

APPROVED
OCTOBER 16, 2023

CITY OF WIXOM
49045 PONTIAC TRAIL
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2023

This meeting was called to order by Chairman Day of the Planning Commission at 7:30 p.m. at which time allegiance was pledged to the American flag.

PRESENT: William Day (Chairman), Cheryl Tacy (Vice Chairperson), Commissioners: Mark Helsom, Anthony Lawrence

ABSENT: Excused: Ray Cousineau; Sandro Grossi; Mark Lada

OTHERS: Ben Carlisle; Matteo Passalaqua (Carlisle Wortman Associates); Drew Benson, Assistant City Manager; and Mona Freiburger (Recording Secretary)

Determination of a Quorum:

A quorum of the Planning Commission was present for this meeting.

Changes or Additions to the Agenda:

None

Approval of Minutes:

MOTION made and seconded by Commissioner Lawrence and Commissioner Helsom to approve the September 6, 2023, Planning Commission Meeting Minutes, as submitted.

VOTE:

MOTION CARRIED

Correspondence:

September 12, 2023, City Manager Update

Call to the Public: (Limited to 5 minutes per speakers, addressing Agenda items on Agenda only)

No public comments.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

1. DISCUSSION ITEM: Renton Street Redevelopment Request for Qualifications Process

Discussion:

Carlisle Wortman Associates prepared a packet of materials, which is the same information prepared for the July City Council meeting. The packet of materials contained are project examples, Renton Concept Plans, Concept Plan Pro Formas, Draft Request for Qualifications and Planning Commission Discussion Points. This letter is dated September 13, 2023 and addressed to Assistant City Manager Drew Benson.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated there was a joint meeting back in May regarding the City owned parcels along Renton Street and North Wixom Road. There has been a lot of progress since that joint meeting, putting together a draft RFQ document as well as refining concept plans for what we have interpreted the goals to be for the City owned property, and putting it out on the market. We are now getting closer to the point of asking City Council for final approval to distribute the RFQ document. There have been individual meetings with each of the bodies involved to look at the documents and give feedback. There are a lot of specific pieces outlined in Mr. Carlisle's memo as well as some visual examples to talk through to show where we are in this process. The ultimate goal is to take feedback as a small group, given the Planning Commission is one of the approving bodies of the project to try to incorporate any last details before City Council's approval to proceed.

Mr. Ben Carlisle commented it is worth noting that subsequent to the joint meeting with the Planning Commission, DDA, ZBA, and City Council, there have been two meetings; one with City Council and one with the DDA. This is a refinement based on their direction.

Chair Day asked why we are trying to develop this property. The reasoning for his question is, if you have to go to three stories or more to make this a viable project, anything built is going to overwhelm the downtown. The sample communities where other buildings were done were all communities that had a much larger, established downtown; Northville may be the closest to Wixom, but even that, that is several blocks of downtown

area that do not have any buildings of this type. There is only west retail. Chair Day indicated he did not understand why we want to develop a 3 to 5 story building there that is going to totally overwhelm the downtown, change the character of the City and eliminate any chance of ever developing small town character.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated, first and foremost, City Council had asked them to acquire some of these parcels; some were acquired years prior, and the City wasn't doing anything with them. Subsequently, the City acquired a couple more parcels because it was needed in order to do the Air Line Trail. There hasn't been a commercial building built in fifteen years. There is a lot of push for this, and that has been identified by the Planning Commission; City Council and the DDA talks about there being a need for more commercial involvement downtown. Administration was directed by City Council to acquire these additional properties and try to put this together; how do we redevelop an area that hasn't seen any investment in a long time? This is how we got to this point. These properties were acquired with the specific intent to turn them over, package them together and try to facilitate new development that we haven't been able to do with properties owned by private entities. East retail is a great example and a perfect fit for this; the infrastructure is all there but for whatever reason, hasn't happened. Administration has been deliberate in having these different meetings, doing a lot of review and feedback before putting the properties on the market. Some of the Pro Formas put together will paint the picture of why similar developments in other communities look the way they do. Our project does not have to look like that. The concepts put together is a four-story concept with the third and fourth stories setback. One of the things most specifically pointed out is that we are not sure, the Planning Commission is not sure, City Council is not sure, if buildings of that height are really what is wanted. We may not find anyone who wants to do this project. If that's the scenario, that's the scenario.

Vice Chair Tacy asked why Assistant City Manager Benson made the statement that the Planning Commission is not sure about maximum height for this project; she indicated the previous consensus at the joint meeting that by most, but not all, Planning Commissioners was that they are not in favor of more than three stories, at the most three, because of the skyline and what that does to it. Vice Chair Tacy indicated she did not understand how we are back to four to five stories when the Planning Commission keeps saying no. Assistant City Manager stated there aren't any five story concepts; the ordinance allows five stories. It was at the direction of City Council to do two, three and four story concepts.

Chair Day commented several years ago now, the City hired Gibson and Associates to come up with concept plans for the property where Wixom market is located between Old Wixom Road and Wixom Road and Pontiac Trail, which is where he thought a four or possibly a five-story project could work; south of Pontiac Trail. Originally, when the concept was built, it wasn't supposed to be the east and west retail; it was supposed to go all the way to Wixom Road. The chiropractor wouldn't sell his building, or the bank

wouldn't go along with it. Chair Day thought that if the Renton area gets developed, it is going to deter the east retail and any of that area where Wixom Liquor and Little Caesar's from being developed. He indicated it is not walkable between there and the west retail area; you can walk it, but it is not a charming walk, by any stretch of the imagination. Assistant City Manager Benson indicated he did not disagree with Chair Day; the DDA, specifically, agrees, as well. They recently took a proposal to City Council for design engineering services with HRC; the goal is to bury the power lines and expand the sidewalk in front of Wixom Liquor and PNC. City Council approved that at their last meeting. Assistant City Manager Benson stated he did not know when that project will be done; part of it, we have to establish the cost to do it. There is an estimate for burying the powerlines of \$200K; not even expanding the sidewalk and rebuilding the area. The infrastructure would make it feel walkable to feel like a downtown, independent of whether we can get the property owners to sell their property or invest in redevelopment. Assistant City Manager Benson stated City Council also asked if there would be parking for a four-story building. The goal of this meeting is to try to paint the whole picture of what these future conversations would look like, and there has to be give and take on both sides.

Mr. Carlisle stated one of the questions that was asked, are there other like communities or similar communities that meets the intent of what the VCA ordinance is trying to achieve. There are examples of Ferndale, Royal Oak, Northville, Plymouth, Birmingham and Auburn Hills. These may not be exactly comparable to Wixom, but these are some of the best examples in Southeast Michigan that meet the intent of what the VCA ordinance is trying to achieve.

The first is three levels, either residential and/or office with mixed use above. The materials of these are all predominately traditional material based of brick, stone, glass; some architecture varies by design but for the most part, those common classic materials are the one that are in all of the developments. All of the buildings are close to the street, against the sidewalk to create the urban street frontage that the VCA ordinance talks about. All of the parking is behind or screened from the public right of way. It is intended to create more of a walkable feel this in area, so there is some shelter for pedestrians that move along the street. These elements are important to match the intent for future development.

Assistant City Manager Benson commented the Auburn Hills site is the clearest example of a downtown where they are seven to ten years ahead of what Wixom is attempting to do, in terms of their intersection, Squirrel and Auburn. They did not have a downtown fifteen years ago; this building was just finished. They are building out the infrastructure the same way that Wixom is doing with individual streetscape projects and working with developers. These all have tax abatements and various TIF subsidies. There are a lot of parallels that we can draw from their experiences.

Vice Chair Tacy stated she hesitates to have those pictures released. While she agrees with the materials and all of the bullet points brought up, she does not want anything close

to any of those buildings; none of them have any of the City's design features. Vice Chair Tacy indicated, frankly, the buildings look like they belong at a college campus; all of the examples are not our downtown.

Vice Chair Tacy distributed examples of buildings from the Internet and demonstrated the brick detailing, style of windows, facades, which provokes the old style feel but every one is either a brand new building or has been re-worked. She stated she would be totally for anything like the examples she provided because when you are walking at street level, it feels like an old building, which is exactly what we are trying to recreate. Assistant City Manager Benson stated the examples were very helpful.

Mr. Carlisle indicated it was intended to not get into discussion at this point about the level of design details, that will come before the Planning Commission. This is only for a massing and scale discussion, not necessarily the details about which type of windows are being chosen for this area, etc.

Vice Chair Tacy stated we now have a Wixom Ford Plant development that is, by the time it gets to the Planning Commission, they are spending a lot of hours and money, etc., and our ability to go back and say no, they are not happy with the design of the building, we are now looking at four and five of them. Vice Chair Tacy indicated if we do not set the expectation at the beginning, they have already put a chunk of money into it. She would rather say here are some ideas of what we are looking for to blend into our downtown especially since there are the townhouses across the street to give it a harmonious look as you pass through that corridor. Vice Chair Tacy indicated we haven't always had good luck with that because they don't want to change, they have already spent the money.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated, fortunately, in this particular case, we are able to take steps like we are doing now because the City owns the property, we can control its destiny much easier than a privately owned piece of property where there are limits. The developer has the ability to do projects if they meet the City's ordinance requirements. We have the ability to be selective and find a developer who submits a proposal that best meets our intent. The examples are for descriptive purposes; he did not think anyone believes that this is what we want to see there. Vice Chair Tacy commented, thank you, she did not want to lead them in any way.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated they will see what the developing community suggests with some barriers, and guidelines. The RFQ package will have the VCA design guidelines and ordinances. There will be detailed priorities, and things that we would like to see. It is agreed that there is a need for more commercial space downtown. We are open to the conversation about residential, but it is not necessarily the preference; we are open to office in upper stories, but it is very unlikely someone would suggest that in today's market, but we are open to that. We may come to a scenario where just based on parking requirements; we may not be able to do more than one story. We require

them to have some façade that looks like an upper story but there wouldn't actually be a second story. That may be the realistic outcome.

Assistant City Manager Benson pointed out, he is very aware of the fact that much of the property on the other side, the city owned, and transferred to a developer in a larger but similar process as this. There were flaws, and we didn't have clawbacks to be able to get east retail back to better facilitate this. The City is working with the city attorney to craft language. There may be more for the agreement, itself. There may be some limits to what the City can do.

Mr. Carlisle indicated he was hearing from the Planning Commission that they did not think the concept plan should be included as part of the attachments of the RFQ. Basically, it would be the developer's discretion to come back with ideas of what they propose for the site.

Vice Chair Tacy stated she did not have a problem with the layout of the site in trying to incorporate the single driveway that would align more closely with the walkway on the north. She did not want to lead the developer in any way, and to force them to read the design guidelines, look at our community and design accordingly to see what they come up with. Vice Chair Tacy indicated she, personally, was in favor of the brick characteristics, all of the things originally stated, but she did not want to give the developer a visual and plant an idea in their head. She did not want to give the developer anything other than we are looking for certain characteristics that are architecturally reminiscent of old, established buildings, and see what they can come up with. Mr. Passalacqua stated the RFQ does, at the direction of the VCA with detail, and also the design committee references the walkability. It requires four-sided architecture, as well.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated he has gotten some degree of consensus, if we are intending for commercial uses on the first floor, everyone has had a preference for having whatever the southernmost unit is, having an outdoor seating area. If you are going to do a restaurant, we have an available liquor license, it should be there.

Vice Chair Tacy commented the Planning Commission is in favor of retaining the building to be used as a public restroom; there was not any mention. The Planning Commission is not opposed to having the building on the Renton property developed into a public restroom. Assistant City Manager Benson stated City Council, at a minimum, a couple of members are opposed to it. The restroom concept is still up for discussion. The DDA has stated they are in favor of a public restroom, as well. This will have to be worked out with City Council. Mr. Carlisle asked if the Planning Commission was open to the idea of public restrooms in the existing building or are they okay with the building being removed, and the restroom could be somewhere else within the new development. Vice Chair Tacy stated it would be her hope to be in the existing building, even if the building gets moved. Assistant City Manager Benson indicated the building is a wood frame house with vinyl siding.

Commissioner Helsom commented, from a residential perspective, it would be best if the restrooms were towards the back, and easier access from the trail. Vice Chair Tacy was opposed to the trail being moved to Wixom Road. She would like to find some way to put in public restrooms, especially if we are going to bill ourselves as being Air Line Trail friendly; and with the Junction. Both need a public restroom. A walkable downtown needs a public restroom.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated part of the idea of moving the trail was to try to accommodate more parking. The City would be open to a developer suggesting relocating the trail, if it meant accommodating more parking but it was good to know a different perspective. He thought the cost of relocating the trail that was just built would make sense. Part of the goal is to retain some degree of green space and to include trees. The original concept dedicated more space with 10-foot buffers around the trail. This would also leave space to bury power lines.

Mr. Matteo Passalaqua went over the concept Plan Pro Forms which are included in the memo from Ben Carlisle dated September 13, 2023 to the Planning Commission. The developer interest in the City-owned property will be an economic decision. Developers will evaluate their interest based on relative risk and anticipated return on investment. A developer's assessment of relative risk in the real estate market is based on a determination that there is a market for the desired use, the project is economically feasible, and that the path to approval will not have unexpected obstacles. There are many different tools for developers to get to the numbers. This is by no means the end all, be all of what it could look like, but it does paint the picture that as we allow for more density on the site, the numbers get better.

Commissioner Helsom asked if the power lines were included in any of the pre-development. Assistant City Manager Benson said no, they were not. This is a conversation, primarily, with the DDA but also with City Council of understanding to get what we want here, or something remotely close, we are going to have to sell these properties for less than we paid for them. The DDA very likely will have to contribute in some way for the remediation costs, demolition of existing things, the prepping of the infrastructure, streetscape, light posts, burying the power lines, etc. To Mr. Passalaqua's point, there is an estimated cost of land and an estimated cost of pre-development work; the cost of land is less than what the City paid. It depends on the scenario. The City has already invested in phase one of environmental for most of the properties when purchased. The City has done a lot of due diligences to try to make this a smooth process. There is going to have to be give and take in terms of what we are willing to invest in this and also what we are willing to accept. It will be hard to find someone who is willing to do exactly what we want.

Vice Chair Tacy asked if the developer wants to do something and it is beyond this scope, is there a way to direct them to east retail and see if we can't get them to move that way

and work with the people that own it. Assistant City Manager Benson stated the City has made connections over the years, and he has, personally, taken partners to that property. They have their own motivations, the same way the property owners on the west side do, but if they own the lots, the City cannot force them to do it. The City can't force them to sell or force them to partner. The beauty of the City owning the Renton property is that we don't have to sell it at a profit, we can do whatever we want to meet the City's intents. A private landowner would not do that; if the deal doesn't make sense for the private land owners, they have no motivation to do it.

Vice Chair Tacy stated she wanted to know if that is something we could do, she does not want to feel like we are rushing, and it is not quite what we want but we will take it; she does not want to be in that position. Mr. Carlisle stated it is, ultimately, the City Council's decision; but it is their hope to get a partnership between what he thinks the Planning Commission would really want to see there.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated there is approximately 25,000 square feet of commercial space; it would take a couple of years to fill. In the packet, Assistant City Manager Benson did include a copy of the market study provided with the help of Carlisle Wortman Associates. There are gaps identified, and there is demand for additional retail space. Although, it may take years to find the right deals to find the right scenario.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated the plan is to take this feedback and to craft it into the RFQ document. Then, ideally, to take this to City Council for authorization the first or second City Council meeting in October. He is anticipating, potentially, an open process, get a small subset of Planning Commissioners, DDA members, and City Council members to recommend a proposal. There is a lot of capacity information required in the application to see if the developer has the capacity to see this start to finish. Chair Day stated he would like to see some outreach to communities in which they have projects, as well, and get feedback from those communities on how well they followed through from the plan. Commissioner Helsom commented in being a resident and close proximity to where this project is going to take place, the spirit of conformity and making sure we maintain our roots is, obviously, important to him.

Call to the Public:

No public comments.

Staff Comments:

No staff comments.

Commission Comments:

Chair Day comment in looking at the sheet of upcoming meetings, it shows the second Planning Commission meeting to be held on October 23, 2023. He thought the Commission had gone to the 1st and 3rd Mondays of the month. Assistant City Manager Benson stated it is the first and third Monday; it might have been a carryover error from an older agenda.

ADJOURNMENT:

This meeting of the Planning Commission was motioned and adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Mona Freiburger
Recording Secretary