

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COMMISSION /
PLANNING BOARD JOINT WORKSHOP SESSION MINUTES
JUNE 20, 2016
DPS FACILITY, 851 SOUTH ETON
7:30 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Rackeline J. Hoff, Mayor called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

ROLL CALL: Present, Mayor Hoff
Commissioner Bordman
Commissioner Boutros
Commissioner DeWeese
Commissioner Harris
Mayor Pro Tem Nickita
Commissioner Sherman

Absent, None

ROLL CALL OF PLANNING BOARD:

Present, Mr. Clein, Chairperson
Ms. Boyce
Mr. Boyle
Mr. Jeffares
Mr. Koseck
Ms. Lazar
Ms. Prasad, alternate member (arrived at 7:32 PM)
Mr. Share, alternate member
Mr. Williams

Administration: City Manager Valentine, City Attorney Studt, Deputy Clerk Arft, City Engineer O'Meara, City Planner Ecker, Assistant City Planner Baka, Building Director Johnson

III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

City Manager explained the meeting format. The city-wide master plan will be discussed, followed by discussion on various issues facing the city regarding land use. No action is anticipated this evening on any of the items. We envision there will be a consensus-driven discussion at the end as to which items are to be brought back to the City Commission to act on formally and provide direction on those issues for the Planning Board.

Public participation will be included as each item is concluded.

A short presentation outlining each item will be made by staff.

Mayor Hoff noted that they hope to have interaction here and gain consensus on how to prioritize the many issues. Through the discussion tonight we will try to prioritize and give the Planning Board some direction on next steps.

A. City-wide Master Plan Update

Assistant Planner Baka noted that the most recent comprehensive master plan was completed and adopted in 1980. Since that time, there have been sub-area plans and overlay plans that have been implemented and are essentially master plan updates, including the 2016 plan in 1996, the Eton Road corridor plan in 1999, and the Triangle plan in 2007. Also the Alleys and Passageways plan was done in 2012, and the Multi-Modal plan in 2013. All of those have been used to guide development throughout Birmingham. The discussion has been whether it is time to do a comprehensive master plan update. It has been suggested that with the sub-area plans being fairly recent, generally it is thought it may not be necessary to overhaul the master plan but tie all of the plans together in a way that creates a consistent and comprehensive guide for the future development. The 1980 plan contains outdated demographic and statistical information. The projections were for 20 years out.

Staff provided a sample RFP of the types of things thought to be important to include in the plan, and certainly, public participation is at the top of the list. If the Commission and Planning Board wants to move in that direction, staff would pursue a formal RFP and begin the process.

Mayor Hoff noticed much information to be updated is objective data and she is not certain why we need an outside consultant for that.

Mr. Valentine said part of the reason is the need for a process facilitated by an outside consultant. He agreed that the data analysis is certainly something staff could do, but the public involvement process is more defined, and that process needs to be driven by a hired consultant to insure all public input that is desired is included in the process.

She confirmed that this is scheduled for the 2016-17 budget. She noted that this is not as much a discussion topic, since we are going to move forward.

Ms. Bordman said that she was disappointed after reading the sample RFP and the memo. She did not think it asked for new ideas especially in the residential areas. She did not see a place for this visionary look at the plan.

Ms. Ecker noted that this would be addressed, but this is not going to be a comprehensive master plan. If Birmingham was a community that did not have any sub-area plans or any master plans, then a comprehensive master plan would be needed. She does not envision that we would start from scratch because Birmingham has been consistent in knowing where it wants to go in the different commercial areas. It is more fine tuning some of the areas that have almost been left out by the sub-area plans, such as the residential neighborhoods and the some of the sensitive zones between the residential neighborhoods in downtown.

Mr. Koseck said master plans should be about discovery, gathering information and analyzing information and presenting it. He would like to find someone who has creativity and can help the city connect the dots after analyzing the information. He thinks it requires a specific and unique expertise. In his opinion, the 2016 plan was very successful. He does not think a one day workshop with the public will gather enough information. The influence should be equally shared by people who live in and who have businesses in the community. He said the Planning board references the plan often. He does not want to shortchange the design piece, and suggested giving at least another day or two of workshops.

Mr. Clein agreed that more public engagement is needed and ask for a detailed public engagement plan.

Mr. Boyle thought the 1980 plan did not connect with the public until the vision was completed and presented. He agrees that we need public involvement in the planning process and let the staff and consultants keep the process moving to end up with a product acceptable with everyone in the city.

Commissioner Harris asked if this RFP mirrors the RFP issued 20 years ago for the 2016 plan since he understands it was considered to be successful. Ms. Ecker said that neither she nor Mr. Baka were employed with the city in 1996 when the 2016 plan was written and she has been unable to locate the RFP. She said the last direction staff received from the previous commission was to update the data and pull all the sub-area plans together. She agrees that the 2016 plan was more involved.

Mr. Jeffares said he views this as a strategic plan of our city. He agreed that the Planning Board relies on the plan in every decision that is made. His opinion that there have been several sea changes and doing something like this may not capture the changes. He referenced plans for electric vehicles in the near future and planning for it in the city. He thinks we need to be more all encompassing and stretching a bit more on this.

Commissioner DeWeese missed vision and direction as to where we want to go and how we get there. Residents have a vision of how neighborhoods should be and how the city acts in regard to that. It is all about integration and the perspective. He thinks we need a broader scope and to pay more attention to the vision that people have. He noted the trend in the community for big homes on small lots, and may be coming more narrow in terms of economic perspective due to need for more wealth in order to live here. We need a community consensus of what we want the community to be, and he thinks this was missing. He wants to see a document that gives us a direction and vision. It may be implied, but it was not explicit.

Commissioner Nickita thinks the RFP has to be carefully drafted. He thinks it is a matter of the right consultant to help orchestrate the very solid planning efforts that have been successfully implemented. Also, to look at the gaps that have not been looked at for many years and put it all together. He thinks we can find a consultant if we clearly define the expectations. He thinks someone needs to recognize what the city has brought to the table already, and then orchestrate it with the neighborhoods and seam it together.

Mr. Williams noted that the plans that have been approved are basically touching on commercial areas as they impact the residential areas. He would like to focus on the neighborhood input and that is different from what the city has done in the past. He said the master plan is not comprehensive as it pertains to some of the neighborhoods and some of the transitional areas but more importantly from a future planning standpoint of how the neighborhoods fit into the dynamics of the entire city. We cannot sit back and pretend that an outside entity will be successful at getting the input of the residents. That is up to the Planning Board and City Commission to reach out to the residents.

Mr. Jeffares agreed that the plans that have been implemented are good and need to be looked at now with a vision to the future to make sure they will continue to work. This plan could have a dramatic effect on the neighborhoods.

Mr. Valentine expected to hear comments about the process by which the plan is updated. Staff will go back and rework it based on the comments made and show everyone another draft for any other comments and then move forward with the process.

Ms. Ecker explained for Ms. Prasad that what generally happens in the RFP process is to advertise and invite proposals. In the past, a steering committee or a board or committee has been used to review the proposals along with staff. A number of top candidates are selected and will be invited to interview with the committee and the City Commission and a final consultant is chosen. Mr. Valentine confirmed that this would be done in the fiscal year beginning July 1. It will go through the process at this level to make certain that what is wanted in the RFP is included. It may be this fall or later.

Ms. Ecker stated the selection process would be included in the RFP. This evening was a review of the scope of service.

Mayor Hoff asked for public comments.

Paul Reagan, 997 Purdy, expressed concern about buffers contained in the master plan, emphasis by the city on commercial planning only, at the expense of neighborhoods. He is fearful for property values of homes. He stated that this process has to be neighborhood-centric when moving forward.

DeAngelo Espree, 505 E. Lincoln, asked if there is any plan for a common meeting place for all residents. Ms. Ecker said the master plan does not have a specific recommendation to provide a community center, but over the years there have been many discussions with the expansion of the YMCA and the Barnum property, but nothing has so far moved forward. It was noted there has been no discussion about expanding or adding another Department of Public Services building, nor is there a present need.

Mayor Hoff summarized that the comments heard tonight will be incorporated into a new proposed RFP which will come back to the commission.

B. Transitional Zoning (TZ2 District)

Ms. Ecker summarized the transitional zoning issues already adopted. She noted the Planning Board has been studying TZ2 district properties. The board is looking for some direction from the City Commission as to what they would like to see and also share what the board has done so far. She said the uses are always the biggest issue. The board has come up with a new proposal and would like the commission to weigh in.

Some uses in TZ2 have been eliminated, shifted around as to which are allowed as of right, and which are allowed as a special land use permit only, and looking at them clearly in relation to TZ1, TZ2 and TZ3. There was some concern that maybe there was a big jump from TZ1 to TZ2 and not a graduated system that would make it a seamless transition from TZ1 to TZ2 to TZ3 so there was a clear differentiation and it moved the most uses to TZ3. If adopted, TZ1 and TZ3 zones which were already adopted, may need to be adjusted.

Mr. Jeffares added that parking requirements were considered carefully. Ms. Ecker said the main focus has been with uses.

Mayor Hoff said traditionally the special land uses are the ones that we want to control the most. She noticed that quite a few special land uses especially in TZ2 have been eliminated and she asked where they have been moved. Ms. Ecker confirmed that some have been moved to other categories. Originally, the board made all of the food-related uses in a special land use permit category. Since then, the board decided the better demarcation would be parking and traffic and the impact to the neighborhood.

Mayor Hoff asked if the food uses have been moved to commercial permitted uses. Ms. Ecker noted that food uses have been moved there in some cases, but not all. Bank or credit union with a drive-thru have been removed due to the traffic and circulation issue for the neighborhood.

Ms. Boyce said they realized that other ordinances are in place that define noise, smell, and dumpsters, so there are other controls over those uses. Parking is more challenging. It was felt that controls are in place already to be able to put something like a bakery as a permitted use in TZ2 rather than as a special land use.

Commissioner DeWeese said part of the issue here is a different vision of the residents among themselves. Some like a more urban vision, while others that do not want them close to their homes. He has not heard complaints about the layout and structure, but has heard people complain about the uses. He thinks it would be better to have fewer permissible uses in the beginning. He said the basic notion is that it is a buffer for residential areas. He is leery about special land uses, and feels the public does not trust the special land use process. The cost burden of a special land use permit is high in both time and money to a small business owner. We want to find the uses that are acceptable, minimize the use of special land use permits and begin with fewer uses and add more in the future, if appropriate.

Commissioner Harris asked whether TZ2 should just apply in certain areas or be available generally for applicants. Ms. Ecker said there was some discussion about that and they are looking for some input from the commission in that regard. The biggest problems fall into the TZ2 category.

Mayor Hoff noted that the commission did designate specific properties for TZ1 and TZ3. Ms. Ecker agreed, and said that was the original proposal for TZ2 as well, so the board is looking for specific feedback from the commission: should they continue to study the specific properties and determine if TZ2 is a good fit, or present the TZ2 ordinance and let the commission decide to create the district and let people apply individually to come in. The Planning Board has not had a public hearing on it yet, so it is still in the draft stage.

Commissioner Sherman noted that the comments received at the commission's TZ2 public hearing were concerns about uses in the TZ2 area. The idea was to restrict the uses more than they were, and move things to areas where we could control them or add them in later. This draft expands the uses in the area, and reduces the controls rather than increases them. He does not think this has met the objective of what was suggested by the commission. If these areas are designed to protect the neighborhoods, then they need to be looked at from neighborhood side. He suggested fewer uses with more controls that can be relaxed as time goes on if appropriate. He expected to see more under SLUPs, far fewer uses and far less intense uses.

Mr. Boyle asked Commissioner Sherman for specifics. Commissioner Sherman used a delicatessen or specialty food shop as an example. Look at the definition and how is the food prepared or is it packaged. The dry cleaner was originally a special land use and now it is a permitted use. He said things that were agreed to at the time were fine as a special land use and wanted to look at the things that were there that could be done without special land use. Instead, things have been taken out of special land use and made them permitted uses. From

a neighborhood standpoint, we are trying to create a buffer and calm the area between downtown and the neighborhood.

Mr. Williams said they also took things that were in the special land use permit designation and eliminated them entirely, and there are more of those than were added. Of those things that have been eliminated, does the commission agree that some of these should be brought back in. The previous commission was generally unspecific.

Ms. Boyce said it is helpful to go back and look at what is permitted in O1 and O2. When she compares the list side by side, the new one has a lot less permitted uses.

Mr. Clein requested more specific direction. Mayor Hoff agreed with him, and the new commission has not discussed each of the new uses.

Commissioner Nickita said it is important to recognize why it was done in the first place. The fundamental issue is to recognize there was a lot of inconsistencies, edge conditions with no controls, inappropriate uses in the perimeter transitional zone. The effort so far has organized and recognized the gaps and issues and inconsistencies and pulled it all together. Now it is a matter of refining it. When we talk about this, we want to make sure we are up to speed on the accomplishment and value of what has been done. He encouraged the commission to have a dialog on that level. The land use is only one discussion.

Commissioner Harris agreed that the new commission would be helped by seeing the comparisons to O1 and O2, and in that way the degree of change can be assessed.

Commissioner DeWeese would like the board to consider there may be some areas where some of the uses are acceptable because they are not right next to residences. He said we still need to do the follow-up.

Commissioner Boutros said we agree we need to move forward and identify first if we need TZ2. If we do, we have identified lots in the area and we need to determine whether these are the final lots, or are we going to open it to even more. We need to determine the reasons why a use should not be there.

Commissioner DeWeese suggested a study session to discuss the reasons as to why this is being done, and what is being done. Then the commission can provide a policy direction, and have the board come back with the details.

Mayor Hoff stated we already approved TZ1 and TZ3. We just have to fine tune TZ2. We already have the reasons for the transition zones. She is hearing that the questions are about the uses, and perhaps we need to have the comparison discussions.

Commissioner Bordman asked is the plan to review the uses.

Mr. Valentine suggested the commission wants to look at the direction this is headed, so that when it goes back to the board, it can continue to do the work that the commission is expecting the board to do.

Commissioner Bordman has listened to the board comments and their thought process about the impact on the neighborhoods of parking and have eliminated the negative impact of

parking. The board carefully thought about what the residents would like to have that would not have a negative impact on the neighborhood. She is highly satisfied with the work done on these uses. She thinks they are compatible with a buffer zone transition area. We ought to concentrate whether we want the document as it is and apply it to specific places, or if we want this document as it is and let the owner apply for this zoning. She thinks that is the commission's decision.

Mr. Valentine said in terms of process, the commission can draft the ordinance, but that's not the role of the commission. The function is to provide the input that the planning board is looking for so they can provide the recommendation to the commission in vetting this all out. As opposed to putting specifically what you want, you could bypass the Planning Board, but that is not the intent. The intent is to give the Planning Board the direction so they can finish the work they have started with the clarity and expectation that you are expecting.

City Attorney Studt stated that the political decision is the commission's. The Planning Board is the body of experts to guide the commission to where the commission wants to go.

Mayor Hoff hears a difference of opinion here. Commissioner Sherman expressed an opinion that is different. She thinks the commission needs to discuss and decide where we go. Mr. Valentine agreed, and said the commission would review it and then provide direction to Planning Board to work out the final details so the commission can then approve it based on a recommendation.

Ms. Lazar asked would a public hearing yield more information to assist the commission. We are considering the importance of the public opinion, and then it can be furnished to the commission. It is an impact on the neighborhoods and we are trying to be sensitive to needs.

Mr. Williams commented that what is missing is the history of the review of O1 and O2 and the types of uses that began years ago. He suggested a narrative to combine with the charts for the public hearing.

Ms. Boyce would like the commission to dive into this more. General direction has not worked so far.

Mr. Koseck thinks most of the issues can be agreed on, if properly presented along with O1 and O2 discussion.

Mayor Hoff requested clarity on agreement where the public hearing should be held.

Commissioner Sherman agrees that it would be good for new commissioners to have the history of this and the comments summarized as part of the narrative for review. The Planning Board and Commission can each have their discussion before a public hearing and get some consensus. The Commission can send some additional direction based on that to the Planning Board so they can finish their work. Ms. Ecker could update her narrative to include what the public comments were and the Commission discussion before presenting it.

Mr. Williams suggested including what the properties are now and what is permitted now and what they would be. Mayor Hoff stated that was presented previously to the Commission.

Commissioner Boutros suggested what people want to know is what might be there. He said not everyone is going to agree. He is unsure that more information is what is needed.

Mayor Hoff suggested that the packet of materials should be some of the information and would be part of the narrative.

Commissioner Bordman thinks it would be an exhaustive waste of time. The board has spent a huge amount of time on this with considerations that she would apply. She does not see anything on the list of uses that is highly burdensome. She does not want to argue with fellow commissioners about the individual uses. We would be spending hours as the Planning Board did debating with each other about the uses. She suggested to have a public hearing so we can get public input, come back to the Commission to decide if we want to apply this to specific property or leave it as an option for property owners.

Mr. Share said the board should have a public hearing, after which the board will make a recommendation to the Commission. The commission can make its decision.

Commissioner DeWeese thinks it would be useful for commission to get the packet as well to become familiar.

Paul Reagan, 997 Purdy, commented that the history is important and neighborhoods have pushed back hard. The concern is intensive uses with cars, and property values. It's about keeping the encroachment of intensive commercial properties from moving into the neighborhoods.

C. Private Development Parking Requirements

Mr. Valentine stated the intent of these items is not to debate them in general but to have the conversation whether or not these issues should be coming back for further discussion.

Ms. Ecker said two different concerns have been heard over the years. Parking standards for all commercial uses of properties that are not located within a Parking Assessment District (PAD) are in the ordinance. The two central issues for discussion are: 1. Should we have minimum standards and if so, should we change the minimum standards, and 2. Should we have a maximum standard and state that we do not want more parking lots like Adams Square. As for the PAD, on-site parking is not required, except for residential uses. Do we want to provide more public parking throughout the city or not. A different kind of development happens when inside the PAD.

Ms. Ecker commented that those in the PAD have already paid in through special assessment when the parking deck was built.

Mr. Boyle suggested that parking is a feature of the city, and of land use and would like it included in the master plan.

Mr. Williams said we hear all the time there is not enough parking. He agrees city wide, parking has to be dealt with in the master plan.

Ms. Boyce said we should be focusing on the requirement on parking in residential development which drives the price of the residential units, so we are ending up with fabulous million dollar properties in town, but they are not available to everyone who would like to be in the

downtown. One dictates the other and needs to be included in the master plan and discuss where we want the city to be.

Commissioner Nickita said the city has done better than most cities in terms of how we have dealt with parking and how it has driven development. Now there are changes in how people use parking. Because of parking and the parking standards, we cannot get what we want to do in the city core. At the same time, we advocate for significant amount of walkability, increased mobility in terms of non-motorized transportation, and mass transit. There are all kinds of drivers and changes, and we should try to get on top of this as opposed to letting it just happen. He suggested taking an aggressive move of examining the current circumstances in parking and seeing how we can incorporate those as much as possible. He does not think we can do it in the master plan. He thinks that this takes a higher level of involvement, and we may want to consider incorporating some level of dialogue with a parking consultant that understands these complexities and include that into the discussion to drive the way we address our other plans and incorporate that into our master plan. There are many aspects, including future recognition of how things are going to evolve.

Mr. Boyle feels parking standards should be included in the master plan. Discussion continued.

Mark Johnson, non-resident, said the biggest problem is lack of multi modal transportation and suggested the city study alternate ways to move around the city. Currently, everyone must use their car. Study ways to move around the city at the same time the parking issues are discussed.

D. Existing commercial non-conforming buildings

Ms. Ecker described the issue as being several properties that are non-conforming with regards to height, bulk and mass. She provided some history of the buildings in question.

After discussion regarding maintenance and renovations that might be permitted, the number of variances that would be required, it was agreed that the discussion should be continued at the Planning Board level, with direction from the Commission.

There were no public comments.

E. Definition of retail

Ms. Ecker described the issue as the city's definition of retail in the ordinance, and people who would like the definition to be more specific. She said this comes up at the shopping district level. The retailers downtown want to see more retail. For the most part, the general public wants to see an active retail type use whether it is retail or restaurant. There is some debate on what percentage of each. The building owners have a different view.

Commissioner Nickita thinks this is long overdue for discussion. He feels it needs to be re-examined and cleaned up.

The consensus is to continue discussion on the definition of retail.

There were no public comments.

F. Dormer considerations

Building Director Johnson provided background on this issue. Recently, some houses appear to be three stories tall. The ordinance allows two stories in height for single family residential. It also allows a habitable attic. Dormers are utilized to give some additional height in the living space in the attic. Changes in the code over the years permitted an attic that realistically could be 100% habitable space and meet the requirements of the zoning ordinance and the residential code. Most complaints come from the neighborhoods with smaller size lots.

Commissioner DeWeese said feedback he has received indicates there is no consensus on this from the public. He prefers waiting until we go through the master plan process with residents.

Commissioner Nickita said the Building Department is having trouble legislating this. He said the department needs us to intervene soon and not wait for the master plan process to act.

Commissioner Bordman said it bothers her that the department is put in a bad position because the director does not have direction from the city to manage these requests. We need to have something developed so that the department can be consistent from project to project.

Ms. Boyce thinks the Planning Board can clean it up so there are no questions.

Mr. Boyle thinks we need the discussion with the public as well, and not just regulate this without their input.

Mr. Koseck said this is not a master plan issue, and the department needs some direction. This helps people who design as well.

Mr. Williams suggested bringing some representatives from the neighborhoods also.

Mayor Hoff said this issue will be placed on the Planning Board action list.

There were no public comments.

G. Lot consolidation process

Mr. Johnson provided background on the issue. He indicated that the city code and zoning ordinance lack regulations for lot combinations. There has been an increase in non-typical combination inquiries, which have been denied because they are inconsistent with how the block was intended to develop based on its layout and standard zoning principles for front, rear and side open spaces. Some have been approved by the BZA after being denied.

Commissioner Nickita said this goes to the master plan, and is being driven by the development community. He thinks it is an inappropriate way of city building. In the meantime, we should have a stopgap circumstance that allows the city control. At the very least, he suggested we immediately take a look at the possibility of incorporating some type of review as done in lot splits, and apply it to lot combinations in a similar manner. Then follow up with the discussion in the master plan.

The consensus was that it has to be dealt with now, and will come back to the Commission.

H. Planning Board Action List Review

It was agreed that the Action List be amended following City Commission review and discussion.

I. Public Facilities Review Process

Ms. Ecker said there was a lot of discussion when the fire station went through the public review process. In the past, a courtesy review was done because all of the city properties are zone PP (Public Property) and are not required to follow the same standards that other properties owned privately. Concerns were raised about noticing, public hearings, the process, who had input, what type of standards we would apply. She has offered a review process for discussion purposes.

Ms. Ecker said the Library (Phases 2 and 3) may be renovated potentially. Mr. Valentine said this public facility review process would be more for external type changes, not interior renovations.

Mayor Hoff said she does not think this has the immediacy of the other issues, but does think it is a good idea.

Mr. Jeffares said he does not want to lose track and wait too long to discuss this process.

Mayor Hoff said maybe this is something that staff can do and then go to the Commission, and not to Planning Board.

Mr. Valentine said we have a solid framework for a process that we created going through the fire station project.

There were no public comments.

V. ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 10:17 PM

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