

**MINUTES
CITY OF ST. CHARLES, IL
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TASK FORCE
THURSDAY, MAY 24, 2012 – 7:00 P.M., COUNCIL CHAMBER**

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

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Devin Lavigne, Houseal Lavigne Associates
Doug Hammel, Houseal Lavigne Associates
Russell Colby-Planning Division Manager
Rita Tungare-Community Development Director

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 March 1, 2012

A motion was made, seconded and unanimously passed by voice vote to accept the minutes of the March 1, 2012 meeting.

Chairman Armstrong explained the proceedings for the meeting. Members of the public would be allowed to ask questions and make comments after the members of the Task Force were finished.

He explained that the Vision, Goals, Objectives Document distributed at the meeting was revised based on the Task Force member's comments and if any further changes need to be made to contact Mr. Colby and it would be addressed at the next meeting.

3. Review of Key Focus Area Plans

a. West Gateway

Mr. Lavigne reviewed the West Gateway Subarea Plan. He explained that it's a great area for development but that it would be challenging. He listed the 11 catalyst sites that he feels would have the potential to develop and stimulate other economic development. He listed the 3 recommended different alternatives for the former St. Charles Mall site, which included Regional Repositioning, Local Town Center and Comprehensive Mixed-Use Center.

Member Doyle asked how much commercial traffic impact there would be in regard to the recommendation for a future street extension of Gray Street to 14th St/Rt. 38. Mr. Lavigne said hopefully none and that the more connections and access from neighborhoods to the commercial sites, the better. Member Doyle asked about extending Gray Street north to Marie Street. Chairman Armstrong mentioned that there could be a physical problem with the connection north

of Carriage Oaks and that developed property would need to be acquired to fit the road. Also, this connection is the secondary emergency access to Carriage Oaks. Member Doyle said he had reservations regarding the street extensions from existing neighborhoods.

Member Bessner said there may be a concern regarding access points for residential shopping from the west as well.

Mr. Lavigne suggested all the street connection would be contingent upon traffic studies. Ms. Tungare noted these are options, and the connections would depend on a traffic study when the properties are developed.

Member Smunt mentioned how much easier it is to get to commercial sites across Randall since Oak St. was extended, which hasn't greatly increased traffic in his opinion.

Member Rabchuk said he feels it's a good idea to connect neighborhoods to the retail.

Chairman Armstrong said he feels the connections will provide alternate routes for getting to other neighborhoods and also to retail and it will in turn relieve traffic on the main streets.

Member Smunt suggested interconnecting sidewalks along Randall Rd., with a wider width and locating sidewalks further away from the street.

Member Doyle said at the west side workshop residents mentioned the intersection of Prairie and 3rd St., 7th St., etc. and traffic being at capacity on Prairie in this area. He asked where this would be addressed in the plan. Mr. Lavigne said there are 4 subareas and a transportation plan coming which would better address Prairie Street in that area and the placement and width of the sidewalks.

Regarding the former St. Charles Mall site, Member Gaugel asked if the intent is to pick one of the three alternative options. Mr. Lavigne said since the City does not own the site they can only make suggestions. He suggested there was most support for the regional repositioning for big box retail.

Member Doyle asked about the rationale to put townhomes or any type of residential on the old mall parcel. Mr. Lavigne said it's a transitional land use function, with multifamily adjacent to multifamily. He noted the site is challenging because of how large it is.

Mr. Doyle he feels there is not a shared vision for the site and the City needs to come to terms with that because there has already been a rejected development there, even though it was what was in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Doyle said he fears going through the entire process again like Towne Center just to be rejected by City Council.

Chairman Armstrong said part of the reason for having 3 approaches is economic demand and what may make economic sense today may not be the same in 3 years from now.

Member Rabchuk said in regard to Towne Center that there were some elements that people did like and that there will never be a perfect plan.

Mr. Doyle asked if the building scale, design, and density would be determined by the Comprehensive Plan. He feels that clarity needs to be established because of what happened with

the Towne Centre project. Ms. Tungare noted the City Council never discussed what was wrong with the Towne Centre plan. Mr. Doyle said he feels the vision for the site needs to be really clear for the developer.

Chairman Armstrong said his preference would be for the big box plan. He said he has a hard time with the words "mixed use", but feels the Task Force must come up with an alternative vision if the big box plan does not happen.

Mr. Doyle suggested another type of workshop for more information gathering for the site. Ms. Tungare said there would be an open house to show the plans so the community can weigh in on the draft.

Mr. Bessner said he just doesn't want the City to be handcuffed to specific guidelines in the plan. Mr. Lavigne said given the issues for the former mall property, any development should be in a PUD.

Ms. Tungare said the revised plan should be brought back to the Task Force and that she feels all options have comparable market components.

Mr. Lavigne said there is a demand for multi-family but that he doesn't feel the plan must be market-driven. Mr. Rabchuk said he agreed because it's hard to say what the market drive will be in 10 years from now. Ms. Penny said she would like a combination of all 3 options. Mr. Doyle said it has to be figured out how to move forward. Mr. Hammell said the intent is to demonstrate any number of ways the site could be developed within a spectrum of options.

Mr. Bessner said he likes option 3 but that it cannot be too dense because 700-800 units is not acceptable to the community.

Public Comments

Kim Malay-526 S. 16th St.-representing the Near West Neighborhood Association-said they are okay with any type of commercial and or office for the former mall site, but that they absolutely do not want any more residential including apartments in that section, and that the more retail the better. She noted residential would likely be a part of the Anderson and Bricher Commons sites.

Ms. Tungare asked Ms. Malay what type of residential was not wanted at the former mall site. Ms. Malay said all types of residential. Ms. Tungare said the residential development should have transitional buffers from another land use. Ms. Malay said the area has enough transition already.

Mr. Lavigne said the existing buffers are not adequate or well designed and are not fair to residents who live there. Ms. Malay suggested the buffer be provided by the commercial development instead of adding more residential land uses on the former mall site.

Chairman Armstrong noted the buffer shown on the improvement plan and asked if this served as a transition. He asked if the mixed use retail-office plan also needed a buffer from the residential use, or would this only be for the big box plan. Mr. Lavigne said the buffer could be accomplished in different ways and not every commercial site needs a buffer. The PUD process would be used so that the residential land use is not adversely affected.

James Zukowski-St. Charles-PO Box 0252- suggested retail-office, not residential, for the mall site and to clarify the terminology for mixed use. He said option 3 with the amount of office space is good, to ensure a return for the development.

Mr. Rabchuk suggested retail on the 1st floor and office space on the 2nd floor because there is already tons of residential which would generate supply to the existing retail.

Mr. Doyle said previous studies have shown that the City is a net importer for restaurants and that there are already too many and not enough consumers. He questioned the demand for more retail space.

Mr. Zukowski said big boxes are having problems also and putting them on the site would not make sense.

Vanessa Bell-Lasota-1610 Howard St. - said it's a challenging market and a bad time for office and retail. She said residential transition has no quality guarantee and potential for too much density. She said in regard to apartments that they receive the most police calls. She said even though quality materials would be used for an apartment complex that it does not guarantee it will not become another Wessel Court.

Brian LaVolpe- 1219 Dean St.- said he does not wish to see big boxes, but suggested a possible community college or a large entertainment venue to draw people to the City and their restaurants.

Ms. Malay said the Comprehensive Plan guidelines call for plans for the future, not what will be successful for the next year. She said the City is too quick to just build without looking at quality of life for the future.

Craig Bobowiec-508 Cedar St.- said going to residential on the former mall site would sell the City short and asked that it be stayed away from. He noted all of the new projects in the City being discussed currently are residential. He said commercial is needed to for tax revenues.

Ms. Bell-Lasota said she applauds the idea of Gateway signage and buffering on Randall Rd. Mr. Bessner asked about design and aesthetics of corridors. Mr. Lavigne said what is contemplated is a separate street scape from downtown and improvements in right of way.

b. Downtown

Mr. Lavigne discussed the visions and goals for the downtown area.

He discussed the different types of frontages in the Downtown, and how character and image varies based on each street. Main St. is the most part intact with a street wall and opportunities for infill development. Gateway corridors are those that are entrances into the downtown, where image, signage and streetscaping are important. The remaining streets in the Downtown serve secondary roles and provide parking. The Fox River is its own unique frontage which requires special treatment.

The Task Force discussed what "Pedestrian Friendly Streets" meant on the Improvement Plan. Mr. Gaugel asked if this meant filling sidewalk gaps. Mr. Lavigne said every street in the

downtown area should be friendly, but the plan highlights the need for improvements along Main Street. Ms. Tungare said traffic calming and streetscape should be included in pedestrian friendly.

Ms. Penny said she would like to see wider sidewalks for both bikes and pedestrians.

Mr. Smunt said the bike routes are lacking markers. Mr. Doyle said the streets generally should be more bike-friendly.

Chairman Armstrong noted the plan for a bike trail along Baker Hotel, which may be more of a pedestrian trail.

Mr. Rabchuk suggested better utilization of the river front and more recreational opportunities along the river. Mr. Bessner said the plan should recommend no parking along the river and also along 1st Street.

Ms. Tungare said she is not sure what the future holds for 1st St. Phase 3 site, but that parking adjacent to the river is not desirable. Mr. Doyle mentioned accommodating parking on the internal portion of the lot.

Mr. Doyle asked about ways to calm truck traffic and whether there is a solution to take trucks out of downtown. Mr. Lavigne said part of the impact is noise levels caused by the pavement. He said a different surface pavement could reduce the noise. Chairman Armstrong suggested canopies on buildings or other methods to shield pedestrians.

Mr. Smunt said suggested a two-lane truck route and a bike route along the old railroad right-of-way. Mr. Rabchuk said this was studied but that it would take away from Pottawatomie Park and affect a number of houses.

Mr. Bessner said it is not safe walking, especially with kids on Main St. and that expanding sidewalks would help. He asked if a guard, similar to the fencing in front of Vertical Drop, could be installed. Ms. Tungare said that would need IDOT approval.

Mr. Bessner asked what a curtain wall is. Ms. Tungare said it's a contemporary wall design, typical of a modern building with a glass façade.

Chairman Armstrong noted a typo regarding Building Materials on Page 8.

Ms. Penny mentioned the Chord on Blues lot, catalyst site "N". She suggested considering closing Walnut Avenue between Riverside and 2nd Ave to create a pedestrian walkway.

Mr. Lavigne mentioned catalyst site "O" discusses possibly eliminating Riverside Ave. from Ohio Ave. to Illinois Ave. to create a riverfront development site. This would move traffic to 2nd Avenue. The Commission discussed that Walnut is a less significant street.

Mr. Doyle said the City has traditional buildings but should also be open to good architecture. Mr. Lavigne suggests photo illustrations. Mr. Smunt said the architecture should be considered in the context of what is adjacent, which is how the Historic Commission reviews projects.

Public Comments

Mr. Zukowski said in regard to the Walnut, this area is used for loading for the Arcada. He suggested adding a Gateway to the Improvement Plan on Route 25, maybe at Route 25 and Riverside Ave. Mr. Doyle noted a gateway is shown on Route 64 coming in from the east.

Ms. Malay mentioned sensitive architecture, following the River Corridor Plan, and requiring high-quality building design along the river. She mentioned that the parking garage on 1st St. does not appear to be high-quality, and the standard should be higher along the riverfront. She said contemporary design can be appropriate but it needs high quality detail. The riverfront design should be similar to Naperville, where there is parking to access the river but the parking is not right on top of the river.

Ms. Bell-Lasota discussed concerns with the business mix in the downtown and mentioned in the late night hours, the activities downtown can take over the sidewalks. She said this activity clashes with the historic charm and takes away from appeal of downtown, which needs more gathering places for pedestrians.

Mr. Doyle mentioned public transit and circulator shuttles as a part of the Downtown Plan. The Task Force discussed addressing this in the transportation section.

Larry Kelly-200 N. 2nd St.-Carroll Towers-mentioned locating a parking deck where a shuttle picks up people to get to the train in Geneva. The Task Force discussed this is a good idea but does not want to encourage people to park downtown and leave.

4. Project Schedule

Mr. Colby discussed that the next event to be scheduled would probably be the Charlestowne Mall Visioning. Ms. Tungare noted the project scope included one open house/workshop to review the sub area plans, which would take place after all of the plans have been reviewed. However, the Task Force could schedule more than one open house. The Task Force suggested scheduling two separate workshops, the first to review the West Gateway and Downtown plans.

5. Meeting Announcements:

All members should send their availability to Mr. Colby for the months of June, July and August.

6. Additional Business-None.

7. Adjournment at 9:20pm.