

City of Columbus
Regular Planning Commission Meeting
February 21, 2018

The February 21, 2018 regular meeting of the Planning Commission for the City of Columbus was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Garth Sternberg at the City Hall. Present were Commission members: James Watson, Pam Wolowski, Jesse Preiner, and Jody Krebs; City Administrator Elizabeth Mursko (8:10); Planner Dean Johnson; and Recording Secretary Karen Boland.

Also in attendance were City Councilmembers Denny Peterson, Bill Krebs (8:30) and Mayor Dave Povolny (8:30); Barb Bobick, Aaron Bedessem of Running Aces, Janet Hegland, Vern Roisum, Richard Miede of Westmor Fluid Solutions, Marlene Nelson, Tom Olson, Arlen Logren, Mary Preiner, and Pat Preiner.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Motion by Preiner to approve the Agenda as presented. Second by Watson. Motion carried.

APPROVAL – REGULAR PC MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 17, 2018

Motion by Watson to approve the minutes of the January 17, 2018 regular Planning Commission meeting as written. Second by Wolowski. Votes as follows: Krebs – abstain, Preiner – aye, Wolowski – aye, Watson – aye, Sternberg – aye. Motion carried.

COLUMBUS 2018 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN DISCUSSION

Planner Johnson thanked everyone for attending. Introductions were made of Planning Commission members, Councilmember Peterson, and Freeway District Corporate representatives Aaron Bedessem, Director of Marketing for Running Aces, and Richard Miede, Environmental Health and Safety Manager for Westmor Fluid Solutions. Johnson gave the overview of the Comprehensive Plan presented at the February 8th Freeway District Workshop. Last week an open house was held for public comment.

Comp Plan Overview:

Every ten years the City is required by State law to update its Comprehensive Plan for approval by the Metropolitan Council. The Plan provides guidance for growth and development, and public and private investment. It sets the stage for what goes into the City's zoning code. The Comp Plan must include sections addressing land use, housing, transportation, parks and utilities.

Growth Forecasts:

For the year 2040 forecasts predict 1672 more residents in the City, 774 more households, and 364 more jobs.

Existing Zoning:

The current use of existing land may or may not reflect its actual zoning.

About 12,000 acres of the City are publicly owned, and therefore off the tax rolls.

We've averaged 8-10 homes/year in the rural residential areas of the City over the past few years. Thirty years ago we were doing 25-30 building permits per year. So that trend in the rural area has gone down. Some level of housing will need to be done in the Freeway District in order to come close to meeting growth forecasts.

There are currently five land-use zones in the Freeway District: Commercial Retail (CR), Commercial Showroom (CS), Light Industrial (LI), Suburban Residential Overlay (SRO), and Horse Racing (HR).

Future Land Use Possibilities:

In 2015 a study was done by the McCombs Group which found that the amount of land zoned commercial retail and destination retail in the Freeway District exceeds projected demand.

- Since the last Comp Plan, the Freeway District is still largely undeveloped. What will make it more responsive to the market?
- Major changes in the retail market have impacted the need for commercial land. What are some new options for use?
- Do combination-use districts, such as SRO, fail to provide certainty to potential developers?
- Should SRO be replaced with SR in the Northwest area of the Freeway District?
 - Pros: 1) eliminates uncertainty about incompatibilities, 2) this area is suitable for housing, 3) the Sanctuary at Howard Lake, 4) there is already an excess of retail land
 - Cons: less flexibility when selling land.
- Should SRO be kept or removed in the Southeast area of the Freeway District?
 - Pros for keeping: 1) flexibility when selling land, 2) retain option for housing, 3) compatible with Forest Lake
 - Cons for keeping: 1) uncertainty about compatibility, 2) housing next to freeway
- Should Mixed Use be added in the Retail District?
 - Pros: 1) another growth option, 2) residential supports retail, 3) high-density housing compatible, 4) affordable/workforce goals
 - Cons: standalone housing may compete for retail space
- Should Suburban housing types be revisited?

There are currently 3 units allowed per acre, with 6 units per acre for townhomes with Planned Unit Development (PUD).

There is potential for senior attached or detached housing, multifamily, and/or mixed use with higher densities.
- Consider transitioning some CR areas to LI (which would continue to allow commercial showroom) or mixed use (which would allow residential).

Table Discussions:

At the February 8th workshop participants split into tables by geographic area: Northwest, East Central, Southwest, Southeast, and Interchange. Some combination of City staff, CC members and/or PC members joined each group. Each table was asked to discuss the best future use(s) for that area and what use(s) should be avoided.

Going forward, the deadline for delivery of the completed Comp Plan to the Met Council is 12/31/18. One-hundred sixty entities in the seven-county metro area must submit a Plan to the Met Council. Prior to final submission, the City must ask neighboring communities to review its plan and comment. They must allow up to six months for comment. This means that in order to meet its final deadline, the City needs to have a draft completed for review by June of 2018.

Discussion/Comments from Westmor and Running Aces

Mr. Miede of Westmor said there are currently no immediate plans for expansion. Growth ebbs and flows with the success of their parent company. Westmor employs approximately 80 people. Its parent company has about 2000 employees. The zoning on either side of Westmor is LI. Right now there are some existing homes to the north, but the land designation is LI. Miede said the company was in Fridley for forty years. They were acquired by a company and the new building was purchased to be more efficient. Westmor would not promote a change from LI in that surrounding area to anything that would not allow for their potential future expansion.

A hotel is in the works at Running Aces. Mr. Bedessem said Running Aces would like to see entertainment venues on the land nearby, e.g. a bowling alley or movie theater.

Johnson said everything east of Zurich--both sides of Lake Drive--would stay in some commercial capacity on the basis of those that came to the Freeway District workshop. There are 2-3 homes immediately north of the alignment of Zurich, on smaller lots. To the east of that it is essentially vacant, undeveloped property. The owners of those properties would prefer service commercial rather than entertainment retail --things like office, day care, auto uses, etc. If a new district is created, we probably wouldn't prevent entertainment-type uses from being there as well.

Mr. Bedessem said Running Aces would like to see businesses that will bring people to the area. High-density housing above retail shops would be desirable.

Johnson said one complaint from Columbus business owners is that their employees can't afford to live in Columbus. One issue to be looked at is whether workforce housing is needed. He said sometimes bad effects are associated with value housing, but the majority of the time, that is not the case. One thing promoted at the City-wide public meeting, is the need for more higher-density housing. We will get called out by the Met Council if we have obstacles in our Plan to higher-density housing.

Mr. Bedessem said regardless of the density of the housing, Running Aces would be interested in housing for people who can afford a night out, people with disposable income. He brought up both Arbor Lakes and a development in Elk River as examples.

Johnson stated that some key differences are that Elk River has its own large hinter-land market to which it provides services. In the case of a place like Arbor Lakes, or some other developments in closer proximity to the Twin Cities, Columbus is much farther from a major downtown area. He said the market is approaching. Columbus is at the end of the metropolitan area. There is a lot of land left to be developed in Lino Lakes and Hugo.

Johnson said the direction from the earlier workshop was to put mixed use in that area. If the City doesn't create a standalone residential district west of Zurich, we will look at having mixed use in all of our commercial districts in some fashion. That will be described in the Comp Plan, but after it goes through the Met Council's review process, it becomes up to the City to modify its zoning ordinance and update it for the standards described in the Comp Plan. By State law, the City ordinance can't be inconsistent with the Comp Plan. Zoning can't be changed without changing the land-use designation. In the seven-County metro area if there is a discrepancy between zoning and planning, planning holds. It is the opposite outside of the seven-county metro area. Because they have no mandatory planning, zoning dictates in those areas.

Johnson pointed out that the Plan can be amended, there is no limit to how often it can be amended, it's just that there is time and some cost involved. If a development came in. it is possible to amend the Plan.

Mr. Bedessem said after road construction on County 54 takes place over the next couple of years, Running Aces hopes to grow some more and add to the Running Aces property.

Reconfiguration of County 54 will begin in 2019. There was also discussion of construction schedules for Highway 35 and the 97 Bridge interchange.

There was a question about a multi-use-- retail below, housing above --development. Would zoning changes be needed to allow this? Would that be CR development?

Johnson said, depending on what the final direction of the Comp Plan is, there can be a statement in the Plan that we are going to allow mixed-use concepts in the commercial area that are going to be developed in the zoning ordinance. Johnson cautioned that if the City shrinks its retail district down, and then says it's okay to have side-by-side residential use, they may find themselves in a situation where somebody doesn't care that it's meant to be retail, they only want it for residential. He recommends including in the zoning area something designating what percentage of the land area can be used a certain way. For instance, no more than 10 or 20% of the land area, through a PUD procedure, can be designated residential. With a multi-story concept, it doesn't matter. He doesn't see this being a good market for that. We will accommodate either --that will be a zoning function--after the Comp Plan is done. It is best to make the Plan flexible, for as little need to amend as possible. Within this broader commercial designation, we will describe that high-end retail function, entertainment use, and service use would all be eligible subject to zoning

amendments to have mixed-use options. The City is not making changes to the zoning ordinance before completion of the Comp Plan. The Comp Plan sets the stage.

Johnson said Columbus currently has a commercial zone and an industrial zone in its Comp Plan. Within that commercial zone, right now we have three zoning districts. We may say in this Plan that we're going to convert that three-district zoning category into five new categories, and in it we intend to establish mixed-use within each. We don't want to get locked into anything we aren't sure we're going to do. But, we will have to address the housing component –how we're going to approach 775 units. If the majority of that residential development is located in the freeway corridor, it benefits all the businesses.

Mr. Bedessem said he doesn't think Running Aces has a strong opinion about the properties northwest of Zurich.

Mr. Mieke said he doubts Westmor's workforce would be likely apartment-dwellers. He doesn't believe Ziegler's workforce would be either.

Johnson went over the following ideas, summarized by the Freeway District table-discussion groups at the February 8th meeting, for discussion and comment by PC members:

Southwest

- The best future for this area would be more light industrial, due to increase in overall truck traffic in the area; this could potentially include manufacturing and/or commercial/industrial
- Preferred uses in this area include outdoor storage, small businesses (contractors), storage/sales/service, tire service, service stores
- This area should not have housing or Gander north retail
- Freeway access is a key consideration here

Johnson said outside storage is a departure and would require an ordinance amendment if you are going to talk about contractor-type businesses in general. That would be a change here. The Freeway corridor is currently more discriminating than the Lake Drive commercial industrial area. It should be in the Comp Plan if you are making a change to allow outside storage in this area. That would require some direction.

East Central

- Increase in light industrial
- There is an issues with paying for sewer and water in this area
- Intersection improvements can provide opportunities for development
- Consider performance standards for managing impacts – relax zoning or encourage focus on high aesthetics
- Outdoor storage is a big opportunity
- Differing opinions on the future of retail for the area, whether or not it is reduced from before

- Would regional stormwater management provide additional opportunities?
- Wetland rules are negatively impacting development opportunities
- Need a destination business

Again, allowing outdoor storage would require direction.

Regional stormwater management is being looked at. This is a concept, which—like sewer and water—may sound good until cost details come in. If the first property requires a million dollars of expenditures, and it benefits 10 other properties, and they all have to share in the cost, they may not be as enthusiastic. This comment looks like they are receptive to see what may come of it.

The McCombs study would indicate destination businesses are on the decline.

Southeast

- Keep guidance for industrial uses here, due to issues with compatibility with planned asphalt plant facility and interstate proximity
- Roads serving area (including Lyons) are dirt; roads need to be paved and improved especially to handle truck traffic
- Support construction of new interchange south of the city; could provide better access to sites here for development
- Should keep flexibility to have a housing option in this area; may be challenging due to location but possible developer can find a way to make it work
- Sound carries far over existing open fields; need to consider additional buffers or sound walls to reduce highway noise impacts on properties
- For residential development, multifamily or mixed use options might be preferable to single family in this location near highway and industry
- More intensive development will need sewer and water service; discussion on what it would take to provide both to the area, and to deal with needed drainage improvements
- Consider range of industrial uses, whatever fits best with the location
- Consider restrictions on a limited number of uses with higher potential for impact, such as slaughterhouses/rendering plants

At the very south end of that southeast corner, it is an expensive proposition to generate development on a small piece of property. Someone near the north end of that section could do a temporary lift-station, you keep moving it south as development occurs and ultimately it is at the very south end. There are ways to do it. We don't have a gravity system, because we're so flat here. It's an expensive proposition no matter what happens.

They would like to keep the flexibility for housing, but don't anticipate it. The City would not be recommending any single-family detached housing, other than senior-type housing. We'd be focusing on higher-density senior housing, if that market exist, and higher-density family housing/workforce housing.

The City is doing a feasibility study completing design for extension of sewer and water all the way to the triangle on the south end, which includes getting water to 35E. Part of the expense of establishing a water system throughout the entire freeway corridor is having two crossings in the freeway. One was always proposed through the triangle. The City Engineer is designing and confirming what the size of that pipe has to be when it gets extended, what the cost will be. There is no current petition to look at the design or estimate the cost for utilities on the east side, south of 145th street. We have always looked at development driving that through petitions.

Slaughterhouses and feed lots are still allowable uses in the Freeway District. Property owners and PC members would like to see these eliminated.

Interchange

- Retail in the four quadrants only – too much area guided for retail right now
- Flexibility with residential overlay, including high density (12+ units)
- Allow mixed use development, though may be more feasible to have side-by-side rather than retail on bottom and housing on top
- Use planned unit development to provide flexibility in development plan
- As move west of the interchange, all should be office/wage/light industrial (e.g. auto repair, electrician and plumber) – not dependent on convenient access/visibility like retail

When talking about side-by-side standards, Johnson would like to see it limited to a certain percentage of the footprint of the property. That is a zoning standard.

Northwest

- Note that group only had participants from the area east of Zurich Street; no participants representing the area currently with suburban residential overlay
- Area has been guided for commercial for 30+ years; it is expensive to hold land with high utility costs and taxes, especially larger lots
- Keep commercial/retail option
- Consider mixed use development option
- Next to Running Aces, commercial uses that are complementary to the track
- Coffee shop or gift shop (retail) proposed in existing home; home could be retrofitted to accommodate use and provide service to the area
- Entertainment and restaurant uses

Johnson went over the following responses turned in at the February 15th public open house, for discussion and comment by PC members:

Public Comment Form – Summary of Responses

Total surveys turned in: 30

For the **rural residential** areas of Columbus (outside of the freeway corridor area):

1. Should the City consider reducing the current 5 acre lot size minimum requirement to allow for smaller lots in certain undeveloped areas?

- No (20)
- Yes (7)

2. Why or why not?

No reasons:

- Keep it rural (3)
- Too little land at 2.5 acres to handle septic and wells
- The Council and Planning Commission can't be trusted to use good judgment when changing the ordinances and zoning.
- Leave it at 5 acres
- Concern for well and septic systems
- We did not build here for less
- I moved here 4 years ago because of the density of the community
- Not outside the freeway corridor
- We located in this community because of the low density. I don't want to see this change
- Our water table will not support this
- I like the rural community, keep population low
- Then we would need more police and fire protection
- I would hate to see Columbus have huge houses on postage stamp lots. Part of what I like here is not having crowded living
- We moved out here to get away from houses being right next door to each other
- Moved here because of low density
- To keep rural feeling of living out in the open
- Concern of septic systems functioning and not being on top of one another
- It's been working for the last 30 years I've been here
- It would turn into Blaine
- Too much wetland
- Won't support wells – my idiot neighbor thinks he should keep his 5 acres watered – I worry that my well will dry up because of this. What if everybody did this?
- The soil composition in this area will not support septic systems that will be adequate for safety of water. There will be poop in the wells. And, yes, I know all about the mound systems. Still not good.

- It is only affecting a small amount of area that is set to be developed. Only freeway corridor is noted but residents in SE corner are not noted but seem targeted.
- 5 areas should be square not narrow – narrow sites = still next door
- I am in favor of lot averaging to 5 acres for new development area, but I am not in favor of reducing to 2.5 acre in the majority of the rural area
- We just moved here for the rural nature of Columbus. We wouldn't want it to change. We want to live "in the country."
- Localized areas of new development could be planned and developed to match the feel of Columbus but also successfully increase density so the city increases residents and revenue
- Larger lots keep it more rural
- I was raised in this area and recently bought property as an adult to live in this area due to the rural environment (used to live in Burnsville). As a young adult wanting to live and raise a family in this environment I do not want additional development below a 5 acre minimum
- We moved up here for the less density. I do not see much benefit to Columbus to reduce lot size.
- Not – because of the potential strain could put on the water table
- If we want to live in high density housing I would live close to the cities

Yes reasons:

- 2.5 acre lots OK in areas that will support it
- Depending on the area – freeway only
- If sewer and water does not exist I don't want denser housing
- 5 acres is an unmanageable lot – too big to cut, too small to do anything with
- More households mean more tax base which hopefully would mean 24/7 police coverage
- If yes, limited area – such as freeway district multiperson housing development
- To allow, where it makes sense, for more residential growth, and minimize taxes
- Personally, I am in favor of the 5 acre minimum. The space is what attracted me to Columbus.
- I wouldn't have a problem if the "certain" areas were like the freeway corridor. I'm in favor of adding some additional low income or senior multiunit housing. Again, as long as the 2.5 acre lot size is restricted to certain areas, I would not want to see a farmers 40 acre field stuffed with 2.5 acre lots

PC members and Johnson felt some of the comments in the "yes" category are more in line with the "no" category.

For the **city as a whole**:

3. Do you have any other concerns or suggestions about the City's growth and development that should be addressed in the comprehensive plan (related to housing, businesses, transportation, parks, utilities, etc.)?

- Traffic and noise on Lake Drive
- Potomac Boulevard is being destroyed by heavy truck traffic
- Get rid of concrete/asphalt recycle plant
- Stay away from heavy industrial, i.e. asphalt plants
- Bring in business that employs more people i.e. nursing home
- I'd like to see an actual plan to address how to better utilize the freeway corridor. I'd expect to see expected units and tax base on potential uses. Right now all I understand is it could be used differently without understanding potential of the area if zoned differently.
- The higher density housing should be along the freeway district but there isn't going to be interest by developers if the freeway district now allows heavy industrial businesses. Seem that the City has shot themselves in the
- No low income apartments
- No mass transit
- Freeway District: eliminate Slaughter House from ordinance L.I. Allow Hospice, Group Homes, Assisted Care Facilities; any nonviolent patient facility in Freeway District – Hospital, Funeral Home, Dentist Office, etc.; build exteriors of brick or sound deadening material on SE side

Johnson said most of these are currently allowed in some of the Freeway districts. He also reported that, by State law, any single-family residence in City can be occupied by a six-person-or-less residential facility. There is one exception: sex offenders. They are regulated differently.

- Why are you putting in businesses like the asphalt plant? That pollution and traffic will stop any other businesses from building in the freeway corridor.
- Keep businesses in freeway and keep multiple family or multiple unit housing on freeway roads as well.
- I would like Met Council to not exist and neither should we cater to it
- There was much concern and discussion about water table and sewer and wells...the people seem to not understand the requirements and the approval processes...more education is needed?

Johnson said some people did not know and were appalled that the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency requires 11,000 feet as the minimum footprint for a home and septic system. A one-acre lot would even be capable of handling that. That doesn't expose us to more environmental

damage. He said that many homes on five-acre lots have less than a half-acre of upland/buildable land.

- Columbus is a nice small city – we should keep it that way
- I have concerns with the ability to subdivide under 5 acres. I also have concerns of water and well usage if people would be able to subdivide or if the average is 2.5 acres which mean the minimum would be less
- Yes, any business developments should honor the environment and preservation of the natural areas and impact on surrounding residential housing
- Parks and trails promote a healthy population
- I'd like to see 153rd paved. That's just me.

Johnson said he and Haila Mazy, with Bolton and Menk, will get a draft to the PC within the next two meetings for some final direction. He would like direction from the Council on a couple of things, including changing the density, before investing a lot of time. Whether the City decides to change from a five-acre minimum to another standard, and whether they want to do it wholesale throughout the City or in certain areas, it cannot be done without amending the Comp Plan to set the stage. If the Council is not supportive of that by a super-majority (four of five), than they will not work on including it in the Plan.

Sternberg asked if we are still seeking the rural residential designation. Johnson said the Met Council staff met with him and the City Administrator two years ago, and told them all they had to do in the Comp Plan process was set the stage and make an argument why the City would go from diversified rural to rural residential. This past December, the decision was made internally at the Met Council to eliminate the rural residential designation. However, Johnson said the City would make its same argument on whatever the density is, as a diversified rural community. Within this existing designation, they still have the ability to make the argument to change the City's density. Making the case doesn't commit you to change your density, but gives the flexibility.

Johnson said in the Comp Plan the City describes what the intent is of every district. In the intent for the RR district we would argue that we are at the end of the region, we are bounded by 12,000 acres of State land on the north and west, we're not going to have sewer and water outside of the Freeway District, so our density has always been at odds with 1 per 10. We've been 1 per 5 for 50 years. Now we'll be saying we either are or we are not looking for greater flexibility. Johnson doesn't want to have to make that argument with Met Council, if the City Council is does not want to seek higher density than five acres.

Mursko said the Comp Plan always takes into account public comment. So, based on input from the public, do the PC and CC still have the same recommendation about having the flexibility to allow higher density than the 5-acre minimum in at least some areas of the RR district?

Johnson said that four people on the Council must agree in order to adopt the Comp Plan. He does not want to write in arguments for higher density in the RR district, if four people on the Council are not supportive of it; that would be a waste of time and resources.

Mayor Povolny said the City does not want to lose the opportunity to hook into the sewer in Forest Lake and have some high-density housing. There are some areas that make sense to find a designation that would allow the City to have smaller lot sizes, but the majority of people in the core of Columbus do not want to change from the five-acre minimum in most areas, as long as the City can continue to afford having that luxury. It is a luxury and it costs more in taxes. It will be progressively expensive to maintain.

Councilmember Krebs did not take away from the public meeting that most people do not want to consider smaller lot sizes.

Johnson said if the Council is interested in maintaining flexibility and not making the decision as part of the Comp Plan, then we should be going through this exercise of defending why we're different than a City that will have sewer and water. We are bounded by public land and have the highest percentage of wetland than any community in the entire region. Any proposed utility extensions are a long time out and extremely expensive.

PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

No topic was raised at Public Open Forum.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mursko reported that Boland is leaving the City after tonight's meeting. She and Planning Commission members thanked Boland for her work.

PLANNING COMMISSION MEMBERS' REPORT

KREBS COMMENT:

Krebs thanked PC members and City staff for all their support at the passing of Councilmember Krebs' father.

ATTENDANCE - NEXT CC MEETING

Sternberg is scheduled to attend the City Council meeting on February 28, 2018.

Motion by Krebs to adjourn. Second by Wolowski. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Karen Boland, Recording Secretary