split. She further explained that the lot does open up at the rear of the parcel, creating a flag-shaped lot.

Ms. Gilmore asked if the driveway would be gravel, as suggested by the CRWP. The applicant was originally seeking asphalt. Ms. Januska explained that asphalt or concrete are normally required, however, when a site plan is submitted, she and the city engineer can consider and approve gravel.

Mr. French asked who requested the memo from CRWP and if the applicant was aware of the suggestion. Ms. Januska explained that the developer of the property together with the applicants requested the memo. Ms. Jenyk had not yet seen the memo and was given a copy at the meeting. Mr. French mentioned that the memo asked the city to verify that the person who stated that wetlands were present on the property, was in fact, a wetland scientist. Ms. Januska confirmed that would be confirmed. He asked the applicant what their plan "b" is, in case the variances are not granted. The applicant indicated that they would not move forward with purchasing the land, if the variances were not approved.

Ms. Duguay asked if the site plan provided demonstrated the house situated within proper setbacks. The answer was yes. She also asked if the lot was originally platted as shown. The answer was yes. She finally asked if the driveway would be flat or if it would be raised in sections to follow the pattern of the topography. The answer will be determined when a topography plan is submitted at a later date.

There was no one present who wished to make public comment.

**MOTION: To accept for study - Joe and Amy Jenyk, 219 N. Bissell Road – Wetland Setback Variances in Conjunction with a Driveway for a Proposed New Residence (1905015)**

Dr. Benshoff moved; Mr. French seconded, and the motion carried 5-0 on a roll call vote.

Yeas: Dr. Benshoff, Mr. French, Ms. Duguay, Ms. Gilmore, Ms. Grandillo

Nays: None

### **Geauga Lake LLC/Pulte Group, Squires/North Aurora/Treat Roads – Conceptual/Development Plan (1905014)**

Dan Neff, President for Neff & Associates, and Jim O'Connor, Director of Planning for PulteGroup, and Dave Francesoni, Land Project Manager for PulteGroup were all in attendance for this project. They were

seeking feedback on a conceptual plan to develop property owned by Cedar Fair. They brought some special speakers with them.

Mr. O'Connor explained the topics of the previous meetings and the focus of the presentation for the meeting tonight. Commercial Development and Parks would be the presentation for this meeting. He explained that as he breaks down the conceptual development into several meetings for feedback, he would be back at least three times for a preliminary site plan and three additional times for final site plans, should the concept be approved.

Mr. O'Connor gave an overview of the total land available to be developed on both the Bainbridge Township side and the Aurora side of the area. He broke down the entire area into zones and showed that the conceptual plan covers zone 4 and zone 5, out of 6 zones. He gave an overview of their generation housing concept.

Dan Neff, of Neff and Associates spoke to the commercial component of the plan. He suggested switching the commercial and retail sites and explained how that would make sense. He gave examples of some retail developments. Marketplace at Four Corners was not what they plan to construct in that area. They are suggesting smaller retail described as neighborhood-type development. Big box retail would not be appropriate and is not part of their vision. He further stated that they are not intending to construct individual out lots.

An example was shown of Brunswick Center near State Route 303. This area contained residential, commercial, medical, park space, and a Liberty Ford dealership. They discussed the connections between the elements.

Another example was shown of Ridgepark Square at 480 and Ridge Road. This was stated to be very successful with very little turnover of retail. The large building was stated to be 14,000 square foot.

For the medical center section of the proposed development, Mr. Neff showed pictures of the medical center in Brunswick, which he stated to be a 50,000 sq. ft. footprint with 2 floors and the Metro Health center at Pearl Road and 71, which he stated to be a 40,000 sq. ft. footprint with 2 floors.

Mr. Neff explained the idea of the roundabout. He stated that it allows easy flow and circulation of traffic, as well as reducing fatal accidents.

Mr. Neff introduced Patrick O'Hara, EVP, CCO, GC of Liberty Ford. Mr. O'Hara stated that the site they developed is intended to be an anchor for future development. He was in favor of this conceptual plan. He stated that the commercial buffer between their site and the residential component is very positive. They have several stores in Northeast Ohio and they are in favor of this transition from the dealership to the residential portion. He was in favor of the residential portion, rather than hundreds of acres of retail and commercial development. He gave positive feedback about the amount of green space included in this development, calling it unique.

Sean Wall and Tony Visconsi, of Hanna Commercial Real Estate were on hand to address the development concept. These gentleman were stated to represent Cedar Fair in the sale of the property and were said to be experts in commercial development.

Tony Visconsi stated that they have been working with Cedar Fair for two years. He stated that the area included in this proposal was always considered the residential piece of the redevelopment, with the corner of Treat Road and State Route 43 having an opportunity for some commercial/retail use. He stated that the scale of that development seems very appropriate. The residential portion will drive the future

development of commercial/retail/medical in that area as it is erected. He also stated that the balance of the acreage in Bainbridge will most likely lend itself to commercial development rather than residential.

Sean Wall stated that this is a unique and beautiful property. Cedar Fair was very selective on who they wanted to work with to develop this area. He stated that he believes what Pulte is proposing will have demand and they would concentrate on some other uses for the remaining acreage after this plan is established. He stated that the increased density will drive the commercial component of this plan. He stated that with the stipulation that developers buy 10+ acres, they have turned away daycare groups and other interested parties that wanted to purchase one acre. With Pulte ready to purchase 246 acres, the commercial portion can begin to develop.

Jack Burge, Director of Economic and Entrepreneurial Development for the City of Aurora addressed the group. He has attended the last two meetings on this proposal and has listened to the comments. He said that he likes this project. He described his role for the city as having two aspects, including attraction and retention. He stated that in his experience with commercial/retail/medical, he continues to hear that Aurora is not ready for this type of development because of the lack of density. His hope was that Liberty Ford would attract more commercial opportunities. That did not happen, however; with the residential aspect of this proposal, it opens the door to more commercial uses.

Mr. Burge discussed theory verses reality. He stated that no one actually knows what might be interested in coming to this area. It could be restaurants, day care facilities, small grocers, medical, insurance, banks, etc. One thing he is working diligently on is a day care center. He stated that the wait for existing facilities is 2 – 3 years. He stated again that he likes this project, though he understands there may be give and take with the residential component. Many retail/commercial possibilities will be sought for that aspect of the project. He stated finally, that in his estimation, this proposal makes a lot of sense for this piece of the property.

Mr. O'Connor provided a letter from Twinsburg Development Corp, owner of the working quarry that was in support of the project and was in favor of the natural buffer to be preserved between the quarry and the proposed development. That letter was accepted for consideration. See supplemental information for the results of the vote.

Mr. O'Connor spoke about the parks. He described his passion for this part of the project and also his surprise at the negative responses he has heard about it. He was surprised about the fear of taking care of the park and liability of the area. He asked people to reserve their responses until he presented his plan for the parks. He stated that this is an opportunity for long-term leadership. He spoke about parks that created a legacy. He referenced Frederick Law Olmsted and his legacy of parks including Central Park and the Emerald Necklace. He described how in the 1800's 1600 residents were displaced because their land was taken by eminent domain to create Central Park. Pulte's plan will give the city park land as part of the development.

Mr. O'Connor described a park he found on his own personal time in Canada. He stated that the park had a trailhead and a heritage trail bringing the history of the area to the person walking the trail. Memory markers in the form of benches were provided which provided opportunities for sponsorship of the park. Brick pavers provided even more opportunity for fundraising for the space. There was a green canopy over the trail. This park also had connections to a residential area. He observed people walking, some with dogs. He observed bikers and joggers along the way. This park was very similar to his vision for the public park section of the proposed development in Aurora. He asked people to imagine what the park can be. He asked the membership to consider leadership and engagement with the park, including opportunities for others to enroll in your park. He mentioned the Canalway Partners that support the Tow Path. They sponsor a series of races and events that benefit the Towpath and help people engage in the various opportunities the park presents.

Mr. O'Connor spoke about the quarry and how to make it the jewel of the project. He spoke about the Guelph Elora Quarry in Toronto that was embraced as an epic swimming hole, which also allowed inflatable rafts. He encouraged the membership to embrace the quarry for what it could be and not to fear the opportunity.

Mr. O'Connor stated that the public park is meant to be a destination and attraction and not a maintenance burden. He stated that he envisioned it to be useable and accessible with observation/lookout decks and trails and optional lake activities. He spoke about the opportunities to recycle and reuse existing materials including the old asphalt parking lot, which can be ground and used for walking paths.

Funding opportunities were discussed as they pertain to developing the public park. Some available options help with acquisition of land and others that provide ways to improve the property. He mentioned an article in Crain's Cleveland Business. It discussed the economic impact that the Cuyahoga Valley National Park creates.

Lastly, he talked about the 80 acres of preservation of trees, the 10 acres of preservation of wetlands, and the 4,224 lineal feet of preserved stream that are planned with this proposal.

Ms. Grandillo opened the floor for comments and questions of the members. Dr. Benshoff asked what type of activities would be conducive to the topography of the proposed public park area. The answer was the predominant use would be a path network for hiking and biking. Optional lake use would be determined later after more study. Dr. Benshoff asked if a landscape architect would be utilized and the answer was yes. The natural wooded area would be developed with a path system.

Dr. Benshoff asked if there was any commitment from a medical group for the project to date. The answer was no. She also asked if a feasibility study has been completed. The answer was not at this stage.

Dr. Benshoff asked about the demographics of the targeted buyers for the residential and commercial aspects of the project. The residential demographics were covered in a prior meeting that this member was not present for. Mr. O'Connor gave a brief overview of that information and stated that the demographics for the retail use would be similar. Dr. Benshoff asked if there was a feasibility study on retail opportunities for this proposal. The answer was that retailers would do their own research. Dr. Benshoff asked if we would be privy to that market research. The answer was that at a later stage, that would come into play.

Dr. Benshoff stated that she is not a hospital administrator, but she believed that staff has been reduced at the UH facility located in the North Chillicothe space. She stated that there has been difficulty attracting medical facilities. She stated that UH has reduced staff at the Walden location, as well. She further stated that as UH reduces staff in Aurora; they are increasing their presence in Ravenna. She stated that although there is an emergency center in Twinsburg, the closest trauma unit is Metro Hospital. She stated that she believed that the Aurora Fire Department has a helicopter pad and that trauma cases would be dispersed from that spot to Ravenna, Cleveland, or Akron. Mr. Burge stated that the trend he sees occurring is that most of the care providers are trying to bring medical services closer to the patient and having the patient travel less distance. He was aware of several changes at the North Chillicothe location and that may be related to the number of rooftops within the community. There was also discussion about how emergency facilities tend to be constructed near a major highway.

Ms. Gilmore asked Mr. Burge how many medical facilities are currently operating in Aurora. The answer was two. University operates on North Chillicothe Road and another UH operating at the Walden medical facility. Ms. Gilmore asked Mr. O'Connor if construction of the medical center would happen after a commitment is confirmed or would the facility be built and a tenant sought afterward. The answer was that a tenant would be identified and a planning process would begin. Ms. Gilmore inquired if that the area,

designated as such, could potentially sit empty for a few years. The answer was yes. Ms. Gilmore asked if the proposed medical facility could be constructed as a full emergency center with a helicopter pad. Mr. O'Connor stated that the site is probably too small. Ms. Gilmore then asked if such a plan would come before the Planning Commission, as this was a large concern to her. Ms. Januska explained that a large facility would come before the Planning Commission and any building with a helicopter pad would also need FAA consideration. She expressed concern for noise associated with a trauma center. Mr. O'Connor assured her that was not the intent of the medical center. He also stated that they do not have a helicopter pad included in this proposal.

Ms. Gilmore asked how many commercial buildings would be erected. The meeting tonight focused on what it would **not** be, and plans will be more specific when a preliminary site plan is proposed. The conceptual plan creates the district. Tenants will later define the amount of buildings.

Ms. Gilmore asked what the total mileage would be of the public area. The answer was just over a mile. Ms. Gilmore asked when the public park would be finished and accessible. The answer was that it is too early to tell. The park section would need to go through an approval process of its own. It would begin as soon as practical.

Ms. Gilmore expressed her desire for less parkland and larger lot sizes.

Ms. Grandillo asked where the entrances would be for the 2 residential areas. An entrance off Treat Road, a roundabout, and an entrance off Squires Road would be planned.

Mr. French stated services that are permitted and services that would be conditional for the district. He did not see hospital spelled out within our code. He asked what the maximum square footage would be for the medical center. The answer was 50,000 square foot. He understood that this plan is conceptual. That being said, if patients needed transported from this proposed facility to another location, would city services be used? He asked if the developer was familiar with the code sections stating permitted and conditional uses. The answer was yes.

Mr. French expressed concern that this proposed area of development would not look the same as it did on tour after development begins. He had concern about fertilizer from the residences will flow into the quarry. He asked if that concern would be addressed by the CRWP. The answer was yes. Mr. Neff explained that after studying the topography of the area, it was discovered that water does not drain toward the quarry. This was the reason the quarry would not be considered for stormwater management. Mr. French asked if the developer would be supplying a landscape architect solely for the commercial development or if the developer would be utilizing that architect for the planning of the public park. It was confirmed that improvement plans for the public park would be part of the package provided by the developer.

Ms. Duguay stated that she sees empty commercial spaces in Aurora. Spaces where Dominos, Doogans, and Starbucks were located are vacant. Spaces at the Marketplace at Four Corners are vacant as well. She asked what makes this place different from the spaces currently available. She was concerned about how tenants would be secured. Mr. Burge stated that this is not the only retail area he is currently working on. He works daily with retailers to fill those available units. He stated that retail is a fickle mistress and it moves in and out. He did not find the empty units currently in Aurora to be alarming. He explained that this plan is conceptual and that the exact development of this area will depend on the tenants that are secured. He also stated that although some national chains have declined to come into Aurora due to the lack of rooftops, not all retailers use the same calculations. This explains how Duncan Donuts, McDonalds and Wendys have been secured when other national chains such as Panera Bread and Chick-Fil-A have declined developing in Aurora. Ms. Duguay asked what would happen if a tenant wanted just part of retail building. Mr. Neff explained that the proposal would include multiple small buildings. He explained that

the depth of buildings was important and that development would be limited by the city codes for size, parking, and landscaping. Ms. Duguay mentioned the lack of buffering between the retail section and the residential section. Mr. Neff stated that this was a reason to consider swapping the medical section with the retail section. Exposure will be important to the retailers. Medical would be a better use next to the residential because of the reduced office hours. Mr. Neff also stated that with each part of this development, separate approvals would be needed and landscape plans are necessary for each one. He stated that the retail/commercial section could be drawn several different ways and will be driven by the retailers who are interested, however; to generate the interest and market the area, an approved concept plan would be needed.

Ms. Duguay had a final question pertaining to the parkland. She asked when the city would take over the park and if there would be a contract involved. She wondered how the city would know how much money to budget for the maintenance and upkeep of the park. She asked if the city had ever taken over a similar property in the past.

Ms. Januska stated that there needs to be more discussions pertaining to the park before that could be truly answered. A development agreement would be necessary. Another example of the city taking over a property to maintain as a park would be the golf course. Ms. Grandillo stated that the city has taken on other properties and she thought the Law Director could shed some additional light on this.

Ms. Grandillo opened the floor for public comments.

Deb Conti, 234 S. Chillicothe Road was in attendance. She stated that she had concerns on the density of the project. She addressed comments she composed on paper and these sheets were distributed to the members. She also provided a copy to the Pulte representatives. She asked if front-loading garages were permitted. She also asked if fences, patios, accessory structures and playground equipment would fit on their lots without variances. She stated that she had a problem with the liability that may be involved with the wetlands in the public park. She stated that the community is already spoiled with the amount of green space we have already. She expressed concern pertaining to the townhouses.

John Shartz, 210 Bissell Road was in attendance. He stated that there is prime commercial frontage along state routes 43 and 82. He also said the retail sounded like a strip mall tucked away in a residential area. We stated that the community does not want anymore park space at all. He gave an example of a development area in Dublin that worked with Bridge Street Development. He suggested that they look into that. He stated that Geauga Lake was a destination. He suggested that with the quarry, it could be a revenue-making destination again. He was not sure Pulte Group was the right developer for this project.

Greg Barrow, 875 Whisperwood Lane was in attendance. He stated that commercial development is his expertise and he said that new retail is almost impossible to rent. The current retail spaces in Aurora will be a lot less expensive to rent out. With the cost of construction and financing, tenants may not be able to afford the spaces. He asked the members to be cautious about their expectations, as they are on a secondary road. He stated that Solon has hampered our ability to get retail to grow. Three hundred more rooftops will not change the retail complexion. He was not in favor of the park. He stated that he was familiar with Mr. Visconsi, Mr. Neff, and Pulte Group and that they were a great team, he simply had problems with certain elements of the plan.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

None

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m.**

Ms. Duguay moved; Ms. Gilmore seconded, and the motion carried 5-0 on a roll call vote.

Yeas: Ms. Duguay, Ms. Gilmore, Mr. French, Ms. Grandillo, Dr. Benshoff

Nays: None

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Kathi Grandillo-Chairman

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Marie Lawrie, Secretary