

City of Bowling Green Comprehensive Plan: Future Land Use Update
STEERING COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES – 2/26/2014

Present: Vicky Valentine-Adler, Jeff Betts, Julie Broadwell, Charles Buki (consultant), Jill Carr, Suzanne Clark, Jennifer Copp, Judy Ennis, Gary Hess, Bruce Jeffers, Earlene Kilpatrick, Emily Monago, Mark Remeis, Barbara Ruland, Heather Sayler, and Lori Tretter.

Absent: Doug Cubberley, Steve Krakoff, and Sandy Milligan.

Visitors: Andrea Weinburg (consultant staff).

Mr. Charles Buki (consultant) started the meeting asking if there was anything to discuss before getting into the agenda, shown on the screen. Mr. Bruce Jeffers wanted to thank the committee for a good presentation to Council and said it gave Council a lot to think about. Ms. Heather Sayler welcomed a new committee member, Ms. Jennifer Copp (she has replaced BGSU student representative Sarah Burgoyne), and requested brief introductions to get to know the other committee members.

Mr. Buki said his hidden agenda all along is to create a cohesive group, do a lot of capacity building, and the committee will be the first to realize and appreciate all the hard work and thought that went into this document. He said when Jeff Winston was here, he was good at getting us all together, but today he will ask the hard questions that will seem like we are being pulled apart. He said when he and Jeff (the consultants) leave or disappear tomorrow, this is the group that has to understand, defend, and educate others about the document. Mr. Buki asked what a comprehensive plan is. Thoughts were it is a vision, a representation of a wide-range of constituent input, goals, a target of what we want the City of Bowling Green to become, and a guide to making decisions. Mr. Buki said all the answers are true, but the best answer is it is a decision-making tool that is rationalized, quantifiable, has benefitted from input and it lends predictability to the community.

Mr. Buki said the homework assigned from the last meeting was meant to tease out the “who, what, and why”. At this meeting we will test 4 areas and look for agreement on these areas. He described, using a PowerPoint presentation (attached) what has happened so far in this update process. From October through December of 2013 the focus has been the collection and analysis of data. Figuring out what is working, what is not working, who is moving in and out, what properties are worth, how businesses are doing, and is the status quo working. Additionally, assets, opportunities and issues were identified. Charts were forwarded to the committee last week to look at and it was identified the economy in BG is slightly lagging, but it is hard to see. From December through February, the focus was direction, including providing clarity to what the vision, values and goals are. Overlapping, with the vision, values and goals, are the “who and what” the City wants to attract. At this point and after the meeting, Mr. Buki said he felt he will have enough questions answered to create a document near the first of April to send to the committee to critique. This will focus on the strategy, the “how”, for what the plan and map will look like. Options will be provided, with input on each one from the committee. Mr. Jeffers asked about when community meetings would be. Mr. Buki said before tax day will be the goal, once a strategy and somewhat of a direction is on paper with options and approaches. The reason not to bring anything to the community too early is you are asking the community to solve a problem. This way the issues are flushed out first, then you present ways to tackle the issues and allow comments on the options.

Mr. Buki said at today's meeting he really needed to have clarity on the vision, value and goals and consensus on the "who, what and why". He wants to avoid talking about the how. Once answers are formulated to questions he has posed, he can then craft strategies and tools to get the community where we want it to be. Most important is to provide a rational basis for saying yes to what BG wants and saying no to what we do not want. Most scenarios cannot be predicted, so identifying a basis for decision-making is crucial. For example, one area he wanted the committee to focus on for a "test" today is the northeast neighborhood (west of BGSU, north of Wooster, as they fold into the east side of Main Street) – "Who and what is there now, is it working, what is the result of a do nothing strategy, and what do you want there? The homework assignment was to help focus on the "who and what" is desired for the community. Some members brought up concerns with the focus of one of the categories on ethnicity. Mr. Buki stated there are communities that use ethnicity as a target market and provided examples (such as immigrants tend to be entrepreneurial). Inclusion is not non-inclusion, it is focusing on what value they bring. The committee understood the various criteria and the dimensions that may or may not overlap. Some came to the realization families may want different things than empty nesters or singles. That social aspect brings a new dimension to plan for. He apologized for not being clearer on the purpose of ranking each criteria, but looking at these implications all together help sort out, into the horizon, as to the types of parcels, streets, and what retail will need to look like. Mr. Jeffers asked if BG has more single parents than two-parent households. Mr. Buki said single-family households are rising, but BG still has more two-parent households. He said there is a correlation if single-parent families rise you will see the economy go down, along with property values, but then housing becomes more affordable.

In respect to property values, Mr. Buki stated the northeast neighborhood is an ongoing concern, since the residents that live there now are experiencing decreasing property values. If nothing is done, the values will continue to decline as more students move into these areas. The committee has to understand, that as this process moves along, the importance of being able to explain these issues, and ideas to solve them, to reporters, Planning Commission, and Council, is crucial. Some of these groups may not be ready to adopt a bold plan. To be confident with the data presented, he stated he has analyzed 10 years of property records, nonconforming uses, where students live, police data, sales transactions, married them with housing standards reports, year built, other housing criteria (how many bedrooms, baths, size, etc, so comparing apples to apples) and will use this data to figure out the effect on property values and what issues may be blame. A member stated concerns over the data not reflecting remodeling and Mr. Buki noted that, but these are the best indicators available. Mr. Buki said this data is important so issues can be determined on certain blocks and the do nothing strategy can be predicted better. For example, more homes will most likely become rentals west and south of BGSU if nothing is done to change these numbers. For example, an owner passes away, the son inherits the property and who do you think is most likely to buy? The higher dollar is most likely going to come as a rental than selling to a family to live there. What politically will need to change to move the rental numbers? Do you want to change this and why? How? What things? Is it better streetscaping? Do you want to get rid of nonconforming uses and at what cost? No decisions are cost-free, whether it is financial or political. Who and what makes sure the "what" gets done? For instance, nonconforming uses are a problem. There are a lot in the City and it correlates with lower property values and enforcement issues. One way to get rid of them is to buy them out, but that comes at a great cost. Is a better way to use incentive programs? Otherwise they are going to continue as they transfer from landlord to landlord and remain toxic for the blocks they are located on. Do we use the stick or the carrot to incentivize? This is also where prioritizing is necessary. Will it be financially supporting bike paths or buying out nonconforming uses?

Mr. Buki introduced Ms. Andrea Weinburg, who is a staff member he has living her for one month at a BGSU dorm. She is scoring every residential structure here (8,000+ structures) using a 1 through 6 scale. One being the best score (it would sell when immediately put on the market and needs no work), 2 would be it needs

minor touch-ups (such as tightening a handle, planting flowers, two weekends for small repairs and then it would sell), 3 would mean it shows signs of issues that would prevent the home from selling immediately (there is a 29 year furnace, 2 layers of shingles, no landscaping, would need sweat equity to fix it up, it is a good deal on a great block but a bad deal on a bad block), 4 would be a troubled property showing signs of neglect and stress (treading downward but still recoverable), 5 would be a blighted property showing lots of distress (risk of abandonment, would take \$20,000 or more to fix up), 6 means it is essentially should be condemned (it is an arson risk, vacant, little hope to save the structure and there normally are not many of these scores). The scores are independent of the size of a structure and location within the City. This is part of the data analysis and will be shared with the committee.

Mr. Buki asked the steering committee to break up into 3 small groups for discussion. The 3 questions to be answered: 1-Who keep or who not to lose (retain)? 2-Who do you want? 3-Why? In essence, this is to ask yourselves “who and what” do you want for this community to thrive and to project what “the who wants” to bring them here.

The first group looked at the opportunity to marry downtown and the university (better town and university knitting together). They saw more commercial opportunities and mixed uses to satisfy both needs. Mr. Buki labeled a paper with “Who/What” and wrote down retaining students and faculty and wanting more young faculty (essentially all faculty) to live here. Students were cited as important since many steering committee members had went to school here and ended up staying. Another group wanted more young professionals (such as teachers) and entrepreneurs. Mr. Buki asked what entrepreneurs are by the group’s definition. The group stated people that have an idea and could get capital to make the idea a reality (could start any type of business), including manufacturers. Skilled trade workers are also important, since they may bring young families or start families and have long-term potential to live here from the start of their life-cycle. Attracting BGSU faculty, staff, and students were listed as important to all groups to live here.

Mr. Buki asked why the above listed “who” are important. Having families (and strong households) are important because they are socially and civically invested. They cost less than what they give, thus, they are considered net donors. BGSU students bring a workforce and disposable income to the community. All the above “who’s” are the fabric of the community and the common denominator is that they are all investors into the community. BGSU faculty and staff are important because they bring diversity and complexity. They all have different areas of expertise and are highly educated. This makes the community more interesting. Mr. Buki asked how this all ties together. What is the hunch about the trajectory and where the community wants to be? Can we only get to the “who” by increasing housing types and choices? The committee will need to mobilize the community to understand we do not have the diversity and complexity we want. Retaining tenured faculty already here is not hard, but we will have to figure out what do we need to attract the other “who’s”.

In 3 small groups the committee was assigned to go over the “Test Page” projected on the screen as part of the PowerPoint presentation, with copies at each seat. The first column listed 4 areas: Northeast Neighborhood (N. Enterprise/Fairview/Poe/Ridge), Southeast Neighborhood (Campbell Hill/Manville/Clough/Napoleon), E. Wooster St. (Main to I-75) and Downtown (Main Street from Washington to Oak). For each area, the next column asked the question “Who/What is there now?”. The next column questioned “Is it Working? Why Yes or No?”. The third column questioned the “Result of a Do Nothing Different Strategy” and the last column questioned “What Do You Want?” for each area listed. The groups met to discuss these areas for about 20 minutes. Mr. Buki asked for answers to the first column for each neighborhood. The groups agreed the NE neighborhood, SE neighborhood, and E. Wooster St. are not working. However, the groups felt the SE and E. Wooster get a “soft no” as not working. Technically, these

areas are “working”, however they are “ugly” and subtly getting worse or have the potential to get worse. The groups all decided Downtown is working, but there could be improvements. The next question about each area was the result of a “do nothing different strategy”. The groups expressed all 4 areas will worsen with no changes. The last question for discussion was “what do you want”. For the NE areas the groups answered having nicer housing, variety of housing types (such as condos, mix of single-family homes at various price points, smaller lots), better rental opportunities (including higher end options), more families, neighborhood scale businesses, empty nesters, young professionals, BGSU faculty and staff. This area is prime for having more people living, working and walking. It should be dense, walkable, diverse and vibrant with the proximity between downtown and BGSU. The SE area discussion led to being an area to attract BGSU faculty and staff, skilled trades (leading to families and strong households), young professionals, and students. There was a question that there is some industrial left in this area and aging multiple-family structures and what to do with that, with no answers provided. Improved aesthetics were described as needed, along with making it a more connected area (it is a non-legible area, meaning an 8 or 80 year old should be able to get there easily which is not the case). This area should be knitted together better with BGSU and E. Wooster St. The discussion then moved to Downtown. The groups agreed the mix of the same was good, however, broadening the income of residents (higher incomes) is important (lofts may attract more and additional parking was mentioned). Continue to permit mixed uses is vital and a better mix of retail was listed as a need (such as diverse shops, a bakery, ethnic establishments, and healthy food options). A community space was listed as needed.

At the conclusion of the exercise, Mr. Buki established the committee seems to be hunger for more residents aged 22-50 and the demand they impose is a walkable, dense, and vibrant area, which is perfect for the NE area being adjacent to downtown. The Downtown and the NE area have the bones to be better with little fix and E. Wooster and SE need more healing. However, the groups did not get to fully complete the exercise (SE area and E. Wooster St.) and as part of the homework, within small groups, the “Test Page” needs to be completed and turned into Ms. Saylor by Friday, March 7, 2014. Additionally, Mr. Buki stated the second part of the homework, again working within the small groups, is to write a vision statement (15 words or less) that describes what kind of place and community you want Bowling Green to be in 20 years (grounded in reality). This also needs to be submitted to Ms. Saylor by Friday, March 7, 2014.

Mr. Buki stated we will pick-up the pace, since the data analysis is complete and we are wrapping up the direction phase. He stated in the next few weeks he will get the committee a set of drawings and versions to review and then rolling out the public input phase in April.

Meeting lasted approximately 3:30 p.m.- 6:10 p.m.