

MINUTES
BLOOMINGTON PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2015, 4:00 P.M.
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL
109 EAST OLIVE STREET, BLOOMINGTON, ILLINOIS

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Balmer, Mr. Cain, Mr. Cornell, Mr. Diamond, Mr. Pearson,
Mr. Protzman, Mr. Scritchlow, Mr. Stanczak

MEMBERS ABSENT: Mr. Wills, Mr. Suess

OTHERS PRESENT: Ms. Jennifer Sicks, Transportation Planner
Ms. Vasu Pinnamaraju, Executive Director of McLean County
Regional Planning Commission
Mr. Mark Woolard, City Planner

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Cain called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL: Mr. Woolard called the roll. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

MINUTES: The Commission reviewed the March 25, 2015 minutes. Mr. Pearson moved to approve the March 25, 2015, minutes as presented. Mr. Diamond seconded the motion which passed by a vote of 8-0 with the following votes being cast on roll call: Mr. Scritchlow-yes; Mr. Pearson-yes; Mr. Cain-yes; Mr. Balmer-yes; Mr. Protzman-yes; Mr. Stanczak-present; Mr. Diamond-yes; Mr. Cornell-present.

REGULAR AGENDA:

OLD BUSINESS: Discussion of Comprehensive Plan
Chairman Cain introduced the discussion. Ms. Sicks stated we have three group to make presentations. She also thanked them for coming to make presentations and for all of their incredibly hard work over the last seven months.

Ms. Tina Salamone represented the Arts, Culture and History group and stated the United States is unlike other places throughout the world in that we have to constantly explain the importance of the arts. Bloomington's existing conditions show we have a rich area of music, art, and theater for generations. Downtown has been the cultural center of Bloomington and now the area for the arts is being stretched out. There is no registered cultural district. We have challenges. One is we do not have a central data basis and we can be in competition with each other. The recent survey demonstrated that the future should be inspired by our rich and important history with abundant art and cultural opportunities. The area will value and support the arts into the fabric of civic life. The community will honor its past and provide a future perspective by preserving historic buildings, neighborhoods and other links to the City's early years. We will foster community interaction and reinforce a sense of place. She explained how we need the arts embedded in the

community for livability and for economics. The cultural amenities need to be part of the basic services. Dead cities have been reborn largely because the arts have been placed front and center. She gave examples of Champaign, river front Peoria and Grand Rapids, Michigan. She said vibrant arts education and arts experiences are absolutely vital to the health of any demographics and without it we cannot address the spirit. The arts are important for people at risk and art is story telling. We need places for art experiences.

Cathy Sutliff stated one goal is to create a unique identity for the Bloomington arts and cultural scene. Downtown should be the official designated art district. The arts have been filling the economic holes in downtown where there are now nine galleries and numerous studios. The number of people employed in McLean County in the arts equals a small factory and the people are already trained. Another goal is to increase the visibility of the arts and culture. Tourists that travel for arts, culture and history spend more money and time than for sports and any other tourist purpose. One quarter of the survey responses were about the arts. The third goal is to support and promote arts and culture in the community. Coordination among agencies is needed. A fourth goal is to identify, conserve, and preserve the City's heritage resources as a basis for retaining and enhancing strong community character and a sense of place. Repeatedly survey respondents mentioned the historic and heritage aspect of Bloomington. This makes us unique. We have five historic districts and numerous historic buildings. We should also consider other places to promote cultural tourism. A fifth goal is to encourage the use of public art to enhance neighborhoods and public spaces and foster engagement throughout the community.

Ms. Salamone explained how Paducah, Kentucky is the nation's model for artist to revitalize properties, provide financing, and the allowance of artists to work in certain areas. She said the great poet Vachel Lindsay embodied what we can do right here for our groups of neighborhoods.

Ms. Brittany Cornell represented the Downtown group and stated one third of the survey respondents mentioned downtown and most said they would like to see downtown revitalization. There were also responses on the history, architecture, the most multi-use neighborhood, culture retail and entertainment. Parking needs to be addressed. Attractions are the farmer's market, the BCPA, the coliseum, the museum of history, the Route 66 museum. The guiding theme is for downtown to be: thriving as a unique local and regional destination, the City's cultural hub with welcoming public spaces appealing to all people for living, working and playing. Goals involve a range of employment, retail, the warehouse district, housing, signs, cultural opportunities, and promoting the unique brand. Another goal is to protect the historic character and encouraging appropriate new development. Other goals are to have a clean and safe downtown, continue to develop a multi-modal transportation network and to reinforce connections between the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

Mr. Austin Grammer represented the Economic Development group and stated we have a strong economy, low unemployment and have a great story to tell. He highlighted the strategies being used for economic development. The survey responses indicated the services we offer are wonderful and we need to continue to provide such by growing our economy. He explained how one third of the city's operations budget is driven by sales tax. The enterprise zone has important benefits and there has been a regional effort in applying for a shared zone. Another initiative is to become a work ready community.

Mr. Diego Mendez-Carbajo said the vision for the group is for Bloomington to be vibrant and thriving, with a diversified economy and a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation. As a regional economic leader, it will attract and nurture a highly skilled workforce. The community's high quality of life will bolster its economic competitiveness. Guiding themes pertain to the city's location, a strong economy with diverse employers, a vibrant downtown for economic growth, an attractive retail and entertainment destination, quality of life, and affordable living. One of their goals is to ensure employment for all residents. Additional goals are to have a culture of entrepreneurship and a skilled workforce. Other goals are for the image of Bloomington as a business friendly community and to enhance tourism based economic development.

Chairman Cain asked for any questions. There was discussion on the defining community character, reinventing the warehouse district and incorporating it into the downtown. Ms. Pinnamaraju described how the warehouse district is an opportunity and communities have revitalized these through the arts or business incubators. Mr. Balmer emphasized how we need to be more specific in addressing these issues. Ms. Pinnamaraju stated that the actionable items will provide more additional detail but the plan will not be able to determine all of the design details. There was discussion on the historical destinations in downtown. Tricia Stiller, Executive Director of the Downtown Bloomington Association, described a number of historic entities and the historical performers that tell our story. Mr. Pearson said he could vote for a quarter cent sales tax to devote just for the arts, culture, history centering in the downtown. Ms. Stiller explained the plan helps us to remember how special we are and bring the history, heritage and culture to the fore front. It will renew our own enthusiasm for our home town and the plan will help us move forward. Ms. Pinnamaraju explained how Paducah, Kentucky moved forward with very little money by adjusting the regulations and the redevelopment process. The arts and culture group is not proposing any tax. There was discussion on how the revitalization and development could push people out but that was not the case in Paducah. The key is the leadership, intent and investment for the area. Art and economic development are not mutually exclusive. There was discussion on the difference between sports verses art tourism. The nature of the sports spending and the art sales can be very different.

Mr. Diamond asked how this integrates with how many perceive as the downtown as a red light district with the future vision for downtown. Ms. Stiller said we do have an active night life in downtown and the reality is far less troublesome than perceived. The bars are mostly active on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays only and there are ways to integrate all of the experiences. Many pubs have recently experienced less patronage and are evolving by changing their market strategies such as adding jazz. The actionable items will be addressing the goal of a safe and clean environment. People often spend more at downtown restaurants when they attend a play or a concert than a sporting event.

Mr. Grammer said it is very valuable to address economic development in the comprehensive plan while the regional economic plan is going on because it helps us to figure out our strengths. The coordination between the two will always need to continue. The two efforts will likely coincide and complement each other.

There was discussion on how the arts, culture and history addresses other areas besides just downtown. More of this will be addressed in the action items.

Chairman Cain stated this has been a fantastic discussion and expressed the planning commission's appreciation for all of the time today by the working group members as well as leading up to today. He encouraged them to keep attending and engaging in the meetings as we bring the comprehensive planning to a conclusion. Ms. Pinnamaraju also thanked them and said they each have spent between 30 to 40 hours throughout the process.

NEW BUSINESS: None

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business to come to the Bloomington Planning Commission's attention, Mr. Scritchlow moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Stanczak supported the motion which was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Woolard, City Planner

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