

**CITY OF BIRMINGHAM**  
**REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLANNING BOARD**  
**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 2020**

Held Remotely Via Zoom And Telephone Access

Minutes of the regular meeting of the City of Birmingham Planning Board held on August 12, 2020. Chairman Scott Clein convened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

**A. Roll Call**

**Present:** Chairman Scott Clein; Board Members Robin Boyle, Stuart Jeffares, Bert Koseck, Daniel Share, Janelle Whipple-Boyce, Bryan Williams; Alternate Board Members Jason Emerine, Nasseem Ramin; Student Representative Rachel Hester

**Absent:** Student Representative June Lee

**Administration:** Jana Ecker, Planning Director  
Jamil Alawadi, IT Staff  
Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner  
Laura Eichenhorn, Transcriptionist

**Master Planning Team:**

Matt Lambert, DPZ  
Sarah Traxler, McKenna

**08-93-20**

**B. Approval Of The Minutes Of The Regular Planning Board Meeting of July 22, 2020**

**Motion by Mr. Williams**

**Seconded by Mr. Share to approve the minutes of the Regular Planning Board Meeting of July 22, 2020 as submitted.**

**Motion carried, 7-0.**

ROLL CALL VOTE

Yeas: Williams, Share, Boyle, Koseck, Whipple-Boyce, Clein, Jeffares

Nays: None

**08-94-20**

**C. Chairperson's Comments**

Chairman Clein welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded everyone that the meeting was being held under the guidance of the City Attorney and City administration to ensure compliance with Governor Whitmer's executive orders. Chairman Clein then reviewed procedures for the meeting.

**08-95-20**

#### **D. Review Of The Agenda**

There were no changes to the agenda.

**08-96-20**

#### **E. Study Session Items**

##### **1. Review of Key Themes in Draft Master Plan Document**

Planning Director Ecker introduced the item. Mr. Lambert presented the item.

At the conclusion of Mr. Lambert's presentation, Chairman Clein invited comment from members of the public. He requested that comments be kept to broad considerations regarding the appropriateness of the themes, with the understanding that more details would be explored later in the process.

Norm Cohen said he was against allowing accessory dwelling units (ADUs). He stated that both of his neighbors have added two-story garages in the time that he has lived there and that those additions affected both his privacy and his view. He said that while he supported efforts to create more affordable housing in Birmingham those efforts should not occur in single family neighborhoods. Mr. Cohen stated he was concerned that ADUs would increase traffic, noise, security, parking and privacy issues. He concluded by saying that Birmingham should put more effort into maintaining the more affordable single family homes that are left rather than trying to move ADUs into single family neighborhoods.

Chairman Clein reiterated his statement from past meetings that in this context 'affordable housing' means more affordable for Birmingham, and not 'affordable' in the sense of the federal government's legal definition of term.

Andrew Haig proceeded to give comment on the themes, saying:

- Themes one and two were more related than separate. He opined that communication within a neighborhood cannot be facilitated through land planning decisions, stating that a neighborhood either wants to communicate within itself or does not.
- He agreed with the aims of theme three.
- He agreed with Mr. Cohen's statement that teardowns of smaller, more affordable homes are leading to people being priced out of Birmingham. He said the City should focus more effort on discouraging teardowns that are replaced with much larger, more expensive, and more unsightly homes.
- Theme four should be rephrased to give more clarity to what precisely is meant by 'affordable'.
- The 60% lot coverage rule is not sufficiently enforced in the City and that many houses exceed that limit. He said this is leading to the flooding issues many residents experience.

- Theme seven should be one of the primary focuses of the plan, as it is one of the things most likely to directly benefit residents. He said he would love to see new parks in underserved areas of Birmingham.
- He is on the City's multi-modal transportation board (MMTB) and would welcome further discussion regarding theme eight during MMTB meetings.
- The differences in success between the City's mixed-use districts could be because of size of properties, types of properties, rent costs, types of businesses, or various other factors. It should be determined which of those issues impact the success of MX districts and how they can be addressed.
- The City should endeavor to invest in its current MX districts and should not try to create any additional MX districts given the relatively small geographical size of the City.
- Supporting sustainable development is a worthwhile effort.
- Bridging the Woodward divide should be the plan's foremost priority.

Matt Wilde shared concern that adding population density to neighborhood seams would increase the parking issues residents already face and would change the experience of the City. Mr. Wilde stated that other residents in his South Poppleton neighborhood were also opposed to increasing population density in the City. He said that the City's population has hovered around 20,000 since the 1970s and said he did not see why they would try to increase the City's population. Like Mr. Cohen and Mr. Haig, he spoke in favor of working to maintain the smaller single family residences that still exist in Birmingham. Mr. Wilde said he would like to see crossing Woodward become safer and easier for pedestrians. Mr. Wilde concluded by saying that Birmingham should look into electing City Commission members so that there is one Commissioner per neighborhood on the Commission.

David Bloom said he concurred with both Mr. Haig's and Mr. Wilde's comments. Mr. Bloom continued that:

- Nearly half of the draft master plan was devoted to mixed use areas and the downtown, despite the stated goal of using this master plan to focus primarily on the neighborhoods.
- City data indicates that over 80% of the property taxes paid in Birmingham are paid by residential, non-commercial, and non-industrial properties.
- The City seems to be encouraging the growth of commercial and industrial interests in the City without much indication from the residents that they want the City to become more commercial and industrial.
- He was skeptical that there was even a plurality of residents that would be supportive of the currently proposed master planning themes. He suspected the community did not actually have much input in composing the themes despite claims to the contrary.
- Increasing population density along the seams would have the effect of isolating neighborhoods from each other.
- The apartments on the north side of 14 Mile between Southfield Road and Woodward are poorly maintained and inspire no confidence regarding future potential multi-family homes in the City. The City currently insufficiently holds multi-family property owners accountable for maintaining their properties, meaning future multi-family homes would only do further damage to the livability and aesthetics of the City.
- He agreed with Mr. Wilde, Mr. Haig, and Mr. Cohen that more needed to be done to maintain the remaining stock of smaller single family homes in Birmingham rather than focusing on building multi-family homes.

Ingrid Tighe, Birmingham resident and Birmingham Shopping District Director, said she wanted to echo previous comments that Woodward must be made easier for pedestrians to cross. She shared feedback from one Birmingham restaurant owner who said his office is equidistant from two of his locations, one in Downtown and one in the Triangle District, but that getting to the latter feels 'almost like crossing the Nile'. She said that encouraging economic development in the Triangle would become much easier if crossing Woodward were made easier. She said making it easier to cross Woodward would also be immensely beneficial for the residents, simply in terms of increasing the walkability of the City overall.

John Jones said that the changes proposed for the Haynes Street area in the draft master plan would create more of a focus on the more immediate businesses rather than on maintaining ease of access to the downtown. He said he and his wife were not enthused about that prospect. He said that as a resident of Ann Street he likes the alley behind his home and would want it to remain as-is. Mr. Jones added his voice to previous comments that the experience of crossing Woodward as a pedestrian needs to be improved.

Chairman Clein thanked the public for their comments and returned discussion to the Board.

Mr. Williams said he thought the Bates Street extension should be added as a thirteenth theme to the list. He said he thought it might also be worthwhile to consider adding how to deal with excess property held by the City and parking to the list. Mr. Williams cited a municipally-owned property on 14 Mile that the City should either find a way to sell or should find a use for. Regarding multi-modal transportation within the City, he noted that Latham is often treated as a bypass for Southfield Road, allows on-street parking, has no sidewalks, and was suggested as a major bike route within the draft master plan. Noting that there is already a lot of congestion on Latham, Mr. Williams said he could not imagine safely encouraging cyclists to join the mix.

In reply to Chairman Clein, Mr. Williams said he was supportive of efforts towards increasing multi-modal transportation while warning that it must be done safely and with consideration for already-existing circumstances.

Mr. Jeffares said:

- It might be prudent to request that the City Commission prioritize the themes since the City cannot undertake all the proposed improvements at once.
- He wanted to see accessibility for all woven into the themes more, noting that the City makes efforts to retain senior residents but does not make sure that they have equal access to the City's amenities. Senior residents still pay for use of these amenities through taxes even if they cannot use them. He cited the trail by the Rouge River and the difficulty in getting across Woodward as two examples of where accessibility in the City must be improved.
- The themes did indeed originate with the residents. He sat through all the charrettes but one and that these themes emerged from repeated conversations with residents. While he may not agree with all the themes he was confident that they emerged from Birmingham residents. He hoped members of the public continued to provide feedback as the process continues.

- That along busier Birmingham thoroughfares like 14 Mile people often do not want to purchase single family homes out of concern that it would be unsafe for their children. A neighborhood seam like 14 Mile would be the ideal place to put multi-family residences given that concern, and that there would be incentive to maintain them when there is sufficient demand for the residences.
- The City's peak population since the 1970s was actually 25,000, and not the 20,000 cited earlier. That means that Birmingham was down from its peak population by 20%. The population increase discussed by the themes and the PB is not because the PB is pursuing a population increase. Rather, it is because the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments estimates that there will be a population increase among its represented municipalities, including Birmingham. Given that, the PB is proactively working to provide the best possible accommodations for such a population increase, instead of trying to figure out as the increase occurs.

Mr. Koseck said:

- Neighborhood seams and defining neighborhoods could be more detrimental to the City than beneficial. Birmingham has a small geographical area and he values the sense of community that smallness allows. He was unsure why it would be useful to create more geographical divisions within those borders.
- He was not in favor of allowing ADUs, especially if they could be used as rental units. The City has a difficult enough time enforcing regulations on single family home rental units and ADUs would likely exacerbate the issue.
- He would like to hear more about possible ways of incentivizing renovation projects on single family homes as opposed to the teardowns and large home replacements that are currently more prevalent in the City.
- He concurred with Mr. Haig, Mr. Wilde, Mr. Bloom, BSD Director Tighe, and Mr. Jones that improving pedestrian crossings across Woodward should be one of the foremost priorities of the plan.
- Possible changes in design controls would be relevant to add to the master planning discussion. On a visit to Birmingham within the last few years Andres Duany of DPZ noted it could be beneficial to allow single family residences to become bigger on the first floors, in order to allow first floor master bedrooms and aging in place.

Ms. Whipple-Boyce said she was generally comfortable with the 12 suggested themes and with Mr. Williams' suggestion of adding a thirteenth regarding the Bates Street extension. While there were elements she was more or less supportive of within each theme, overall she thought the themes appropriate. She would hold off on her comments regarding specific ideas within the themes at future Board meetings as requested by the Chair. The themes did derive from residents' preferences and feedback.

Mr. Share said:

- Regarding the first theme, he would be supportive if that meant either attention to zoning standards within each neighborhood and/or attention to making sure residents of each neighborhood have equitable access to public amenities.
- He would be less comfortable if the first theme relates to social identity issues in each neighborhood. Neighborhood identities change based on the current residents.

- The second theme made less sense to him as a land planning issue. He has visited other cities where retail was abandoned at the neighborhood seams and turned into residences. He was not sure that fostering neighborhood destinations any more than Birmingham already has would make a lot of sense.
- He liked the theme of manage and growth. The city must define what increased housing units at the seams might be. He recommended that people look at the ~~multi-family~~ **courtyard** homes between Brown and Frank on Southfield Road. Those would fit as examples of appropriate housing at the seams.
- He agreed with Mr. Jeffares that the City can plan for additional population growth and that it can be handled well.
- Original Birmingham neighborhoods no longer exist since there are now new two-story large houses next to one-story 1950s ranches. It is too simple to say that the City needs to preserve neighborhood character since the neighborhood character has changed. Some of the smaller homes in Birmingham could potentially be saved by declaring them historic, but the City cannot undo the different kinds of houses that have been built.
- It would be worth considering using pedestrian bridges across Woodward to connect the east and west sides of Birmingham.

Mr. Boyle said:

- He agreed that studying the effect Woodward has on the community should be prioritized in the master planning process. The problem posed by Woodward is less the width of the road and more the speed of the cars. The city should work with other state governmental bodies to find ways of lowering the speed on Woodward.
- Themes three, four and five could be combined into one theme. They all attempt to address the question of what Birmingham will be like as a residential suburb over the next 25 years.
- It would be worth looking into whether the City sufficiently upholds its lot coverage standards.
- The median income in Oakland County is \$80,103 annually. Housing attainable for anyone making between 80% of that median and 120% of that median would replace what is often termed 'the missing middle'. If Birmingham had more housing stock available in that range it would attract people like school teachers, nurses, and administrative staff. These are the people Birmingham should be trying to attract. People making 80% of the median area income could probably afford a mortgage of \$325,000. People making 120% of the area median income could probably afford a mortgage of \$475,000. The City currently has very little and is building very little housing stock affordable to people in that range.
- He would be happy to see Birmingham have more houses in that price range.

Chairman Clein said:

- He appreciated Mr. Boyle's comments regarding making costs of housing more affordable in Birmingham, and that it would be appropriate to discuss further at a later date.
- He concurred with Ms. Whipple-Boyce that there are some things in the themes he agreed with and some he disagreed with. There were some recommendations made in the themes that may be appropriate in some areas of the City but not others.
- While he did see overlap between themes, he generally agreed with all 12.

- The length of the master plan documentation could be reduced by combining themes that are very related. Themes one and two could be combined, and themes three, four and five could also be combined.
- It would be helpful to have the themes streamlined wherever possible.
- For theme six, instead of assuming that Birmingham will grow, it might be more appropriate to commit the City to appropriately managing its population and growth. It was not clear to him where Birmingham residents stand on the possibility of adding between 1,000 to 4,000 more residential units. It would be inappropriate to assume that Birmingham wants to grow its population because SEMCOG predicted there could be some population growth.
- Per Mr. Jeffares' recommendation, theme seven could accommodate considerations of accessibility and infrastructure throughout the City.
- Mr. Boyle was correct that the speed of traffic on Woodward has the greatest negative impact on pedestrian safety.
- He would not be in favor of bridges or tunnels to cross Woodward. The word 'bridge' should not be in the title of theme. He said bridges and tunnels should not be set forth as the first option even though they could be considered as alternate solutions.
- He would not support adding the Bates Street extension as a master plan topic. The Bates Street extension should wait until the master plan is able to inform decisions regarding what the residents want to see there. From there the City administration can consider means of implementation.

Mr. Williams said the Bates Street extension could be discussed as part of the excess municipal property discussion he proposed earlier in meeting. He said the part of the City charter that prevents excess municipal property from being sold needs to be re-evaluated. He said he concurred with Mr. Boyle that the primary issue on Woodward is the speed of traffic and that the City must pursue reducing the speed on Woodward by whatever means available. He concurred with Chairman Clein that bridges or tunnels would not be a good way to address the issue of crossing Woodward safely.

Mr. Lambert said next steps would be to evaluate the the master plan draft from the stance of how it addresses and elucidates the chosen themes.

Mr. Boyle said that would be a better approach than trying to go through the nearly 300 page draft master plan document line by line. He said the onus would be on Ms. Traxler, Mr. Lambert, and Planning Director Ecker to make sure the talking points for each theme from the draft master plan are clear.

In reply to a question from Mr. Boyle, Planning Director Ecker said no formal action would be required of the Board at this time regarding the themes or the draft. She noted that this is part of the draft master plan review, and that the comments from the Board and the public will be integrated as appropriate by the master planning team into the second draft of the master plan.

Chairman Clein said that by the end of the review of the first master plan draft it should be clear to the master planning team which items should remain and which items should be removed.

Mr. Williams said that before the next master plan discussion in September the master planning team should consolidate some of the themes and should excise any recommendations that pay more attention to social dynamics in the City than they do land use. He said the titles of the themes should at least be revised to reflect the focus on land use. Draft two needs to be more concise than the plan's first draft.

Ms. Traxler said it might be most appropriate to revise the themes once the draft master plan has been reviewed through that lens. She noted that the discussion of the draft would likely yield additional nuance regarding the themes and key objectives.

Mr. Lambert said that while prioritization would be an important discussion the master planning team had intended it to be a second draft focus. The first draft review should clarify what topics remain, which are removed, and which need to be added.

Mr. Share said that if the City provides a wider variety of housing in order to retain different family structures and age groups there will necessarily be population growth in the City. He said it will be critical for Birmingham to have a strategy to manage the likely impending population growth. Refining the purpose of neighborhood seams and making them particular to different parts of the City will be helpful in that endeavor. Mr. Share concluded by saying that the City should plan explicitly for the likely population increase.

Chairman Clein countered that growth is potential if the other themes are satisfied and not necessarily inevitable. He said he agreed with previous comments that smaller single family residences could be preserved as one way of making housing more affordable.

Mr. Share replied that if one of the goals is for all areas of Birmingham to have a variety of family sizes and age distributions then the Board would be well served by thinking about managing worth.

Mr. Boyle said he wanted it minuted for the consultants that prioritizing the themes is probably important. He said themes one and two relate to implementation and that they should probably not be the opening themes as a result.

Chairman Clein thanked the public, the Board, Mr. Lambert and Ms. Traxler for their participation.

**08-97-20**

**F. Miscellaneous Business and Communications:**

**a. Communications**

**b. Administrative Approval Correspondence**

Planning Director Ecker reviewed a request regarding the awnings of 856 N. Old Woodward. She explained the part of the awning that currently says 'The Pearl' would need to be changed as well since it is too big to be an awning sign.

John Marusich was present on behalf of the request.

Mr. Marusich told the Board the material would be a high-gloss metal panel very similar to the one proposed in the 2016 plans.

In reply to City Planner Dupuis, Planning Director Ecker explained the awning can be required to extend the full seven feet over the sidewalk as originally required by the Board in 2016 because the sidewalk is private property, which means public right-of-way issues do not apply in this case.

The Board offered no objections to administrative approval of the plans.

**c. Draft Agenda for the next Regular Planning Board Meeting (August 26, 2020)**

- Public hearing for the glazing changes
- A further postponement of Jax Karwash, per the applicant's request
- SLUP amendment for Luxe

**d. Other Business**

**08-98-20**

**G. Planning Division Action Items**

**a. Staff Report on Previous Requests**

**b. Additional Items from tonight's meeting**

**08-99-20**

**H. Adjournment**

No further business being evident, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 9:41 p.m.

Jana L. Ecker

Planning Director