

City of Bowling Green Comprehensive Plan: Future Land Use Update
STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES - 1/23/2014

Present: Vicky Valentine-Adler, Jeff Betts, Julie Broadwell, Sarah Burgoyne, Jill Carr, Suzanne Clark, Doug Cubberley, Judy Ennis, Gary Hess, Bruce Jeffers, Steve Krakoff, Sandy Milligan, Emily Monago, Mark Remeis, Barbara Ruland, Heather Saylor, and Lori Tretter.

Absent: Earlene Kilpatrick

Visitors: None

Committee Chair Bruce Jeffers welcomed the Steering Committee to their second meeting on Wednesday, January 22, 2014. He thanked the committee for their time and work on this important task. Heather Saylor asked how the discussions (assigned homework) went inquiring about the trajectory of Bowling Green. During most discussions people were very talkative. Of interest to note, was that some of the views were conflicting. Such as, one person would say they did not want a “big box” store or “chain” restaurant here, but later would describe how often they drive to other places to shop and eat at these types of places. Other views indicated skepticism of the process and implementation. An overriding theme of all discussion was the need of the City and Bowling Green State University to be equal partners in the future planning process and increase communication/cooperation. Ms. Saylor also stated it was helpful during her discussions to market the questions to the group you are speaking to by using different scenarios.

Mr. Jeffers introduced the topic of what people thought about the “trajectory” of Bowling Green. Lori Tretter wanted to assure people we are all the messengers of information and not to take any of the opinion personally. Sandy Milligan offered to take notes on the flip chart.

Opinions in summary:

- Economic development is very important and needs to be a consideration to land use. Some opinions indicated the need for more technology-based industry to be located here. However, of interest, is the opinion that while it appears people want economic development, they tend to not want some of the negative things that go along with it (such as noise, traffic, and lack of aesthetics). Avoid looking like a “Findlay”.
- There is a slow degradation of neighborhoods south and west of campus. The quality of life is decreasing with the increase from single-family owner-occupied homes to rentals. This is a negative direction the City is heading. There is also a gap between single-family homes and rentals. For example, there is not an abundance of “higher-end” type of rentals (whether it be single-family homes, condos, or apartments) for young professionals, graduate students, or other employees that may be here on a temporary basis. How do we blend together with the university, yet encourage development?
- It is a mistake to continue growing boundaries (not appreciating open space and agricultural land) and more redevelopment of existing sites should be encouraged. Reconsider annexation policy?
- There are many positives with downtown, but this could go further; such as aesthetics. Additionally, the area between downtown to the railroad tracks on E. Wooster (“Lost Blocks”) needs improvement.

There could be better looking buildings and it could be thriving with uses that are geared toward younger professionals. This should be treated as a more vital area.

- BGSU improvements have enhanced the community.
- Accolades to Parks and Recreation. It is clear from many discussions that the community provides a great depth of support for parks, with time and finances.
- There are too many empty retail stores, which is concerning. Additionally, there are too many bars and coffee shops.
- The deterioration of the mall is trouble. Can the City re-focus what it is and get empty stores filled? This brought up the concern to members that an educational component is required to the public about private property rights and how much involvement a City can legally have with this type of situation. There is also education that is needed about how certain demographics are required for attracting a chain store or restaurant and Bowling Green normally cannot meet these qualifications. Another problem is that the City's population greatly fluctuates part of the year due to students.
- It is unclear where the real center of gravity is? BGSU? Downtown? There is no impact here for the entryway experience, not as much vibrancy as some other similar college towns (Kent, Miami). There are other colleges towns that are knitted together better with a certain look and feel.
- How can we talk about 2025, when we do not know what BGSU will be doing?
- The trajectory is passing BG by. There could be better signage regulations, better entryway experience, there is not center for transit, need to be more forward thinking, and focus on other modes of transportation.
- What demographic is BG wanting to grow or appeal to?
- There needs to be more focus on being family-oriented, not just marketing to students. There are people that have chosen to attend BGSU and stay here over other towns, however, there needs to be more balance between the university and families, including what is offered downtown.
- Students do not have to leave campus for services, unless they want the interaction with the community. Since the campus is self-contained, is the relationship to the campus and community more symbolic and/or should it be forced? We also need to recognize the reality of the shrinking campus, that was mentioned at the first meeting and an article that Ms. Saylor emailed. Most felt the interaction between community/BGSU is very important to recruit students and even strengthen the desire for university employees to live here. For a student to be connected to the community they are temporarily living in enhances the college life experience. Additionally, if the town/gown are not knitted, there is less students wants to stay here or return after they graduate to be "permanent" residents of the City.
- There should be more effort to develop businesses with students in the community. An example of one such occurrence is with Joe Chow, who has a business downtown and hires his own students. There should be more examples of this or more types of business incubators with students.
- There needs to be a public square, such as the old Junior High School space. There could be a theater, comedy club, different types of uses to draw more people downtown.
- There needs to be a better "front door entry" approach. More of a "wow" factor when you enter the BG, you know you are here.
- Students should be involved in any planning process.
- Historic preservation should be in place and not just demolishing all buildings.
- There needs to be more bike paths. The bike paths need to be safe and also there should be a focus to have these (and sidewalks) at all schools. (This led to a discussion about a "Complete Streets" policy that is being tied to funding for future road project by TMACOG)

- There needs to be better engagement with the City/University and convince people they can get everything they need in BG (better marketing?).
- There should be a better connection between downtown and the university. The Special Improvement District may be able to be extended, which would bring more money to the downtown. The new B-5 Transitional Central Business District was created to help alleviate concerns for the new Market Square and CVS projects and this could be an opportunity to extend this zoning to Thurstin/Manville.
- Does the City have enough types of commercial spaces to accommodate economic diversity? Low overhead and various space sizes hard to find.
- Are there enough types of housing? What will happen to the older areas? Homes in the older areas, near the university, tend to attract students, but not coaches who are moving here with families. Will more multi-family need to be established?
- Neighborhoods needs to offer more types of houses and diversity, such as a mix of housing that includes multi-family, single-family, condos, and is affordable to various low to moderate income levels.
- There needs to be a focus on attracting others to live here, such as more starter homes all over town, and more effort to focus on Wards 1 and 2 where older homes and more rentals are. We should not see renters in a derogatory way, there is a market there. There appears to be an opportunity for the university to own residential units to offer to faculty, grad students, etc. to potentially get them to live in BG and closer to campus to create a better balance in neighborhoods. Can there be other incentives to help get more families to live near the university? Oxford was mentioned as an example of the university providing down payment assistance for the employees of the university to live in the “Mile Square” area.
- There should be more of a focus on corridors, such as primary and secondary corridors. Aesthetics could be improved on commercial corridors and areas where BGSU and the community share borders. Specifically, Court Street, E. Wooster Street, North Main, South Main and Poe Road/Haskins Road intersection.
- There needs to be more meeting places, including for off-campus. Students only have the Victory Inn as a large meeting space and the condition of that is poor.
- Young people need local opportunities for diverse activities. Hearing from young people (teen years), they often have to drive elsewhere for things to do for fun, such as roller skating.
- Could there be an energy-efficient street or neighborhood? This could serve as a model and continue BG as being forward-thinking with energy efficiency.

After hearing many ideas, the committee general topics could be listed and prioritize in the 2-page memo. However, first and foremost the committee determined the educational component as to what the City can and cannot control is crucial. This would also be a good introduction to any public meeting that is help. Ms. Sayler also stated the consultants have gathered extensive data and are in the process of plotting this data on maps. This data will help determine the areas and issues that will need focus, also, and allow for public education with the planning and economics in a city. Ms. Sayler also wanted the committee to review the Visioning Report and read over the items that may pertain to land use, which many were already discussed as ideas. She also discussed the importance of the existing plan and recognizing what may or may not still be issues to work on, since a same type of core group helped work on these ideas.

The following general ideas were decided by the group to be the focus of the 2-page memo to Council, however, members recognize there still has not been full community input yet and members will continue discussing the update with the general public and stakeholders:

- First and foremost, clear up public misconceptions.
 - State what the City can and cannot do.
 - It is a fluid document and the goals will take time significant time to accomplish.

- Identify and focus on improving primary and secondary corridors in the City.
 - Downtown: Extend to Thurstin/Manville.
 - City Entranceways: Improve aesthetics, create “wow” factor so people know they are in a unique place.
 - Primary corridors: E. Wooster (across from university to area around I-75), N. Main St (primarily commercial), S. Main St. (primarily commercial).
 - Secondary: Court Street (blend with BGSU) and Poe/Haskins
 - Consider better streetscape and how to increase aesthetics of these areas, along with knitting the areas that share common university/City boundaries.
 - E. Wooster, across from university: Is it realistic to maintain single-family zoning?

- Study and adopt a Complete Streets related-policy or ordinance.
 - Streets should accommodate all modes of transportation.
 - Bike paths should be studied further for locations that are safe and have clear destinations (especially to schools).
 - Study the market for passenger rail (odd that we have to get in a car to get to Toledo to use Amtrak).

- Housing and neighborhoods.
 - Study what types of housing BG had and what is missing (identify gaps and opportunities). There appears to be a gap in the availability of higher end rentals that appeal to young professionals and families. Does BG have enough land zoned multi-family? Does BG need different zoning districts to support this.
 - Study neighborhoods near the west and south of BGSU that are becoming more rentals, than owner-occupied homes. What can be done to reverse this trend? What can be done to create more housing types in these neighborhoods to attract families, university staff, and young professionals? What can be done with the older structures that are not appealing to today’s generation? What happens to the aging apartment structures? What incentives can there be? Can BGSU purchase more properties and rent to staff or provide incentives?
 - Neighborhoods across the community should be a more diverse mix of housing: a mix of price points, apartments, condos and single-family – not so much seclusion of housing types and rentals.
 - Neighborhoods should be connected to services, destinations, schools, etc., by all modes of transportation (bike lanes and sidewalks).

- Consider and study growth boundaries.
 - Identify a potential growth boundary.
 - City may have to take a new look at annexation policy.
 - Preserving open space and agricultural areas is important. Identify appropriate locations.
 - Encourage redevelopment of aging areas to prevent sprawl past the growth boundary.

- Planning with City/BGSU.
 - BG/BGSU's master plans needs to be cohesive.
 - Identify areas of the campus and community that touch and target cooperative planning efforts on these areas first. Reach out to the surrounding areas/neighborhoods to recognize problems and identify potential solution for improvements.
 - Can the campus and BG feel more tied together?
- Identify location of downtown public space.
 - Community members have expressed concerns with lack of a "town square" / "public space".
 - Have a central location, specifically in downtown, which fosters a sense of civic pride, a location for core community events, gathering space, and could further beautify and add uniqueness to BG.

The committee agreed that Ms. Saylor and Judy Ennis will draft the 2-page memo and share with the committee for comments. Ms. Ennis, Mark Remeis and Julie Broadwell will help finalize the memo and work on the presentation to the consultants for the next Steering Committee meeting on Wednesday, January 29, 2014. Additionally, Steve Krakoff will have a presentation about BGSU's Master Plan at the next meeting. If any committee members have specific questions, please email them to Ms. Saylor ahead of time and she will forward the questions to Ms. Krakoff. Ms. Saylor will forward an agenda to the committee when the consultants arrive Tuesday. She anticipates they will also have a presentation to share the data they have collected and various maps.

Meeting lasted approximately 3:05 p.m.-5:10 p.m.