

**PLANNING COMMISSION
CITY OF RAMSEY
ANOKA COUNTY
STATE OF MINNESOTA**

The Ramsey Planning Commission conducted a special work session on Thursday, July 9, 2015, in the Lake Itasca Room at the Ramsey Municipal Center, 7550 Sunwood Drive NW, Ramsey, Minnesota.

Members Present: Chairperson Gary Levine
Commissioner Randy Bauer
Commissioner Matthew Maul
Commissioner Cindy Nosan
Commissioner Gary VanScoy

Members Absent: Commissioner Andrew Andrusko
Commissioner Ralph Brauer

Also Present: Community Development Director Tim Gladhill
City Planner Chris Anderson
Assistant City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Patrick Brama
Community Development Intern Geoff Solomonson

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Levine called the regular meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion carried by Commissioner Bauer, seconded by Commissioner VanScoy, to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion Carried.

3. MINUTES

Community Development Director Gladhill explained the purpose of the special work session was to develop a comparison document of the COR Development Plan and the Original Ramsey Town Center Master Plan.

He explained how at the May 26, 2015 Joint Meeting with the City Council, Staff was directed to prepare a comparison document and made the decision to touch base with the commission. The COR vision is very different from the past ideas, but headed in the right direction. He asked if there were to be changes to the vision and ask “what needs to change?”

Community Development Director Gladhill described the history of the COR which originated from the 2020 Comprehensive Plan (1998-2001). In the plan was described how the area was an agricultural use and due to growth forecasts, Ramsey decided to protect its rural areas and concentrate this new growth into a more centralized area.

The question arose of what is a mixed-use development. In the 2001 general election, an advisory question for the ballot was developed, essentially a survey question for residents. The question was “Do you want a Town Center with restaurants, shopping, and other amenities along the Highway 10 Corridor?” This was around the same time as the Northstar Commuter Rail transitway planning.

Between 2009-2010, the City began a process to provide a new vision for the development to better match current market conditions at the time, the revision of the plan to the COR plan today.

Community Development Director Gladhill then asked the commissioners to choose their top 3 components of the original master plan for Ramsey Town Center.

ORIGINAL MASTER PLAN (PREVIOUS)

Commissioner Nosan asked what the “West 30” referred to in the original plan.

Community Development Director Gladhill described the area to the North and West of the roundabout at Sunwood Drive guided for retail.

Commissioner VanScoy asked about redevelopment and the current zoning of the West 30.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained the vision as a more traditional suburban retail center, while still maintaining a higher degree of architectural standards.

Discussion ensued about parking standards for traditional suburban retail.

Commissioner Bauer explained how he wrote down shared parking, such as the ramp next to the Municipal Center [and apartment complex] and how it is critical not to lose the idea of shared parking.

Commissioner VanScoy explained how density requires parking.

Commissioner Nosan responded how the church [Northgate Church] is a great example of successful shared parking.

Mixed-Use was the next topic. Community Development Director Gladhill asked if it meant vertical mixed use within a single building or different types of single-use buildings within a single block.

Chairperson Levine commented it did not mean different uses within a single block.

Commissioner Nosan expressed concern about too much mixed-use in the area. She explained currently it seems to be only the residents actually living in the COR who use the area.

Commissioner Bauer described the apartment complex connected to the Municipal Parking Ramp and how the City Council originally wanted retail on the first floor of the complex. The developer did not want retail on the first floor. Commissioner Bauer then explained without a large store/attraction there is no market for mixed-use commercial in this area.

Commissioner Nosan remarked how the residents of Ramsey are always going to have cars and is what the culture of the town is used to. She explained how Ramsey will never be Uptown [Minneapolis].

Community Development Director Gladhill then clarified the consensus on the meaning of mixed-use for the original plan was vertical mixed use. Gladhill then explained that the City would continue to discuss the current definition in the next step, and perhaps continue to discuss this as a policy question moving forward.

Commissioner Maul explained how mixed-use development works very well in Minneapolis and Uptown because there is limited space, whereas there is still plenty of land in Ramsey.

Community Development Director Gladhill then went through the remaining components of architectural standards, which was split into the architecture of the building itself as well as the architectural review, density; strong blue system, of which The Draw is itself a utility and amenity; and the Master Park Plan.

Commissioner Bauer explained he had written the strong blue system and wanted to see it developed further. He then said water re-use is important and water is unique to Ramsey because of the two rivers. He said he would like to see developments with ideas like fountains using rainwater.

City Planner Anderson explained The Draw uses storm water and is recycled through the park surrounding it.

Chairperson Levine then remarked about how the West 30 idea has changed from the medium-density residential idea to now [retail].

Community Development Director Gladhill then asked the commissioners if there was any components of the Original Master Plan they would like to strike from or add to the list.

Commissioner Maul stated he would like to see the strict sign standards removed.

Chairperson Levine agreed and said he would like to see more relaxed sign standards.

Chairperson Levine spoke of how there was an educational component to the Original Master Plan in buildings being a multi-use, multi-educational facility for shared resources and how he would like to see that brought back in.

Commissioner VanScoy remarked how the residential density was a top priority in the old plan, but not in the new (COR plan). He explained how the old plan was to drive people into the center with a transit-oriented development and build a population of enough people to support retail and subsequently encourage those living in the outer areas to drive in to use the amenities as well.

Commissioner Bauer remarked how he had second thoughts on the retail area in the southwest are of the COR. He explained how the type of retail should be changed to a unique destination type, similar to Stillwater [MN] with craft and antique stores.

Chairperson Levine agreed stating Stillwater is a much better example for Ramsey to follow than Arbor Lakes [Maple Grove].

THE COR DEVELOPMENT PLAN (CURRENT)

Community Development Director Gladhill then asked the commissioners to repeat the process with their top 3 components of the current COR development plan. He explained the similarities of the plans, but some changes occurred when they tried to apply it, such as the West 30 [retail vs residential], eliminating the architectural review, and reducing the floor to area ratio (FAR).

The first topic was the definition of mixed-use. Community Development Director Gladhill explained the change from vertical mixed-use to many single uses within a block.

Commissioner VanScoy agreed the definition had changed, but asked what is considered a block.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained a block is an area surrounded by public or private streets, but could use a better definition [for this plan].

Chairperson Levine made the comment how less is happening in the COR now.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained how less vertical mixed-use is happening, but there is still activity and interest. Gladhill noted that mixed-use is still a goal of the community, however the community has experienced more residential growth compared to retail.

Chairperson Levine remarked how less four (4) story structures and more one (1) story structures equals less activity, or density. He then said less activity equals less rooftops (residents).

Commissioner VanScoy remarked how mixed-use in the COR now seems to be all residential, something different which wants to be built seems like it needs a variance. He then asked how you plan to get the mixed use [in the future] which we want.

Commissioner Maul agreed adding scale should be asked in addition to Commissioner VanScoy's question. He then remarked if we want vertical, we need to plan for it now.

Community Development Director Gladhill then explained more of the components as architectural standards & relaxed sign standards and parking.

Chairperson Levine made the comment how shared parking does not always work.

Commissioner Maul agreed adding and asking again, to what scale.

Commissioner VanScoy remarked how there was no strategy to implementing the shared parking [in the original plan].

Chairperson Levine asked how we pay for parking.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained that the City has had a strategy to implement shared parking, but does require an up front investment and has required some form of public assistance in the past in Ramsey's examples, namely through grant awards. Gladhill reviewed the history of the Ramsey Municipal Ramp and the feedback the City originally received in the early stages of the development before uses such as Residence at The COR was completed.

Commissioner VanScoy remarked how there needs to be a new strategy to shared parking because parking supports density and retail.

Commissioner Bauer explained how the original plan had plans for a second parking ramp. He then explained how it should be pursued in a development which has the developer paying half and the City paying half.

Commissioner VanScoy asked how we define parking counts and how there are conflicting methods for parking counts/requirements.

Community Development Director Gladhill then went through the rest of the components on the board which were the West 30; transit; storm water; density; and streetscape. He then remarked how the streetscape portion has been redesigned different than the original plan, especially Ramsey Parkway. He explained how in the original plan the Parkway continued west with landscape. He then asked what components should be in the streetscape.

Chairperson Levine remarked how Ramsey Parkway was an attraction on the original plan.

Community Development Director Gladhill asked the commissioners if there were anything in the COR plan that they would like to strike out or add to the list.

No commissioners had anything to strike from or add to the list.

Chairperson Levine asked what the 'strong downtown feel in center' meant.

Chairperson Levine expressed concern about the West 30.

FUTURE POLICY QUESTIONS

Community Development Director Gladhill asked if there were additional questions to add to the list of policy questions from city staff [handout].

Chairperson Levine asked about McDonalds, remarking on the question of whether Ramsey wants to continue to allow uses with a drive-thru and gas station. He said McDonalds certainly has a drive-thru and where they go, other restaurants [and retail] will follow.

Commissioner Bauer responded with the reconstruction of Armstrong [Boulevard], it will have the effect of getting people off Highway 10, for example weekends when gas, groceries, and meals are needed on the way [in and out of the city and metropolitan area].

Community Development Director Gladhill responded that drive-thru and gas station type business should be acceptable in portions because Ramsey needs and wants those types of businesses.

Commissioner VanScoy remarked how the plan for the places of employment (southeast quadrant of the COR) needs to be reevaluated.

Community Development Director Gladhill responded, adding with the question, what are appropriate uses within the business park.

Commissioner Bauer responded with the fiber-optic in place, it is not marketed towards retail, but should be marketed towards others as job opportunities.

Chairperson Levine asked for clarification on the second and third policy questions. [2. Are there uses we are not allowing that we do not want to allow? 3. Are there uses we are allowing that we do not want to allow?]

Commissioner Nosan asked how we are not allowing uses we do not want when we do not know what those uses are.

Chairperson Levine remarked [question 3.] was saying basically what does [the City] not want here.

Commissioner Nosan responded saying she does not want the COR to turn into a solid line of bars like Jackson Street in Anoka.

Chairperson Levine responded noting that there may be uses we do not want to allow within the development, and that the City should review uses that are currently allowed as part of this process.

Community Development Director Gladhill remarked the definition might be too broad.

Commissioner VanScoy asked to look at the sub-districts [of the COR], what is their intent, and what do they mean.

Chairperson Levine added to Commissioner VanScoy's question with what the sub-district was and what it should be.

Commissioner Nosan asked Assistant City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama about the possibility of Target in Ramsey. She spoke of her displeasure of driving to Elk River or Coon Rapids just to visit the store.

Assistant City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama explained how Target in Ramsey comes down to logistics and access. He then went to say there is interest from business based on the Armstrong [Blvd] interchange, but they are waiting for 'more rooftops' in the community. He said it comes down to the economy and how Ramsey is surrounded by communities that have a Target, for example.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained that lack access across the Mississippi River to Dayton and across the Rum River reduces the market area or drive-time for retail users.

Assistant City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama added when speaking to a broker, they discussed how Ramsey is an island within the area, in terms of access [the lack of current highway 10 freeway] and connections [across the Mississippi] to other communities. He

also went to say there is a possibility retail is too saturated with the amount available due to the restricted access and connections.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained how it would be helpful to see existing examples, local examples, or other retail areas. He suggested a tour with stops including Silver Lake Village in St. Anthony, Arbor Lake in Maple Grove, and Riverdale Village in Coon Rapids. These stops would give the commission and idea of what they do and do not want in the COR.

Commissioner Nosan asked Assistant City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama asking if retail has a hard time coming here.

Assistant City Administrator/Economic Development Manager Brama responded saying the Armstrong [Blvd] interchange could help and could also possibly be the domino that falls [propelling growth].

Commissioner VanScoy asked where the City and County stand in regards to the Dayton Bridge [Mississippi River crossing].

Community Development Director Gladhill responded saying [Ramsey's] comprehensive plan and [the City of] Dayton's comprehensive plans both have it listed and both plans match, even to the degree of prioritizing a corridor from Highway 10 to Interstate 94.

Commissioner VanScoy asked if Hennepin County and Anoka County were doing anything in regards towards completing this matter.

Community Development Director Gladhill explained how Anoka County has purchased land in anticipation of the connection, and the connection lines up in both the City of Ramsey and the City of Dayton, but the timeline for this project is undetermined as it is not on the State [of Minnesota] funding plans or MNDOT's plans.

Community Development Director Gladhill told the commission how staff would refine the document based on the responses that evening plus other future meetings, eventually to bring back to the Planning Commission and the City Council.

Commissioner Bauer asked where the planning staff stood with the upcoming comprehensive plan.

Community Development Director Gladhill responded saying the plan is being approached in smaller sections and the information in the meeting that evening would be incorporated into the future document. He then went on to explain that as the smaller section become developed, citizen engagement opportunities and feedback would be initiated closer to fall.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting.

Motion Carried.

The special work session of the Planning Commission adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Gladhill

Community Development Director

ATTEST:

JoAnn Shaw

Community Development Assistant

Drafted by Geoff Solomonson

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