

City of Bowling Green Comprehensive Plan: Future Land Use Update
STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES – 5/28/2014

Present: Jeff Betts, Julie Broadwell, Suzanne Clark, Jennifer Copp, Judy Ennis, Gary Hess, Bruce Jeffers, Steve Krakoff, Sandy Milligan, Emily Monago, Mark Remeis, Barbara Ruland, Heather Saylor, Lori Tretter, and Jeff Winston.

Absent: Jill Carr, Doug Cubberley, Earlene Kilpatrick, Vicky Valentine-Adler.

Visitors: Clint Corpe and Lee McLaird.

Heather Saylor thanked everyone for attending and briefly discussed the survey results, hoping all members had a chance to review all of the results and comments by now. She especially noted the results of the target market at well over 90% agreement and 0 had indicated a “strong disagreement” and felt the committee was overwhelmingly on the right track per public sentiment. She welcomed Jeff Winston, planning consultant, back to Bowling Green, and turned the meeting over to Mr. Winston.

Mr. Winston asked for a reality-check about the plan, what members are hearing around town, and for comments regarding the draft document outline. Barbara Ruland indicated the members of the Downtown boards she represents are not in favor of food trucks, since they are not a good fit here due to the economic realities of running a business downtown and tend to act under the radar and appears as free-loading” on the community. She was surprised it was on the outline, since this topic had not been discussed prior. Mr. Winston indicated there are benefits to food truck, such as generating downtown activity, livening up the street, filling a niche for quick food, and tend to be business incubators (often these can become a viable business into a permanent space or owners often become chefs). Food trucks do require a license from the City and current regulations do not allow “itinerant vendors” to be closer than 150 feet from a property line, thus eliminating food trucks from being located downtown. Lori Tretter stated that between the administrator’s office and the planning office the City receives several calls of interest to operate this type of business downtown. Additionally, they have to meet Health Department regulations.

Mr. Winston requested comments on the “intentions” statement from the draft outline. Is this strong enough? Is this Anywhere, USA? How do we make this for Bowling Green? Julie Broadwell said it is not strong enough regarding the north east neighborhoods and it needs to describe strong neighborhoods as an important component of Bowling Green. Ms. Ruland said she would like the statement to blend BG as a crossroads between agrarian and the culture of the university. It is a part of who we are and it would be a call to action that embraces these crossroads, taking a step forward, and makes Bowling Green different from any college town. Mr. Winston stated these are both excellent ideas that translate into part of the DNA of Bowling Green, setting the community apart from others. Another member commented about the importance of the Black Swamp Festival and making sure that is mentioned in the outline, since it is unique to Bowling Green. Ms. Saylor added that “bike-friendly” should be part of the intentions, since many community members’ comments on the importance of being able to bike to destinations safely and the draft mentions being “walkable”. Sandy Milligan stated having a vibrant downtown is important to have as part of the statement.

Mr. Winston asked if the committee is agreement in the 7 principles outlined in the draft document, which include:

- Health
- Local Emphasis, Compact, Livable, and Pedestrian Oriented
- Positive, appealing, marketable first impressions
- Strong base of employee-intensive businesses
- Target market housing
- “Good neighbor” neighborhoods

He asked the committee to rank the principles in order of priority. A paper was passed around to get individual committee member thoughts on the principles, which was given to Mr. Winston after the meeting.

Mr. Winston asked for comments about applying the vision and objectives to key areas, such as north east, E. Wooster Street, south east, and downtown. One member stated the “low hanging fruit” are the improvements to E. Wooster Street. This makes sense to do early on since it impacts the City and University and makes a crucial impression on visitors. Additionally, this may be the most impactful to the community at-large, visually show implementation, and gain traction for the other goals. It also is likely to create a domino-effect into neighborhoods and make it easier to deal with the tougher items. There is likely buy-in with BGSU and a project that could foster collaboration. Adding trees and shrubbery is cost effective and there was some discussion as to the different looks of E. Wooster, such as making sure linking to downtown occurs. Additionally, the stretch beyond Enterprise “looks bad”. Therefore, there is 2 pieces: the piece that is the “first impression” near I-75 and the piece that is an extension of downtown with the B-5 Transitional Central Business District zoning that was created with CVS and the new Market Square project that would be a corridor to campus. Mr. Winston said taking advantage of opportunities as they come along is important, such as requiring screening as development occurs. It is easier to ask when it is part of an overall, clear picture of what the community wants and what is important to the community.

Mr. Winston asked for the priority action items. The committee was in consensus that E. Wooster be first priority. Bruce Jeffers mentioned the trip officials took to Kent, Ohio recently and thought Court Street could be an important corridor between the downtown, north east neighborhood, and downtown, even a walkable esplanade such as what Kent created between downtown and Kent University. Thus, he would list Court Street as a close second to E. Wooster, since it does relate to the other action items and would be difficult to separate. Court Street is more of an extension from downtown and part of north east, so they should be addressed as a package. He said Kent was able to move forward, be forward-thinking, and there is a synergy created once the work happens.

Mr. Winston stated meetings accorded earlier this day with large property owners and downtown businesses and owners. He said it was a good reality-check of support and reminded the committee that it can be very difficult to plan when there is no real sense of urgency. Anything that is done needs real money, real capital and political capital, so it is important to start building consensus. What we heard at the large property owner meeting is that Bowling Green needs more housing, more apartments, and that preserving neighborhoods is not as important. It was not conveyed as crystal clear about the competitive arena universities are in and how important it is to help create an environment that makes both BGSU and Bowling Green successful. Mr. Winston said we are at the 8th inning and he needs to know the committee still is support of a plan with actions items. He drew a straight arrow, with “R3 fluff” (multiple-family residential) at a point on one end of the arrow, in the middle he drew a point and labeled it “plan”, and at the opposite end of the arrow he drew a point and labeled it “plan + action + \$”. The process is close to the end of the budget and timeframe and he

needs to make sure the committee is still “on board” for a bold plan. The committee will have to overcome inertia that BG does not have a “big problem” and it is easier to mobilize and motivate during obvious crisis situations. It is hard to see to the average eye when a community is in “ever so-slight” decline. What is part of the decline? Decreased revenue, taxes, the scoring of homes, the university master plan presentation, and the overwhelming survey responses indicate the community is ready for change. How are we going to pay? Is this just fluff? Are we willing to pay and work hard to accomplish the action items? Gary Hess said it is crucial to document the decline with the data that has already been collected. In his mind, documenting the series of problems and the advice of consultants, even a plan to identify potential funding sources and these items can be achieved.

Mr. Winston said a number of these ideas are not expensive and there are avenues to require private owners to do their share of improvements. Some of the big tickets items may require re-allocating budget items or in other words, re-using the pot of money in a different way. Investing in significant change will show the community, which was what we heard from the surveys, that it is time to start investing in ourselves. The bottom line is are you willing and committed to convince the community and elected officials that doing nothing is not okay? Can we mobilize? Can we get to the goal line? The committee agreed they are ready and committed to change. Mr. Hess stated “you eat an elephant one bite at a time” and the importance of hiring good financial consultants, like Kent did. We can work on obtaining money in various ways, such as grants, university financial support, private monies, local developers, etc. Mr. Hess said Kent started out with a very general idea that led to an urban plan, various consultant studies, and were resourceful. They found money, took on problems as they happened, were opportunistic, and to their advantage they had an element of common leadership, but it was okay they did not have everything figured out from the beginning. Steve Krakoff said that private capital will follow public commitment and this plan is crucial for our own survival (college and city), and that 3 or 4 actions items completed will trigger other good things to happen. Members discussed the presentation by Mr. Krakoff regarding the campus master plan, which including information about universities being in tough competition was sobering and bringing that information to the community is important. Some type of educational component to include this information is needed. Additionally, the committee asked Mr. Winston for talking points as community groups and decisions-makers are approached to share the plan and gauge support.

Mr. Winston stated they would refine the outline and begin the drafting the document.

Meeting lasted approximately 3:00 p.m.- 4:30 p.m.