

MINUTES
OAK PARK PLAN COMMISSION
VILLAGE HALL- Council Chambers
July 11, 2013
7 p.m.

PRESENT: Acting Chairperson David Mann; Commissioners Mark Benson, Jeremy Burton, Douglas Gilbert, Gail Moran, Steven Rouse

EXCUSED: Chair Linda Bolte, Commissioner Sonny Ginsberg

ALSO PRESENT: Craig Failor, Village Planner; Jacob Karaca, Plan Commission Attorney
John Houseal, Principal at Houseal Lavigne Associates

Roll Call

Acting Chair Mann called the meeting to order at 7: 04 p.m. and roll was called.

Non-Agenda Public Comment

None.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Moran motioned to approve the minutes from May 1, 2013. Commissioner Rouse seconded. Minutes were approved upon submission.

Public Hearing(s)

None.

Other Business:

Comprehensive Plan Presentation.

Acting Chair Mann explained that there would be a presentation by Mr. John Houseal, from Houseal Lavigne Associates, the consulting firm hired by the Village to craft the Comprehensive Plan. After, he would take any questions or comments from the public and the Plan Commissioners.

Mr. Houseal said his firm was focused on urban planning. The purpose of the presentation was to provide an update on where they were in the Comprehensive Plan process and how they got there. He explained at the end of this year, Plan Commissioners would receive a bound document in draft form that would go out for community review through a public hearing and Village Board approval.

Mr. Houseal referred to a Power Point presentation. He said a comprehensive plan was a foundation for future decision-making, acting as a guide for a broad range of topics but it was not something that mapped out specifics like a zoning code, for example.

He said in the beginning of the process, they felt establishing a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) was important and it was composed of residents, business owners, staff and elected and appointed officials. The process included community outreach, looking at existing conditions and setting goals. He said they decided to brand and promote the process for community outreach, establishing "Envision Oak Park" as the logo. He said they used a multi-media promotional campaign to reach local residents.

Mr. Houseal said first they identified local issues and aspirations through community workshops- nearly 40 workshops that included community-wide, neighborhood, student and do-it-yourself workshop kits to cast a wide net. He said they also used web-based outreach such as on-line mapping, surveys and a housing priorities tool.

He said during the workshops, certain themes permeated what they heard from residents and business owners— and these emerged as the core values: diversity; urban sustainability; respect for Oak Park's history and legacy; and collaboration and cooperation. They then put the information into 11 major categories like Land Use and Built Environment, Arts and Culture, Parks, Open Space and Environmental Features, etc. During a February 2013 kick-off event, participants prioritized issues for the 11 categories and set the stage for establishing working groups to further refine goals. Each element or category would have its own chapter and be the primary focus of the comprehensive plan.

Mr. Houseal said they developed a community reference book to understand where Oak Park was right now. The book includes data like demographics, community characteristics as well as current development regulations and a summary of the information from the public outreach sessions. Next, they established a working group series inviting people with expertise or interest in each of the 11 categories. There were three workshops, each with breakout groups that resulted in 11 vision statements, 53 goals and 241 objectives. He said right now they are currently refining those goals and objectives and they will continue to do so.

The working groups authored the core plan components: statements of importance in the beginning of each chapter; vision statements that set the community ideal for each plan element in the year 2030 for each of the 11 elements; goals, which are ends to be sought through various actions and partnerships; and objectives- incremental actions or outcomes that they need to attain to achieve the goal.

He said the specific language would continue to be refined on the vision, goals and objectives part of the plan. The next steps will be developing the focus area and community-wide plans examining the transit-oriented areas in Oak Park, which was required due to funding by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development agency. They will also create a plan implementation strategy and benchmarks to measure and gauge the success of the plan. After the final plan presentation and adoption there will be a one year review on how the process was going.

Acting Chair Mann opened up public comment.

Mr. Steven Glass, 805 Highland Ave., said he also serves as the chair for the Housing Programs Advisory Committee. Mr. Glass said he wanted to commend everyone on the process so far and said he found it to be very comprehensive.

Commissioner Burton said there wasn't much in the presentation dealing with organized sports or sports use in the parks. He suggested more outreach to those organizations. Mr. Houseal said he would look into the parks and open space group and follow up on it. Mr. Failor said the AYSO and the baseball/softball groups were invited to the workshops and he recalled that there was some discussion about how in-depth they should get in the discussion. Acting Chair Mann said in goal number one in the Parks, Open Space and Environmental Features working group discussed understanding the demand and an inventory of space and matching it up in a more appropriate way. Commissioner Burton agreed but said he thought an important part of the health and safety, education and parks components was reiterating the acknowledgment of sports in the Village.

Mr. Houseal said one of the challenges was it was almost impossible to divorce an issue so that it only fit into one category- there was a lot of overlapping. He said he could add a few words to the section to address the feedback on adding athletic groups.

Commissioner Moran said some of the goals were so specific that made it sound like this is what the Village must do and she felt that conflicted with the document being more of a guiding force rather than prescriptive. Also, there was conflict on specific goals like adopting an impact tax or building a cultural center with the goal of reducing the tax burden. She said she thought there were redundancies in some of the goals, for example in the Governmental Excellence section. Also, she did not see any mention of aging in place, which she felt was important for seniors. Mr. Houseal said multi-family housing was an element to the neighborhoods category. As for the issue of redundancy, the context of the entire chapter or document was not complete yet. He said several people had discussions about redundancy, but they found that most people do not read comprehensive plans like novels, instead they go to a specific section so there will be some duplication and in the case of Governmental Excellence there was some deliberate duplication that the working group indicated was essential. He said they would continue to refine and revise and would look for duplication and also look to include aging in place if it was not already there.

Commissioner Rouse said he thought the issue of parking in Oak Park was given very cursory treatment, when it was such a huge issue. He said a lot of the public hearings and PUD applications the Plan Commission hears was devoted to parking and it was barely discussed in a practical way. Mr. Houseal said parking came up at every hearing and workshop. The issue was each category was limited to five goals with five objectives in each goal, but within each of those chapters there would be lengthy explanations and parking would be a part of that. He said he would also go back and take a look at it to make sure it was addressed well enough. He agreed that it was an important issue. Commissioner Rouse asked if there was anything about systematic improvements in infrastructure. Mr. Houseal agreed, saying alleys received a lot of discussion. Commissioner Rouse asked if there was any discussion on personal privacy and cameras and issues like that. Mr. Houseal said he didn't believe it came up.

Commissioner Gilbert said he'd like to see more of a mention on preservation issues in the Land Use and Built Environment section under the statement of importance, especially in issues of preservation with a small 'p'. He said almost all of the Village's housing stock was historic and that posed challenges for homeowners especially on the sustainability front. He said one of the biggest movements in preservation was incorporating sustainability in existing buildings and he'd like more text in the Environmental Sustainability section on that in terms of housing stock. He said another issue was obsolescence, as buildings reach a certain age people want new systems, etc. and that related to property values, neighborhoods and quality of life. Mr. Houseal agreed and said he would check and ensure that receives some prominence.

Acting Chair Mann agreed, saying if we really value our neighborhoods we must commit to keeping these older buildings in place. Mr. Houseal said one of the key defining characteristics of Oak Park was the architectural diversity and the character of the residential neighborhoods. Commissioner Gilbert said one way to avoid tear downs was the functional ability of homes to provide modern comforts of living and environmental sustainability and we needed to find ways and develop programs for homeowners to keep up with the latest improvements. Mr. Houseal agreed.

Commissioner Moran asked if there was a conflict between Land Use and Built Environment and Economic Health and Vitality when it pertained to economic development. Mr. Houseal disagreed, explaining Land Use and Built Environment was the land and buildings on it while Economic Development could be how the land or building was used. He said there was relationship between the two, but different enough to require its own categories.

Acting Chair Mann said it was apparent to him that some of the words used had hidden definitions behind them, and since the document will be used by all the commissions that could be a problem. For example, the terms “complete streets” or “travel demand management” could be spelled out in a glossary. Mr. Houseal agreed, saying the final document will have more context and they will be able to flesh things out, but he said a glossary was an excellent idea and if there were other technical terms that were not understood to let him know.

Acting Chair Mann reiterated Commissioner Moran’s observation that some of the objectives got into outcomes rather than what we are trying to go after. Some massaging needed to happen so we didn’t prescribe the exact outcome. Mr. Houseal said they wanted to be as specific as they could to provide focused guidance but didn’t want to tie the hands of the Village so that someone said you have to do this. He said they were refining things now to ensure that and if there were specific cases to let him know so they could do so.

Commissioner Rouse said there was a lot of discussion now about getting things onto the web and with objective number two on the first goal of Governmental Excellence, it seemed very casual and not illuminating. Mr. Houseal said there were a lot of current and former governmental leaders in that group that helped craft that. Commissioner Rouse said it seemed very bland and informal and it didn’t seem to tell the reader what we are really shooting for, for example a more user-friendly Village, the ability to pay bills, parking online, etc. Mr. Houseal said getting to the details sometimes turned a section unwieldy. Commissioner Gilbert agreed with Commissioner Rouse, saying it didn’t really grab people with a strong direction like saying, “make Oak Park a 100 % online service provider”, for example. Mr. Houseal asked commissioners to go through and edit and craft some of the language as it would be helpful to see examples. He suggested giving it to staff and it would go back to CPAC. Mr. Failor agreed, saying it would be best to have edits by mid-August as there would possibly be a presentation to the Village Board in September.

Commissioner Benson suggested adding, “Continuous contact with businesses, developers and other industry professionals” to goal number one in the Economic Health and Vitality category. Mr. Houseal argued that that was only a piece of market analysis for viability and he would bring it to the working group, but he would suggest qualifying it by adding “including” before the phrase, “talking with businesses, developers and other industry professionals”. A short discussion ensued about the factors that play into market viability and whether it was possible to include all the factors into the goal.

Acting Chair Mann thanked Mr. Houseal for his presentation.

Mr. Failor said at the August 1, 2013 Plan Commission meeting there would be a public hearing looking at South Town and whether the Transit-Related Retail Overlay District was still appropriate.

Commissioner Moran asked staff to recap the outcome of the Zoning Board of Appeals and Plan Commission recommendation on use variances. Mr. Failor said the Village Board determined the ZBA would continue to hear all use variances and make a recommendation back to the Board. The Board will then make a final decision.

Commissioner Gilbert asked about a day care application that came through the Plan Commission on South Marion Street that was now a children’s play area. Mr. Failor said it was a by-right use and that area was not in an overlay district.

Adjournment:

Commissioner Rouse motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Burton seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

Angela Schell,
Recording Secretary