

**MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES, IL
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TASK FORCE
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2011 – 7:00 P.M., DENS A & B**

Members Present: Chairman Mark Armstrong, Dr. Steven Smunt, Steve Gaugel,
Betsy Penny, John Rabchuk, Brian Doyle

Members Absent: Ald. Bessner

Also Present: Devin Lavigne and Dan Gardner, Houseal Lavigne Associates
Rita Tungare-Director of Community Dev., Russell Colby-
Planning Division Manager, Matthew O'Rourke-Planner

Call to Order

The St. Charles Comprehensive Plan Task Force meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Chairman Armstrong.

2. Approval of Minutes for August 24, 2011

A motion was made, seconded and unanimously passed by voice vote to accept the minutes of the August 24, 2011 meeting.

Mr. Lavigne suggested also discussing the Project Initiation Workshop. He said the reason this is done is to run the committee and the residents through an exercise to see if the steering committee that has been assembled is the pulse of the community, to see if there is a connection between the committee and the residents. He said the committee on June 29th was consistent with what was heard by the residents. Mr. Lavigne said the committee's comments were much more specific, as far as the top issues with the community, such as Charlestowne Mall. He said residents concern was more toward general issues, such as Economic Development.

Chairman Armstrong said he suspects that may be because the committee is a bit more free speaking than the general public in a public setting. Mr. Lavigne agreed, and said they asked the public to get specific and name five projects of concern, he said across the board there was a consensus.

3. Presentation and Review of Community Workshop

Mr. Lavigne stated the Community Workshop was a well-attended meeting; he then went over the hand out and discussed the top issues, which were:

Pedestrian and Bike issues- Residents want more bike trails, issues related to incomplete sidewalk network, pedestrian friendliness.

Transportation/Transit- Stronger connections to the Geneva Metra Station and improve PACE bus service, truck traffic on Main St. East Main Street in general was an underlying issue of the community.

Quality of Life- Residents expressed the desire for more entertainment and gathering spaces. Mr. Lavigne said that according to the committee, an asset to the community is the night life of downtown, which contrasts to what was heard in exercises at workshops, which was that there are too many bars downtown. Member Penny said yet they say we need to attract outside visitors, and who do they think comes to the bars. Mr. Lavigne agreed and said one idea he feels needs to be explored is, what are too many bars. He feels that needs to be quantified. He said if residents' complaints were more toward the cigarette butts and people smoking outside, he is curious if this is more of an issue since the smoking ban. Chairman Armstrong said the bars have been an issue for decades. Member Penny said the general behavior of people coming out of the bars is what residents have complained about in the past, which goes back way before the smoking ban. Mr. Lavigne said he feels it's a tough thing to quantify and that the strategy may be to address the symptoms as opposed to thinning out the active businesses in the downtown. Member Penny said there have been attempts at that in the past, things like more enforcement, more training with bar owners and there was just an Ordinance passed that bar owners would be fined if police were called three times to the bar for problems. She feels that this issue is somewhat more than just having too many bars; we could have only six bars and have the same problem. Member Rabchuk said he feels that due to the lack of traditional retail in the downtown, it gives the impression that the only thing we have is the bars. Member Penny said she feels if retail were placed in between the bars, residents would not have issues with the bars. Member Rabchuk said that the 1st Street development has proven that retail will survive. Ms. Tungare said she feels that to quantify what we have in terms of bars would be a beneficial exercise to some extent, in quantifying how many is too many. Member Doyle said he's curious if this feedback is coming from across the community or specifically from residents in the Belgium Town area (northwestern quadrant of downtown). He said there is concern that the Belgium Town neighborhood is getting lost. He said there are some important influencers in that area that have a concern about maintaining the character and historic charm of that area. Member Penny said that as former alderman in Ward 2, way over on the east side, she has always had complaints. Mr. Lavigne said he can get a business mix from other west suburban downtowns, and see how St. Charles fits as a ratio. He said one thing Naperville has is an SSA that the bars pay into and at 3am there are people outside cleaning up cigarettes with street and sidewalk sweepers and the bars pay for that service. Member Rabchuk said one of the things talked about was the ability to lower costs for businesses and he feels there is a way to do that. Ms. Tungare said that having some comparison with comparable communities would be valuable especially from City Council's standpoint.

Chairman Armstrong suggested discussing the 3 top issues: Improve/Preserve the River, Preserve/Improve Downtown and Charm/Historic Preservation. Member Penny said she was surprised to hear that residents mentioned improving the river because she has witnessed so many amazing changes done to the river. Member Rabchuk said he felt that we have a nice river but that he feels there is even more we can do. Ms. Tungare said that comments she had heard from residents in regard to the river was more to make sure we protect the river front and provide public access with any future development along the river. Mr. Lavigne said that another thing heard at the workshops was to maintain not just access but also views to the river. Chairman Armstrong mentioned that with enough money the river trail could be extended around the Baker Hotel, setting aside the land use rights, that would be an expensive proposition. Member Smunt said he feels that residents just would like the City to continue with the effort going forward.

Member Penny mentioned some comments made in regard to developers getting priority over Historic Preservation and she is guessing those comments are due to First Street. Chairman Armstrong said he also saw a comment that someone thought that was an impediment but it was lumped in with general development controls. Mr. Lavigne said yes that was a developer at the Downtown business workshop that said there is a burden placed on them. Mr. Lavigne said that with this issue being so important to the community that it's a burden, developers will have to deal with if they would like to develop in St. Charles. Member Doyle noted a comment that was made on the report in regard to certain developers not be used for certain sites, as if the developer is being contracted by the City, he said he feels that's a fundamental misunderstanding. Mr. Lavigne agreed and said the City is not in a position to cherry pick which developers they would like to develop sites.

Mr. Lavigne said another common theme throughout this process was to develop vacancies, specifically the entire east side surrounding the mall, including the mall. Member Penny said she feels all the curb cuts near Corfu and Jersey Mikes is just a mess, she said it's nothing against those businesses but that it just is inefficient and unattractive. Chairman Armstrong said they are not even platted lots.

Mr. Doyle mentioned the Task Force's last discussion about semantics between defining vacant properties vs. undeveloped, he said he is relating this to pedestrian improvements and open space. He said he does not know if all undeveloped properties are greenfield or only some, but if there are any that are greenfield he would argue that particularly in light of the Park District's submission of their recent comprehensive plan, he said he was surprised to see a lot of comments about open space. Mr. Doyle suggested the Task Force consider maintaining distinction between vacancies and undeveloped property. Mr. Lavigne said he feels that at the next meeting when we see that Phase I report and you see 60% of the comments were in regard to open space, detention and vacant space, he feels that discussion should be saved for next meeting.

Member Smunt asked if a policy could be developed where developers would have to develop existing properties that are vacant before even touching an open vacant space. Chairman Armstrong said one way to address that issue is with the issue of extending utilities versus using existing utilities, it's easier to do in-fill when the utility capacity is already there. Mr. Lavigne said the City is in a position to incentivize, and it's a principal of smart growth, it's one of the only ways that's ever withheld a legal challenge of how a community can refuse to give out building permits is concurrency and making sure development is concurrent with existing utilities systems.

Member Doyle said one of his concerns is that if we are promoting smart development that we pair it with the principal of preserving open space, he said the worst case scenario would be to have a bunch of piece meal individual developments all of which are high density and 50 years later we say what happened to all the open space, he feels the City need to systematically promote strategic density. Mr. Lavigne said as the City shifts from outward growth to compact, the Park District has a policy and he feels it needs to be revisited because the new development ahead of this community is smaller strategic infill development and if it is all cash in lieu of park land then the community will lose, as opposed to a quarter-acre park in the middle of a townhouse development which could be a great functional open space for a development. Member Rabchuk said that the Park Districts boundaries are not continuous with the City. Mr. Lavigne said yes the Park District and the City can have two different boundaries but the development that happens within the City is bound by your park land dedication ordinance, so when a developer comes in

they have to adhere to the City Ordinance, the land then is given to the City and its then up to the City to give it to the Park District.

Mr. Lavigne said that a recommendation made at the workshop and also it was in the minutes from our last meeting, was the use of the railroad's old viaduct as a truck bypass route. The Task Force had a discussion in regard to the railroad being a truck bypass and agreed that it would be a costly capital project and that they should wait to see how Stearns Rd. does as far as a truck route.

Mr. Gaugel mentioned the idea of a catalytic project such as a college or university in the downtown area and said he feels the idea would not be an asset to the city, because something like that would be tax exempt. The Task Force agreed that if First Street gets redeveloped, that something like a college to take up vacant space in the downtown area would not be needed, but that the two mall sites could work for a catalytic project like that. Ms. Tungare said she would be interested to see with the visioning exercises which locations would be identified by the community for this type of project. Mr. Lavigne said that would be a good exercise to have them all list what they feel would be good catalytic projects.

Mr. Rabchuk said he was surprised there was not more discussion in regard to the St. Charles portion of Randall Rd. on the west side, he said in comparison to what has happened in Batavia, Geneva and even South Elgin, the St. Charles section is quite a bit different. Mr. Lavigne said there was more of a concern about by sales taxes, more economic development and more retail, and those opportunities exist on Randall Rd. Member Penny said she feels the problem in the community is regardless of retail location and development that residents want the commercial but we do not have the rooftops and she feels that will not work.

4. Presentation and Review of Area/Neighborhood Workshops

Mr. Lavigne said at the east side workshops they had residents write down three specific issues relating to the east side minus the downtown area, he said there was a general consensus: the Charlestowne Mall site, the transportation issue being the Oliver Hoffman unfinished road, the desire to expedite some growth and annexation and also the appearance and aesthetics. Chairman Armstrong mentioned that some of that may improve once Route 64 is finished. Ms. Tungare said there is also the amortization of non-conforming signs along Route 64 that has been postponed by Council for a couple of years pending the IDOT road widening and once that amortization schedule starts, we will be bringing the signs and landscaping in to compliance, so she feels it will improve. Chairman Armstrong said he feels it makes sense to wait until IDOT goes through due to potential for sign relocations. Member Doyle asked if the proposal going through Council for the east side business district would support some corridor improvements. Ms. Colby said it's one of the options that the money could be used for but he is not sure if that will be the focus for it, but it cannot be used outside of the designated boundaries of the district.

Mr. Doyle asked if "de-mallification" has ever been mentioned in regard to the mall and would that be a viable strategy. Mr. Lavigne said this is a challenge the city recognized when the RFP was issued, he made reference to the sprawl repair manual where they take malls like that and turn them into urban villages, taking the ring road and making them streets and surface areas into open space with townhomes, but he doesn't know if that would be palatable to the community. Member Penny said that there is a preconceived notion by residents on the east side that a Geneva Commons type place could go there and that she feels that is not feasible. Member Doyle said his perception is at public hearings for Plan Commission or City Council there is not opportunity for community leaders to speak with the community about challenges they see, he feels that the community capacity is key is that it's really important to communicate up front. Ms. Tungare

suggested putting that on a list as far as members of the community really pointing out what they would like to see at a global level.

Mr. Lavigne said at the west side workshops most comments were made about the multi-family surrounding the Randall Rd. corridor and the Applied Composite site and dealing with infill development, he feels what needs to happen is a few successful infill developments to take place so the residents' fears never really manifest and then its welcomed. Member Doyle stated that school issues in both infill's are a very significant subtext and the reason there is such a strong objection to any residential development particularly on the St. Charles mall site and even on the medium density development on the Applied Composite site is because people feel the schools are overcrowded and developments would just add more kids to the schools. In fact, since the housing collapse, the community is still under the impression that the schools are overcrowded and that's not the case any longer, but the community is still operating as if that is the case. Mr. Gardner stated that only 40% of the students in the school district actually come from St. Charles.

Member Doyle feels the biggest challenge on the west side is there is hard core opposition to any residential development on the St. Charles mall site. Member Penny said that again she feels it's another reality check that if you do not have more people we will not have a market for all of the commercial that is wanted. Ms. Tungare said that there needs to be an educational process stating facts and a presentation by a third party.

Member Doyle mentioned the amount of consensus regarding promoting walkable neighborhoods and bike paths, he feels it's something as we prepare to engage with the community that the areas need to be identified where there is consensus and build off of that, he said he wondered in terms of bike paths if any progress has been made in town where there are gaps on connecting the trails having more integrated networks and how we make this happen. Chairman Armstrong agreed that it needs to be thought about in context of at what point we say this is something we should do publicly. Mr. Doyle noted that there are no procedural processes that would prompt those issues to come forward. Mr. Lavigne stated that there will be a trail master plan that will come out of this, and there is no better time to be planning and building bike trails due to there being a ton of grants out there right now.

Mr. Lavigne commented on the county facility on Randall Road saying it's definitely a permanent facility. Chairman Amrstrong said the long term plan is to put everything on the Justice Center site on Rt. 38. Mr. Lavigne said the intersection of Main and Randall was also highlighted as being an underutilized intersection. Mr. O'Rourke said that's due to small parcels and limited access. Chairman Armstrong said this may be where our policy should be to encourage consolidation of the sites, he said if there is a way to incentivize that we would end up with fewer curb cuts and it would be less of a problem.

5. Presentation and Review of Business Workshop

Mr. Gardner said there was a lot of commonality between what was heard from the public and the downtown property owners with the exception of property owners looking at it form the perspective of, "the community doesn't need to incentivize development, they need incentives themselves to maintain their businesses."

6. Presentation and Review of Key Person Interviews

Mr. Gardner said it was a good cross section of the community. He said the conceptual proposal for the redevelopment for Pheasant Run was presented, but from the context of what we are hearing for the desire for the mixed use environment and age restrictions it is appealing to a

different market; it's intriguing because it's already a captive location for bringing in a destination environment. Mr. Gardner stated that they spoke to the School District, a representative from Shodeen, new brokers of Charlestowne Mall and they are optimistic in their outlook as to what can be done.

Member Gaugel questioned if there was a concern of the City raising taxes or generating revenue. Mr. Gardner said both on one hand the city would have to divert all the resources to running the city and not having the ability to incentivize the business owners, there was a concern if the burden falls more to the business owner to support themselves. Rabchuk said he felt the business owners feel that the City needs to cut back on services at a rapid pace because the tax revenues are going down yet costs are going up so things need to be taken away. Chairman Armstrong said this is not so much our issue but Ordinances are crafted based on this plan we end up with, if we cannot craft an Ordinance that someone can read and come in with a development that meets the Ordinance then it won't be helpful for redevelopment and it drives developers away.

7. Correspondence from St. Charles Park District

Mr. Colby noted correspondence from the Park District. Chairman Armstrong asked what had been updated in the Park District's plan. Mr. Colby said Delnor Woods is not proposed to be developed but is proposed as a park. There are also references to some greenfield sites that the Park District suggested the Forest Preserve should acquire.

8. Update on Project Schedule

9. Meeting Announcements:

**Task Force Meeting, Thursday, November 10, 2011 at 7:00pm in Dens A & B
(tentative) Community Visioning Workshop, Wednesday, November 30, 2011 at
7:00pm in Council Chambers**

10. Additional Business-None.

11. Adjournment at 9:13pm