

IMAGINEBLOOMINGTON STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY, MARCH 27, 2013

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Attendance:

Steering Committee Members: Jack Baker, Scott Burgins, Susan Fernandes, Dave Harstad, Nikki Johnson, Mike Litwin, Patrick Murray, Andy Ruff, Phil Stafford, Maggie Sullivan, Kerry Thomson and Carl Zager

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

Questions for Staff

Mr. Robinson introduced Mr. Zager, who replaced Jacob Sinex as the Bicycle Pedestrian Safety Commission representative, and welcomed him to the Steering Committee.

Ms. Sullivan asked if the Steering Committee would be focusing on the Group 1 goals over the next three meetings. Mr. Robinson replied that would be the case. Ms. Fernandes asked about the 2002 GPP goals and how many implementation strategies have now been completed (i.e. housing). For example, what is the current mix of student vs. non-student housing in the downtown? Mr. Robinson stated that an overview of GPP accomplishments was presented to the Steering Committee early in the process and is available on the ImagineBloomington website. Almost all of the GPP implementation strategies have now been accomplished. Mr. Micuda responded that there are two ways to respond to the housing question: anecdotal information from developers and census data. Both of these areas can be explored in more detail as we move forward in the process.

Overview of Group 1 Packet Material: Goal Setting

Mr. Robinson summarized the packet materials that were sent to the Steering Committee. He again stressed the importance of achieving the “S” in the “SMART” goals. He also reminded the Steering Committee that any of the topics could be addressed at this meeting. There will also be two additional meetings to cover these topics. He then opened the meeting up to comments, thoughts and suggestions on any of the Group 1 goal topics.

Ms. Johnson shared a number of ideas: slow down student housing, increase owner-occupied and workforce housing, the need to address the impacts that intense student rental housing has on established single-family neighborhoods, increase diversity in the community and that more age and demographic shifts are needed in the downtown.

Ms. Thomson said that there is decreasing affordability of downtown housing. It is harder for disadvantaged people to be close to their needed services. An increase in owner-occupied multi-family options is also needed. Without data, it will be hard to determine specific housing needs.

Mr. Stafford asked what is considered to be “downtown”. Mr. Robinson said that is an open-ended question, since people have many different views on what downtown is (i.e. the zoning designation, just Courthouse Square, a larger geographic area, etc.). Mr. Stafford felt that a balance is needed in age and income demographics and owner-occupied vs. rental options. He also suggested that the terms “accessible” and “universal design” need to be included with the affordable housing conversation.

Mr. Murray said that flexibility in codes regarding housing is needed - smaller square footages, live/work spaces, increased density, etc. This will open up opportunities for the private sector to experiment with new ideas and practices.

Mr. Harstad said that increased densities have been a mixed blessing for historic resources, especially smaller form historic structures. He observed that core neighborhoods anecdotally seem to have more owner-occupied residences and urban homesteaders. Many students appear to be moving closer to campus in higher densities. He proposed two ideas: 1) incentivize higher student housing densities near the Memorial Stadium area on the Indiana University campus versus Downtown; and 2) Design options are needed for three story townhouses. Mr. Harstad said that there have been several successful examples recently constructed in the downtown that look much like those found in Norfolk, Virginia and other east coast cities. Bloomington should zone and plan to encourage these types of developments as an additional housing option for students (and others), instead of the current large-scale apartment developments.

Mr. Ruff said that the overriding goal should be to mix ages, demographics and affordable opportunities throughout the entire community (i.e. accessory dwelling units, also known as “granny flats” or “Fonzi flats”). Mr. Litwin stated that there is a need for a long-range student housing plan. This would proactively plan where to locate future sites for student housing.

Mr. Micuda said that he has often thought about this issue. He recently found on-line that Fort Collins, Colorado conducted a similar planning effort for student housing. He offered to share the report link to the Steering Committee.

Mr. Stafford said that a target goal should be set for senior housing or housing for people with disabilities. Ten years ago the GPP had a goal for students living in the downtown – this time around, there should be specific goals set for other types of housing opportunities.

Mr. Baker said that there is one culture downtown right now. There is a need to diversify cultures. Don’t just have young students and older people downtown. There should be young and midlife families, recently retired people – run the spectrum of ages and plan for it. Neighborhoods should have a mix of owner-occupied and rental rate housing, but strive for increased ownership rates. There has been past successes with this in Bloomington and we should continue to build upon that in the future. Neighborhood stability is important, especially in light of avoiding higher costs and losing existing structures. This could be very true for

residential properties along the B-Line Trail. We need to be careful to avoid pricing existing residents out of their homes. Neighborhood participation with developers on style, size and design is a valuable process. Protection via conservation districts is also working well.

Mr. Harstad said that the student housing market might soon stabilize in Bloomington. This could relieve some of the housing pressure in the community. He pointed out that growth in the Indiana University student population has skyrocketed in the past. This trend has been leveling off and the financing environment for future student apartments could change.

Mr. Robinson asked if the Steering Committee felt that historic preservation was working differently in the downtown versus neighborhoods.

Mr. Baker said that the focus of historic preservation in the downtown was geared more towards commercial buildings. Mr. Ruff said that historic designations are often used to prevent a variety of issues from impacting neighborhoods (i.e. increased rentals or preservation of livability) rather than to preserve historic architecture and buildings. He said that this situation presents a problem for decision-makers in justifying historic preservation measures because they end up being used this way.

Mr. Micuda said that he felt the last several conservation district proposals were done in response to perceived threats rather than historic preservation issues. Is this a failure of planning and zoning to deal with these threats? If yes, how do we respond to this?

Mr. Harstad said that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) often won't regulate unless there is a crisis. He pointed out that the Courthouse Square isn't currently designated and this could present a problem. He said that perhaps the HPC should survey and designate all eligible properties. If so, this has costs too. What is the role of the Plan Commission and this Steering Committee? There is a need for design review in Bloomington. Right now, Mr. Harstad feels that the HPC is a de facto design review committee.

Mr. Stafford agreed with Mr. Harstad. He sits on the Monroe County Preservation Commission and sees some of the same issues there. Mr. Stafford said they are often frustrated with protecting only single structures versus a larger context. He was concerned that preservation could lead to homogeneity and that we need to focus on form versus use.

Ms. Fernandes said that Plan Commission review of a recent Grazie restaurant proposal highlights the lack of historic preservation on the Courthouse Square. The case involved an innovative exterior product that had never been used before in Bloomington. The Plan Commission approved the case, but the owner never built the project.

Mr. Burgins and Mr. Micuda both confirmed that this case did involve the Grazie restaurant. Mr. Micuda said that new materials and design are not really regulated right now. Matching the footprints, step-downs and heights of existing structures are about the only current historic preservation design standards for Courthouse Square.

Ms. Thomson wanted to know if there were any best practices available that encourage renovation and preserve structures/form without a historic designation? Mr. Murray said that the current conservation districts are a close fit. Mr. Micuda responded that no, there weren't really any tools like this. The façade improvement program available through the City's Housing and Neighborhood Development Department, plus federal and state tax credits for historic rehabilitation, are probably the main incentive areas outside of historic designation.

Ms. Thomson asked if incentive programs are available to increase densities if a historic structure(s) are preserved. She noted that this often happens on the east coast, where she is from. Perhaps incentivize programs that preserve housing while allowing density bonus – this could be helpful for many neighborhoods. Mr. Micuda said that currently the City would utilize density incentives for a use, but generally could not have a density incentive for preservation.

Mr. Zager pointed out that having a mix or balance throughout the community is a good goal, but how would this potentially impact zoning and infrastructure? Mr. Micuda responded by saying that form-based code tackles this issues in many other cities. Decisions are based on form instead of use. For transportation and city services, mixing uses reduces the impact that capital projects have on all city services because it heavily utilizes existing infrastructure.

Ms. Fernandes asked how would we deal with impacts of form-based code? She used a bar in a house example. She said we would need to think about this issue. Mr. Micuda said that form-based code is often used for specific areas like a downtown or corridor. That way, scenarios could be studied first before applied to an entire community. Often times hybrid zoning codes that incorporate some form-based elements are also used too.

Mr. Stafford said that infrastructure is more important for older people, and there will be a need to focus amenities such as street furniture, lights, sidewalks, etc. in older demographic neighborhoods.

Mr. Robinson challenged the Steering Committee to explore non-planning and zoning issues or city related issues. He said that the themes already mentioned today, such as defining the “affordable” in affordable housing, or the need to avoid monoculture in the downtown, were good examples to explore.

Ms. Fernandes said that there is a need to have innovative ideas about the philosophy of housing. She gave co-housing and more individual rental options as examples.

Ms. Thomson said often the people with 120% of the median income and below typically have difficulty finding housing in Bloomington. She stated that a current lack of credit counseling and a culture of spending versus saving often contribute to this problem. She pointed out that there are many applicants for Habitat for Humanity homes that qualify based on their income, but they won't qualify due to their poor credit history. Ms. Thomson also pointed out that there is a very long waiting list for Section 8 housing. She mentioned that the community needs to be careful where we encourage families receiving housing assistance to live. Often times they are only funneled to two or three specific neighborhoods and these typically are located in areas with financially taxed schools. There needs to be more and better quality affordable multi-family

owner-occupied housing options. This would be a good use of limited land, energy efficient and could serve a greater number of people.

Mr. Stafford agreed with Ms. Thomson and said that “equity” needs to be included when talking about access to public goods. He pointed out the Farmers’ Market as being a good example. This is a public good, but can people walk to it, or must they drive to get there?

Ms. Fernandes said that data can help frame the housing picture. Student housing is a very dominant force due to the local market and financing. She pointed out that the Plan Commission almost always deals with multi-family projects geared towards student housing. Mr. Micuda agreed with this condition. Ms. Fernandes also asked about Indiana University’s long-term housing plans.

Ms. Johnson said that Indiana University is building new housing units, but these are only replacing some housing units that have been removed in recent years. No expansion in residential housing capacity is occurring on campus.

Mr. Baker recommended some innovative projects to look into. These include small condo units and co-housing options (like old the Middleway site or Eco-Village). He said that these options would allow more affordable housing options, especially for younger people. Mr. Baker felt that there was some concern whether they could work in the long term and that a wait-and-see approach would be needed.

Ms. Sullivan said that there are several very successful co-housing options in Bloomington that have existed for a number of years. She feels that this option will only grow stronger in future years. She said that these options attract a wide range of people because of their affordability, agrarian lifestyle within city limits, social benefits and sustainability features. Ms. Sullivan felt that urban food production or small scale commercial food production (food security) is another important area to encourage. She also pointed out that retrofitting existing housing to be energy efficient is important.

Ms. Bauer said that Portland, Oregon is currently planning for energy production at the neighborhood and sub-area level.

Ms. Sullivan asked about the status of neighborhood identity in Bloomington. She had a concern about the low level of activity in Bloomington’s neighborhood associations. Mr. Stafford said that CONA is trying to reestablish itself. He said that neighborhood organizations were an important effort in the past and is an issue that is coming up again.

Mr. Baker said that some neighborhoods are more active than others. The established neighborhood groups are consistently active. Mr. Burgins said that a crisis or big issue will energize any neighborhood quickly. Mr. Baker agreed with this.

Ms. Johnson said that she hoped the Areas Intended for Annexation (AIFA) issue would be resolved soon between the city and county. She also wanted a focus on the downtown merchants, non-profits, library and service organizations. Ms. Johnson said that in light of the

parking meter resolution, it will be very important to keep them all downtown. Mr. Robinson said that he has heard people comment that they hope downtown does not just become an area to eat and drink at. Other services are needed in order to keep it vibrant and active. Ms. Johnson agreed and also said that the Certified Technology Park and Convention Center were both important downtown issues moving forward.

Review of Today's Findings

Mr. Robinson displayed the major findings from the meeting. These included the following themes, listed by topic area:

Housing and Neighborhoods

- Slow down student housing in downtown and increase owner occupied SFR impacts in neighborhoods – balance workforce housing
- Decline of affordability at city center and age groups (<120% ami, no credit counseling, diversify where we place people avoid concentration of lower income households)
- Balance in age and demographics including mix of rentals
- Quality of design
- Innovation of housing standards – size live work for private sector to capitalize on (NY 250sf challenge, co-housing)
- Students in urban center – takes pressure off core neighborhoods – how about infill near stadium – long range student housing plan – (student boom may subside)
- Numerical goal for households in the downtown – other areas
- Less rental and more owner occupied in neighborhoods 35/65
- Stability of neighborhoods – cost, building context, gentrification, association participation, protection is working (conservation district)

Downtown

- Defined as urban core – transect concept
- Preservation is a challenge for balancing urban core and historic context – design is very important – townhouse
- Avoid mono culture in downtown
- CTP, merchants and convention center are important

Land Use

- Zoning has led to unintended consequences by segregating uses – need the mix of age, ability, stature, and building style everywhere
- Zoning weaknesses towards infill and conservation districts – missing design review – perhaps tilt towards form rather than use, consider preservation incentives
- Thorough historic preservation analysis – designation (don't want to regulate)
- Mixing land uses and impacts associated with infrastructure and other neighborhood services (transit)
- Equity is very important for context to diversity