

Planning Commission and City Council Public Hearing
Minutes – Tuesday, January 12, 2016
Wooster Green Space

The Planning Commission and City Council met on the above date at 6:00 p.m. in the Wood County Public Library, 251 North Main Street, Bowling Green, Ohio.

Members Present (City Council): Michael Aspacher, Theresa Charters Gavarone, Daniel Gordon, Bruce Jeffers, Bob McComber, Sandy Rowland, and John Zanfardino.

Members Present (Planning Commission): Jeff Betts, Julie Burton, Gary Hess, Mark Hollenbaugh, Ryan Holley, Richard Michel, and Erica Sleek.

Members Absent: Brady Gaskins and Kris Phillips.

Michael Aspacher, President of City Council, thanked the Green Space Task Force, the Mayor, Planning Commission, and Executive Staff for their presence, which represents the city's willingness and the importance placed on these types of important events to gain community input. He also thanked the public for their attendance and willingness to share their thoughts. He then reviewed the agenda to include a brief presentation from the Green Space Task Force, followed by the opening of the public hearing, and ending with a discussion between the member of City Council and Planning Commission. He asked those wanting to speak sign-in and that three (3) minutes would be allotted to each speaker, with potentially more depending on the amount of time.

Eric Myers, chairperson of the Green Space Task Force, started the presentation by asking the task force members to stand and read their names. He said the membership was very interesting, diverse, and was a fun group to work with. He reviewed the history of the task force, including the announcement of the task force on May 6, 2015 by Mayor Dick Edwards and the charge of the task force as follows:

1. To develop and recommend a conceptual plan and a timeline for implementation to the City Council's Public Lands and Building Committee, chaired by Theresa Charters Gaverone. Also serving on the Committee are Council Members Bruce Jeffers and John Zanfardino.
2. To review the history of the site at the corner of West Wooster Street and South Church Street and to review the "pros and cons" of the site in terms of potential uses.

3. To ensure than any plan put forward for consideration by City Council includes design elements that require minimal operating and maintenance costs by the city, includes representation of Bowling Green's history, and that takes into consideration the First Presbyterian Church and the surrounding neighborhood.
4. To recommend a plan that is dependent upon a community-wide fund-raising campaign in keeping with previously successful private dollar appeals, for example, the Simpson Garden Park, Save the Woods, and Ridge Park fund-raising efforts.

Myers said the group first met on May 27, 2015, along with several times as a whole. There were subcommittees on design, cost, and fund-raising that were developed that also met several times. The task force presented to the Public, Lands, and Building Committee of City Council on October 4, 2015 and to the Planning Commission on December 2, 2015, who then scheduled it for the joint public hearing occurring tonight.

Myers said the group first brainstormed all possible uses and he brought copies of the original lists, along with those that made the "first cut". They came to a consensus, than using that, it was determined a design was needed using the experts on the task force. There were several tweaks made to the original design and the full majority voted in favor, with a vote of fourteen (14) in favor and one (1) abstention.

Myers described the design itself and the desire of the task force for the space to be a welcoming part of downtown and a part of the history of downtown. He said the middle of the space could be landscaping or a sculpture and the design has trees, benches, bike racks, brick entrances, a cement center, with cement and gravel sidewalks that are wide enough to be easily maintained by the city. They tried to minimize concrete for proper drainage. He stated the southern portion of the site would have a pavilion that could range in size from 24' to 40', depending on shape, and could provide a space for musical performances.

Myers said he would like to address specific questions he has heard regularly. He said the amount of parking has been questioned. He has measured (220') South Grove Street next to the green space that could accommodate 12 to 20 cars. He said the task force thought it would be expensive to add parking and not necessary given the amount of city parking lots surrounding the green space, including the church parking lot, if possible to use on occasion. He said people have also asked about the sizes of the pavilion, which he considered a middle-sized one. Lastly, he said the additional side lot near the church has been questioned. He said they did not include this property in the concept plan because the task force was made aware that a land swap was offered to the city. They did not want to add this to the plan, with this potential swap, so they planned using the rectangular-shaped site. He also added that restrooms were discussed, but they would need to be located next to the church and they wanted to be good neighbors. He also

referred to the handout offered in the back of the room that lists the cost estimate of \$250,000. He said the cost could change depending on the pavilion size, the type of pavilion, landscaping type, and the potential shade options. He also acknowledged that the city \$500,000 has already invested in the site and individuals helping to fundraise for the remaining investment seems reasonable.

Myers said the committee created a plan for fundraising and the task force would like to begin fundraising once a formal approval is received. He said they will need to gain more community feedback about more specifics from the community, such as what type of landscaping, events, etc, but this is a general plan to follow.

PUBLIC HEARING

Aspacher started the public hearing, while Heather Saylor, Planning Director, read each name from the sign-up sheet. There was a maximum of three (3) minutes for each speaker.

Joyce Kepke, 1132 Lyn Road, explained the history of the area, including the location of the former city building and fire station and she was part of a committee that decided to move the city building to its current location. She said now the facility is crowded, but she thinks it is important for the city offices to be downtown. She said the old junior high space was originally slated for a new city building, but when the building was demolished the green space seemed like a nice space. She thinks that there is room for both a building and open space to be molded together, which would be a compromise. This would also provide restrooms.

Susan Krueger, 24 Tanglewood Lane, said she appreciates the time and effort put forth by the task force. She would like to keep the green space "green", not concrete. She would like to see more trees, which would make the space more inviting. In keeping it green, this would give time to revisiting improvements to the site in 5 years after additional trees have grown and then could proceed with something more permanent. She also talked about an event hosted by Not In Our Town and the Human Relations Commission that gathered on the green space. She said it seemed liked the perfect space for gathering space, with the addition of trees.

Ann-Marie Lancaster, 29 Parkwood Drive, said she appreciated the work of the task force, since came up with something concrete and worked together to combine what they all wanted. She said she wanted to know more about the process of coming up with this design. She also said there should be experts involved to come up with options for landscaping, to map out all possibilities, and the needs of the community. She said the city should not proceed until there is a better understanding and experts involved.

Bob Callecod, 1234 Brownwood Drive, said he was a landscaping architect and the primary lesson he learned was that form follows function. He strongly supports using the site as green space and taking a step back to original discussions, this should stratify a lot of community needs to be multi-purpose, close proximity to downtown, and complementary to neighboring homes, businesses, and downtown events. In particular, he said this could be an extension of the Black Swamp Arts Festival as it continues to grow and the many other events there are downtown. He wanted to know if other potential users have been contacted for potential uses that would suit their needs and then they could be incorporated into the space. He would like a better handle on what these potential uses could be prior to finalizing the design. He also said the concern has to be who maintain the space. He said he cannot speak for the city, but of what he knows of their budget, it is tight. He said it should be the responsibility of the coalition of agencies that could benefit from the space, such as the chamber, downtown, city, and other groups that could use it as a possible venue. Sharing responsibility and cost between those potentials users is fairer than having it as the city's responsibility solely.

Neocles Leontis, 119 North Summit Street, said the task force did a great job with the plan. He also said he is making an assumption on how to perceive the overall value of the site as a creation of a civil space. He said this summer than was powerful event that was used as a space to present and talk in public. He said Levis Commons is an example of a privatized place, similar to a town squire, which does not provide a space to talk freely. He said a space to talk and have access to for public speech is very important. If something belongs to the city, it belongs to us all. He also stated that when you look at Bowling Green from Google Earth, you see many parking lots. He said buildings can go on these parking lots and that the city should consider less people driving and people having less cars, which means these parking lots will need to be reclaimed for other purposes. He also said driverless cars may be the norm ten to fifteen years from now. He again thanked the task force for doing a wonderful job.

Aspacher asked if there were others wanting to speak, since it was the end of the sign-up sheet.

Reina Calderon, 209 South Prospect Street, said she lives near downtown and is a member of the Presbyterian Church next to green space. She said she has viewed the concept plan, but wondered what other things were looked at like parking, pedestrian flow, etc.

Penny Evans-Meyer, no address given, said it appears to be a good design for all, including walkers, wheelchairs, and strollers, but she is concerned with the large amount of concrete in the center. While she does like the design, she would like it be more "green". She said we need to promote the importance of land, health, sustainability.

Lloyd Triggs expressed his thanks for being on the task force. He said it was a great experience. He wanted to explain more about the design and the intended function to be a town square. He said they wanted the design to be flexible, so they could watch how the green space gets used for the years, but they wanted to provide seating and some aspects that people would gravitate to. He said they could not anticipate all users at the start.

Aspacher said thank you to all who spoke and he wanted to talk about the questions that have been raised, realizing there may not be answers for all the questions. He emphasized this is an unprecedented process and is a work in progress. The logistics of the site is a great question and will require additional discussion and planning.

Sandy Rowland, Council member, had a question for Triggs. She said there is a lot of concrete and the circle appears to be large. She wanted to know if that much concrete is needed or could it be a little greener. Triggs said in his opinion and after visiting the site and measuring, it actually seemed small. He said they wanted a little extra space to accommodate larger events. Rowland then asked if there was space for both a building and green space? Triggs said they did not do any measurements, but it was his understanding that there is not enough room for both and there were potentially other spaces that would be more appropriate.

Jeff Betts, Planning Commission member and chairperson, asked Kristen Otley, Parks and Recreation Director, a question. He asked if parks and recreation are able to take on additional maintenance and the view in the short and the long-term of this. She said the short-term view and the current motto is "maintain, no gain". The city currently has 373 acres of parkland, but has been on the same levy millage for sixteen years. To maintain at the current quality level they cannot take on more maintenance. She also stated the department will be starting to update their master plan soon, but for right now the focus is on maintenance. Betts said thank you for the clarification, since he wanted a better understanding of reality, rather than the perception.

Bruce Jeffers, Council member, said his concern about the process is that a decision is made before knowing what to do with a new city building. He said the green space is a good idea in general, but it may or may not be the best space, since maybe west of Grove Street could work and be complementary to the site. He thinks maybe a green space could be more valuable next to a city building, especially since the event referred to in the summer was very windy and the shelter of the building would have been nice to have.

Evans-Meyer asked realistically how soon a building would be built and how long can people be left in an inadequate building that will not get any better.

John Calderonello, 307 Haskins Road, said there was a 2004 study that recommended a city building of 33,000 square feet with 120 spaces. He said

it would take \$1,000,000 just to pay off the interest and the schools are also discussing replacement of several elementary schools. He was on the task force and thinks there is not space both for a building and green space.

Ryan Holley, Planning Commission member, said he agreed with what Krueger said about leaving it green to see how the uses turn out, but he also agreed with Triggs who said there should be some features people gravitate towards. However, he is more on the side of seeing how it is used, such as where pedestrians walk, so they know where to build the sidewalks. He also said it would be difficult to push a stroller on grass.

Diane Vogtsberger, 1515 Cedar Lane, had a question about how the property will be used on the west side of South Grove Street, where the old Central Administration Building was. She wanted to know if a new city building could be located there. She said this could create an ideal complex to have a town square, with a visit to the city building for business, a visit to a downtown business to shop, and then relax on the green space. Aspacher said this could be a potential site and that this has not been discussed, but certainly is not off of the table. He said the state of the current building will come up as a priority at some point, but he cannot say what that process will look like or commit to anything tonight.

Mark Hollenbaugh, Planning Commission member and vice-chairperson, said the reason a building keep coming up is because this was the intended site for the new building. He said it is important to have a sense of history and referred to the great expense of building and preserving the Wood County Courthouse. He said it is a symbol of the community and provides a sense of pride. He agreed the city building needs to be downtown and he is fine with the green space, however, he things it is important to keep in mind the need for a city building as it conveys a lot about the community.

Rowland asked if anyone else from the task force would like to say anything and no one else responded to the request.

Aspacher asked if there was any other discussion. John Zanfardino, Council member, asked where we go from here. He also asked what the current zoning is. Sayler stated the current zoning is S-3 Planned Institutional, which allows the proposed use as a green space.

Erica Sleek, Planning Commission member, said she is very excited about the design and is really happy with the work of the task force. She said right now it is just a field and a person in a wheelchair would need to have adequate access via a sidewalk.

Robert McOmber, Council member, said it would be a great space for either a city building or green space, but it cannot be both. He said he thinks the public sentiment supports having it as a green space and that the city should go with the broad consensus. He said he likes Vogtsberger's idea of having a

city building on the old Central Administration building site, which would be complementary to the green space. He said it should be investigated more closely. He said there will not be adequate funds to build a new building in soon, but maybe in ten years when more bonds are paid off this would be realistic to consider borrowing more money with the increased capacity. He said if there is a will to do it, then the new building is possible in the long term and is certainly needed. He said the current building is inadequate and makes it tough to attract new employees. He hope he is around long enough to see a new building and it is easy to put money elsewhere, but planning should start now even though the money is not there yet.

Theresa Gavarone Charters, Council member, said she agreed with Hollenbaugh and McOmber. She thinks it is a good idea to look at Vogtberger's suggestion. She also does have a concern with access to the green space with all users and that adding parking may want to be considered.

Gary Hess, Planning Commission member, said he found it remarkable that the green space discussion has been monopolized by the talk of a city building. He said he agrees with what McOmber said to take his concern of planning for a new building seriously. He also wondered if any downtown businesses have been asked about the green space and how it could be integrated into downtown needs and uses. Myers said they had downtown business owners on the task force, but did not have discussions with downtown businesses. He said the task force did discuss having rotating cafes or retail sites on the green space, but that was turned down.

Calderon asked if the space could be used as a performance space, such as a band stand or a large venue that may come to town and how would tickets and prices be handled. Myers said it is important to remember it is adjacent to a neighborhood and they want to be good neighbors. He said they focused on more of acoustic type performances, wedding pictures and envision something like City Park where chairs can be brought to concerts but not replace any other events in the community.

Aspacher thanked everyone for attending and said he will sit down with the Mayor and Municipal Administrator to discuss potential next steps. He said this is an on-going project and he is excited about all of the possibilities. He said the discussions have been cautionary and deliberate to serve the entire community and ensure the space is usable for everyone. He will provide updates on the process as they become available.

The meeting ended at 7:30 p.m.