

**MINUTES  
PLANNING COMMISSION**

**September 30, 2014**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mark Weaver, Ron Rehm, Gil Ning, Jackie Middleton, Heather Kobilarcsik, Wanda Christopher-Finn and Fred Seling

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Jean Boen

**STAFF PRESENT:** Andrew Dutton, Tim Monea, Joel Montgomery, Mayor Bob Breneman and Jonathan Millea

**I. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

**Application #CP-5.** The City of Wooster is proposing a replacement of the existing Comprehensive Plan, approved in 2002.

Mr. Dutton noted the Commission had received the draft Comprehensive Plan at its August meeting, and indicated clarifications/minor changes had since been made to the document and were outlined in the Staff report.

Aaron Donley from OHM was present to answer questions.

Mr. Seling questioned where the division was between planning and recommendations, and private property rights. Mr. Donley stated the division between the two lied between the Zoning Code and the Comprehensive Plan; the property rights were done within the Zoning Code. Mr. Donley stated the Plan would guide the City and Planning Commission relating to Zoning Code changes which came before it. Mr. Donley stated with any future development in the City, there were impacts or opportunities for the community. There were focus areas within the Comprehensive Plan that were high priorities, and the focus areas set a vision on how those areas could be redesigned. Mr. Donley stated the Comprehensive Plan would give the Commission an opportunity to say “no” to a development—that it was not what the City wanted.

Mr. Seling stated that if a development met the Zoning Code, the Commission had no legal standing to deny the application. Mr. Dutton stated the Planning and Zoning Code was more mechanical in terms of setbacks and coverage, and the Comprehensive Plan was more about “this is what we would like to see/what we should follow”. Mr. Dutton stated in case of the property on Burbank Road, the previous Comprehensive Plan said the land should be residential and the application was for a commercial development which fit the zoning/Zoning Code. Mr. Dutton stated in order to address that, the property should have been rezoned years ago to fit the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Seling questioned if the Comprehensive Plan were adopted, how it would all play out in real life. Mr. Montgomery stated 90% of the things in the focus areas would be

generated by the property owner/a developer, and the Plan was a guide for them. Mr. Montgomery stated there were things in the Plan which dealt with transportation, bike paths and parks that the City would be involved in implementing. Mr. Donley stated there were a few of the focus areas which were more proactive rather than reactive. The Comprehensive Plan may direct the Commission to make certain changes to the Code and would provide a legal basis in doing that.

Mr. Seling stated one of the areas the Commission dealt with recently was with a development where existing housing was being lost to accommodate the development. Mr. Seling questioned if the Comprehensive Plan addressed that, specifically noting the recommendation on how to deal with the existing mobile home parks. Mr. Seling stated while there may be issues with the mobile home parks, they did serve a purpose in providing housing for people. Mr. Seling questioned if that issue was discussed during the Comprehensive Plan process. Mr. Donley stated it did come up quite a few times, and providing a different variety of housing choices was a priority. Mr. Donley stated discussion about creating a variety of housing options downtown occurred, and the reason the downtown was noted was so that people would be closer to the City's services. Mr. Donley stated the other issues discussed were affordability in providing a variety of housing types and that it was important to have a full spectrum of housing choices.

Mr. Seling questioned if there was adequate low income housing in the community. Mr. Donley stated with the initial survey, it showed there was a need for affordable and market rate housing which had the amenities that today's marketplace demanded. Mr. Donley stated there were some older aging houses, many of which were single family residences, which were being converted because of demand. If there was another product available for people to move into, that may be something which would help to curtail the conversions of the single family homes.

Mr. Donley stated he had met with Main Street, and the more housing that could be added around the downtown, the bigger the success the downtown would become. Mr. Seling stated the Commission had reviewed some subsidized housing projects recently, and felt that the marketplace had identified there was a niche for that. Mr. Donley stated that a full market housing assessment had not been done, but felt there was a need.

Mr. Montgomery stated in Chapter 3, the City had 1,000 acres of active developable land and it was estimated about 2,000 additional residences would be added over the next six years. Mr. Montgomery stated 36.6% of the housing was multi-family. Mr. Seling stated what struck him was the comment about how to deal with mobile home parks and whether that would create additional problems as that was resolved. Mr. Montgomery stated the current Zoning Code did not allow any new mobile home parks. Mr. Donley stated what had been addressed was the need to ensure that the existing developments met the same standards as every other residential development which included Code Enforcement and Property Maintenance.

Ms. Kobilarcsik questioned if parking in the downtown would be made a priority. Mr. Montgomery stated parking has been a priority and the City met regularly with Main

Street and downtown businesses to discuss that. Mr. Montgomery stated there was a perception that there was a lack of parking downtown, but that maybe it was more of a walking problem. Mr. Montgomery stated the existing parking lots were not completely full in terms of leased parking. Ms. Kobilarcsik stated parking had been a problem for the past 30 years, and the City did not seem to want to address it. Mr. Montgomery disagreed and stated the City talked about it “all the time” and parking had been assessed and re-evaluated. Mr. Montgomery stated the City relied on people on Main Street, the Police Department, the Chamber and the downtown businesses to tell them if parking truly was a problem.

Mr. Monea stated the City just acquired a property on East Liberty for added parking (near Troyer’s Bakery). Mr. Millea noted that signage would be placed on the property so that people were better aware it was available to use. Mr. Millea noted that leased parking was also available. Mr. Montgomery also noted that the parking area behind Merchant’s Block was also expanded. Ms. Kobilarcsik questioned if parking in that area was leased or 3-hour parking. Mr. Montgomery stated it was both. Mr. Donley stated beyond the Comprehensive Plan, a plan for the downtown with more detail could be developed which would reflect the elements of the Comprehensive Plan where specific locations for parking could be determined.

Mr. Ning stated that, as for implementation, how “short term”, “mid-term” and “long term” were defined. Mr. Donley stated “short term” was 1-3 years, “mid-term” was 3-5 years, and “long term” was years. Mr. Ning questioned who would ensure that the entities involved would be doing this Plan. Mr. Donley stated it would be the City Administration and Council’s responsibility. Mr. Donley stated committees could be formed to manage the Comprehensive Plan and could meet semi-annually. Mr. Donley stated it could also be charged to the City Administration or it could be the Planning Commission’s responsibility. Ultimately, the community should decide who would be the final guardian of the Plan, but it would likely start with Mr. Montgomery and the Mayor. Mr. Donley stated that, more often than not, it was done internally at the administrative level. Planning Commission or City Council may request, on a semi-annual basis, a report as to progress being made.

Mr. Montgomery noted that the last Plan did not have action items. Mayor Breneman stated Mr. Dutton would work the document (Comprehensive Plan) on a daily basis and indicated that one of the things he really liked about the Plan was the inclusion of focus areas in the community. The focus areas were obtained because of the Steering Committee’s input and the feedback it had received from telephone interviews and on-line from residents. Mr. Breneman stated the four focus areas were ones that were happening or needed to happen within the community—the downtown area, the hospital area, the OARDC area, and the Hawkins Plaza area.

Mr. Monea noted that a lot of the things which were identified in the Plan were things that were already known and were being worked on. Mr. Monea stated the Plan noted that improvement needed to be made to be housing stock in and around downtown and that affordable housing needed to be improved. Mr. Monea stated the City now had a full time

Property Maintenance Inspector, and the City had also recently received a home improvement grant. Mr. Monea stated a lot of the different elements in the Plan (walking/bike paths) were something the City was always working on.

Mr. Donley stated many communities operated their capital improvements program by “who was making the most noise”. Mr. Donley stated through the Comprehensive Plan process, a true survey of the community was taken to determine what their issues and concerns were. Mr. Donley also noted that the Plan could be used for economic development and pre-development incentives.

Mr. Weaver questioned LU.4.1 in the Plan noted “*improve and expand Code Enforcement efforts*” and he wondered if additional personnel would be added or if personnel would be reassigned in order to accomplish that goal. Mr. Montgomery stated a full time Property Maintenance Inspector had already been hired to set up the program. Mr. Monea stated the City was trying to develop a good metric to see how effective its efforts were and was measuring how long cases took when working with the Prosecutor and what the outcomes were. Mr. Monea stated the Plan let the City know that it was something the community wanted and valued, and that the work being done was important.

Mr. Weaver questioned the notation in the Plan (LU.5.2) “*support downsized housing options for residents*” and questioned how the City would go about encouraging and supporting that. Mr. Donley stated it would give the Commission support to make positive recommendations/zoning changes on developments to occur in places the Plan identified to be appropriate.

Mr. Weaver questioned the notation in the Plan (LU.3.1) “*Consider permitting small-scale neighborhood commercial development as part of large-scale master plan developments*”. Mr. Weaver stated the last time the Plan was updated, that was highly controversial especially in neighborhoods close to the downtown. Mr. Weaver stated the residents indicated small businesses were found to be very disruptive, and he questioned what types of small scale businesses would likely be found. Mr. Montgomery stated the Plan talked exactly the opposite of that towards the downtown and the traditional neighborhoods surrounding that and in preserving that area. Mr. Donley stated the one area that the City already had neighborhood commercial located in was near the hospital.

Ms. Christopher-Finn stated she felt the Plan looked great and that it underwent a good process.

Ms. Kobilarcsik questioned if there was any interest in the SR 585 area. Mr. Breneman stated once SR 585 was fully completed and established, things may start to happen but because it was currently under construction, it was hard to see much of a future there. Mr. Dutton noted Bauer Ladder, Fastenal, Aldi’s Expansion and Daisy were more recent developments in that area. Mr. Montgomery stated there had not been much interest in the Hawkins Plaza. Mr. Donley stated the Plan did say that when that area was re-developed that it did not happen in the same pattern as was there currently (strip retail).

Mr. Donley stated that area was one of the primary gateways within the community and needed to make a good first impression.

Mr. Seling stated mention was made in the Plan for a new fire station. Mayor Breneman stated in 2011, a fire study was done which evaluated the City as a whole, and the study indicated there was a need for three stations in Wooster. Presently the main station on Market Street was well situated for the main portion of the City, but another fire station was needed to better serve the north end. Mayor Breneman stated that having the tax levy pass would help to make that a reality in the next few years as the City was building its reserves. Mayor Breneman stated a fire station was the most urgent need for the City's safety services. A third station was recommended in the Rubbermaid area and would have to be addressed at some point as well.

Mr. Monea stated by conducting the surveys, he felt there was a lot of public input that went into the process and made part of the Plan. Mr. Monea stated he felt the Plan represented the pulse of the community. Mr. Millea stated he was part of the Steering Committee and felt the approach was on the cutting edge having worked on Comprehensive Plans previously. Mr. Millea stated by having a Plan such as the one proposed, it would help in the City's efforts when seeking public funding.

Stewart Fitz Gibbon, a Steering Committee member, stated the process mattered especially in obtaining the information via many different avenues where the public was engaged. Mr. Fitz Gibbon stated every available source of information was consulted on the front end to put together a roadmap to offer guidance.

Ms. Middleton stated she had heard a lot of positive things from the community about the transparency of the process, that public meetings were held, that a draft copy of the Plan was on the City's website, and also with the media coverage.

Mayor Breneman stated he had been involved with three Comprehensive Plans for the City, and this plan had the most holistic approach to a community plan. OHM did a good job in reaching out to the community to get as much input as it possibly could from the residents.

Mr. Dutton stated there were minor tweaks which needed to be made to the Plan based on some of the Commission's comments and suggested that the Commission wait to take action on the Plan until its next meeting. Mr. Dutton stated he would provide the Commission with a final, finished product for that meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 6:35 p.m.

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**Fred Seling, Chairman**

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**Laurie Hart, Administrative Assistant**