

IMAGINEBLOOMINGTON STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY, APRIL 10, 2013

Meeting summaries are transcribed in an abridged manner and no audio recordings are available. All Steering Committee meetings are open to the public.

Attendance:

Steering Committee Members: Jack Baker, John Carter, Nikki Johnson, Mike Litwin, Patrick Murray, Phil Stafford, Chris Smith, Steve Smith, Jan Sorby and Carl Zager

Others in attendance: Tom Micuda (staff), Scott Robinson (staff), Jacqui Bauer (staff), Nate Nickel (staff), Katie Bannon (staff).

Overview of Group 1 Packet Material: Goal Setting

Mr. Robinson opened the meeting up to comments, thoughts and suggestions on any of the Group 1 goal topics. Ms. Sorby discussed concern that current zoning is failing. She feels that neighborhood design and architecture are very important. Mr. Stafford said that we should focus on neighborhood form versus architecture. He pointed to the importance of having commercial edges to neighborhoods because they help maintain neighborhood form. Discussion ensued regarding the importance of developing neighborhood nodes.

Mr. Micuda said that developers usually need heavy residential density, high traffic counts and a predictable zoning process before nodes are built. Mr. Zager discussed the importance of transportation choices for commercial options. Mr. Murray talked about the need to have standards to identify locations for possible neighborhood nodes.

Mr. Murray began a discussion on economic trends that affect housing. He pointed out this could now include both elderly relatives and college graduates that need housing with their families. Mr. C. Smith proposed the idea of “granny flats”. He said that this housing component would be suitable in certain neighborhoods, especially those with large lots. Discussion ensued about this concept and the need to define neighborhood boundaries, various density levels and establishing an allowable radius from the IU campus. Mr. Micuda suggested that a policy on infill versus transitional products, and the need for public involvement in the development process, is needed to achieve these results. What would everyone like to see? He said that right now, there are problems with the development process.

Mr. C. Smith asked how many current neighborhood nodes are there in the city? He talked about the need to better define boundaries. He also talked about potential opposition from neighborhood groups in response to certain node uses. Mr. Stafford said that it’s important not to simply divide Downtown and Residential from each other. A variety of mixes is needed. Mr. Micuda suggested that a core commerce area versus other areas of high density mix could be an option for this. Ms. Bauer suggested that perhaps rings around the downtown, or “transects”, could be used for different allowable land use intensities.

Mr. Stafford and Mr. C. Smith discussed the need for city subsidies to spur specific development types and the importance of meeting public benefits with those subsidies. Discussion ensued regarding loan process and financing challenges involving housing, especially for owner-occupied condos.

Mr. Robinson asked for more ideas relating to the downtown. Several members discussed the need for a global parking policy. Mr. Zager mentioned how downtown commercial areas have changed since World War II and cited his experience in Pittsburgh. He wondered if downtown Bloomington was more residential in the 1950s, before suburban sprawl. Ms. Sorby said that the bus system of the 1950s was very strong and we need that type of system back in the downtown.

Mr. Micuda asked if a lightly parked downtown was a goal? Mr. S. Smith said that current high downtown rents are precluding other development types occurring in the downtown. He suggested taking city TIF revenue and other public subsidies and reinvesting these funds into downtown parking infrastructure to keep the downtown viable. Mr. Stafford suggested making development costs higher on the outskirts of the city to keep development occurring in the downtown. Mr. S. Smith answered that parking costs already do this via private parking lot construction, maintenance and taxes.

Ms. Johnson said that city TIF funds already subsidize downtown parking garages. She said that parking subsidies are probably key to keeping the public library and other service providers in the downtown. Mr. C. Smith said that diversity in population downtown is important, as are public subsidies to performance venues. Ms. Sorby recommended more traditional retail is needed in the downtown. She also mentioned that better defined boundaries could help with mixing different ages and population demographics. Ms. Johnson said that keeping a strong arts presence downtown is important. Mr. Zager asked if downtown was a destination, or if it is an area primarily accessed by the core neighborhoods? He cited the B-Line Trail as an example. Mr. Stafford recommended more downtown destinations for both children and the elderly, as well as greater access for disabled people. Discussion ensued regarding downtown green spaces, green streetscapes and connectors, water features and public gathering spots.

Discussion turned to downtown housing. Mr. S. Smith noted that tearing down downtown buildings is expensive. He said that many older properties on the outer rings of the city are still valuable and offer good housing options for people. Mr. Micuda said that the current trend for many Indiana University students is to move from these older buildings to newer developments located downtown. Ms. Johnson said that the development at 11th and Morton Streets should be the last major student housing complex permitted downtown. She said that the number of bedrooms is crucial to examining future developments. Mr. Stafford noted that coffee and donut shops create areas for different demographic groups to mix. He felt that the Fields was a good example of this. Mr. Robinson said a large population of students already lives in the downtown. We should start thinking about what role these students will fill in the downtown's future.

Mr. S. Smith mentioned the importance of planning for "green" stormwater infrastructure. Discussion ensued regarding planning versus implementation of current City of Bloomington stormwater goals. Several members felt that the downtown would be an ideal pilot project location for a "green street" stormwater concept