

**BIRMINGHAM CITY COMMISSION /
PLANNING BOARD JOINT WORKSHOP SESSION
JUNE 16, 2014
DPS FACILITY, 851 SOUTH ETON
7:30 P.M.**

WORKSHOP SESSION

This will be considered a workshop session. No formal decisions will be made. The purpose of this workshop format is to focus on problem definition and desired outcomes. Each commissioner will have an opportunity to share their perspective and thoughts on problems and possible solutions. Citizens will have an opportunity to make public comment at the end of the workshop meeting.

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Scott D. Moore, Mayor

II. ROLL CALL

Laura M. Pierce, City Clerk

III. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A. Review of summary observations from Duany visit and discuss priorities.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

VI. ADJOURN

NOTICE: Individuals with disabilities requiring accommodations for effective participation in this meeting should contact the city clerk's office at (248) 530-1880 (voice), or (248) 644-5115 (TDD) at least one day in advance to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance.

Excerpt from:

Draft 1. Birmingham Summary Report on Downtown 2016 Assessment and Future Goals

Summary of Observations

Birmingham is very good at management. There is a collection of small problems that represent possibilities and opportunities for opening up more areas in terms of future development.

Downtown Birmingham has been a perfect success. It is a city that is solvent and wants to move on to the next successional step. Its high quality mixed-use shows that the standards are very high in Birmingham although there are still some empty sites. The density of the city is amazing. Downtown Birmingham has got physically solid and visually continuous urban edges that are guaranteed by the disciplined alignments of the buildings to the sidewalk and the building's frontage.

Birmingham's grid brings in high real estate values. The city is not affordable and this is why it is so special. The city has been successful and wants to move on to the next successional step. Birmingham is one of the cities where there is no beggar's mentality. All the national retailers want to come here and be on Main Street and when they do then the city tells them what to do.

Subsidized parking is the currency of urbanism. The existing parking garages are still insufficient. A final parking plan is needed. The lack of public parking is considered as one of the biggest problems and the biggest constraint for developing The Triangle District.

Restaurants are successful destinations and create their own market. A very high proportion of restaurants is normal in a walkable downtown and their different categories provide diversity of choices to the population.

The Bistro Ordinance is a successful one. The proliferation of these restaurants is stunning.

Shain Park has no meaningful civic infrastructure for sharing. It is too big and too dead because the edges do not provide enough activity.

The Baldwin Public Library lacks civic character. It is worn out and it is not a civic space to be proud of as it is dated and dingy. The building does not engage the park. Its signage system is inconsistent and inappropriate and lacks adequate design and height. A readily accessible exterior book return is a highly desired public feature. The building needs new landscaping and the ramp needs to be improved.

The Triangle is the next frontier for Birmingham. There are some other areas than downtown like The Triangle District which are out of date and have not been developed accordingly.

The city has the right to plan. The city doesn't end on a street and Adams Street is an unusually busy street that should have never been left out of The Triangle District. The city happens organically on both sides so both sides of the Triangle District need to be considered as a whole in terms of activating all adjacent areas. The strip mall adjacent to The Triangle District represents an impediment for future development and disconnects the West and East. It's the gorilla in the room.

Streetscapes. Some streetscapes need some improvement like Martin Street where trees are not growing well. The traffic on Woodward Avenue is too fast, there are limited crossing opportunities and the whole street needs to be rescaled. Pedestrian crossings need attention.

Transit was not in the 2016 plan. It needs an analysis of context as problems are too complex to provide a single answer. The vote against bike lanes was wrong. It was uncool to turn down bike lanes in such a progressive city.

Birmingham's democratic system is not working very well. **The degree of "NIMBYism"** is very high.

Summary of Recommendations

It's all about the future. The future looks bright in Birmingham. The City calls for a vision. While Birmingham 2016 was about the twentieth century, Birmingham 2040 is about the twenty first century.

Downtown Birmingham

Create a new gateway for Downtown Birmingham with a substantial addition to the south end of the 555 Building. The existing building could be re-skinned and a new corner tower that creates a glowing beacon should be added to the southernmost area to become the new gateway for downtown Birmingham. Design elements should draw from the Apple stores' aesthetics.

Develop the property at Bates and Willits to provide additional parking, and liner buildings and provide a connection to Booth Park to the north. Build a new thin strip of retail and condos above garages overlooking the river that provides a threshold to the Rouge River allowing for a visual connection of the green and for extending the urban edge on Willits Street. The scheme should provide parking beyond its own needs as a developer could accommodate hundreds of additional cars by extending the North Old Woodward parking deck. Decide exactly what is desired first and allow developers to bid on the desired development.

The revitalization of Shain Park is of the essence and should be thought of as a city project to create a magnet. The edges of the park are not providing enough activity generation. Encourage edge uses that will spill over into the park, such as bistros and cafes. Bring food trucks to the southern parking area to sell coffee, pastries and maybe some light food at lunch time. Invest in bigger and better trees and plant in clusters.

The Baldwin Public Library needs to expand on the subject of engaging the park. The idea of a terrace-like transitional space oriented to Shain Park could both contain the entrance and also help activate the park. A street side restaurant could make people walk to the Library if a café is located on the corner facing Shain Park, or on a roof garden if the terrace has a flat roof. Redesign landscape and ramp accordingly. The library entrance should be kept on Merrill

Street. Consider the winter factor and the aging population in terms of successful seasonal planning. Provide a readily accessible exterior book return. Correct and redesign signage.

Address both sides of Merrill Street to create a civic plaza space that flows from the library into the park and across to the Community House. Convert the tent at the Community House into a permanent enclosure with good design that relates to both the Community House and the library.

Map and categorize the retail network and avoid landlords who kill shops. Map the quality of the frontage. Try to keep the movie theaters. Relax retail definition in lower quality retail areas.

Modify the height of the railings of the outdoor dining platforms. They should not surpass the height of tables and should be simpler in terms of their designs.

Do not gentrify the alleys. Keep their character and variety and make them cleaner. Provide smell control in alleys where meat is served by air conditioning the dumpsters.

Build a café at Booth Park to revitalize it.

The Triangle District

Replicate Downtown Birmingham's success in other areas of the city like the Triangle District.

The Triangle District calls for a holistic vision, a concept that also applies to the whole city of Birmingham. It has not been developed consistently and lacks public parking and amenities.

Expand the Triangle District boundaries to include both sides of Adams Road. The city happens organically on both sides so both sides of the Triangle District need to be considered as a whole in terms of activating all adjacent areas. The key for the success of this area is to incorporate the strip mall area as it is a site that can activate all adjacent areas. Improve connections between the West and East through the Triangle District and linking to the Rail District.

Provide public parking immediately. Consider providing creative incentives to those who develop first in the district to encourage development. This could include allocating a limited number of spaces from the first city parking deck built to the first developers that invest in the district or eliminating certain parking requirements in the district.

Landscaping of the Triangle District needs to be redesigned in order to be perceived as a single piece visually and physically. Landscaping in the Triangle District is fragmented and perceived

as “slices and dices”. Focus on providing the green space centroid at Haynes and Worth to anchor the district.

The Triangle District should be thought for the millennial generation. We know that urban planning is for the younger generations. A more contemporary approach is needed for this area based upon the next aesthetics that encompass diversity to engage the younger generation. We need to lighten the red tape to help development flow as youngsters are allergic to regulations and bureaucracy and also to attract a new generation of entrepreneurs. We need to bring small developers and code regulations down to some reasonable notching and introduce the building threshold that accommodates the youngsters according to the principles of Lean Urbanism.

Consider a Tactical Urbanism overlay in the Triangle District by minimizing regulation and red tape to encourage investment and development by young people.

Build townhouses in the Triangle District combined with entertainment to provide housing and a night life. Encourage smaller and more affordable residential units for young people.

Streets and Streetscapes

Review the street network plan and classify streets into three categories. Use a scientific approach that analyzes the quality of the pedestrian experience, the use and frontage of buildings and the dialogue buildings establish with people as they meet the streets. One third of the streets are good (A streets) but the two other thirds are bad (B streets). Focus on and invest in the quality of streetscapes on A streets. Woodward Avenue is a B street.

A system of bike lanes is to be considered. Plan bike trails where traffic is violent, bike lanes where it is not and also bike paths shared with cars in some other areas. Maple Road should be reduced from four to two lanes with bike lanes. Try striping the streets one way and see what happens. If you don't like them, just add a little tack coat of asphalt, erase them and stripe them a different way. It takes less time than discussing them forever.

Analyze transit according to the context and change the street section to incorporate transit depending on the context of every stretch. Of the two types of transit, community and commuter, the former is the one to be privileged.

Provide pedestrian crossings on Woodward and make them the focus of attention as crossings are very important. Focus specifically on the redesign of the crossings of Woodward Avenue at Oak Street and at Maple Road.

Calm traffic. Reduce traffic speeds on Woodward Avenue. Control traffic speed on Old Woodward to increase pedestrian safety and avoid accidents. Some of the streets in the city have too many lanes. Use traffic circles and pair lights to reduce traffic speed.

Repair sidewalks and streets. Change concrete specifications to provide a more attractive finish and allow cobblestones to be installed around trees to provide for appropriate percolation to support tree growth.

Provide larger tree wells and invest in bigger and better trees. Plant trees in small clusters to incentivize their faster growth as they compete for sunlight. Do not plant the same trees everywhere.

Do not blow up porches. They provide for a link for people to the streets and to their neighbors. They are a great attribute of urban architecture. Keep garages in the back.

Process and Policy Recommendations

Project to the future. Remember that planning is for the future. Design and plan communities that younger generations desire. **Engage young people** and establish a more defined media strategy of communication with them and use social media actively to keep young people engaged. The city has a right to plan for its future.

Adapt existing housing for an aging population. Setbacks should be relaxed. Every city should face what to do with the aging population and allow every house to build a floor area ratio exempted master bedroom with a bathroom on the first floor. This provides multigenerational housing and should be a civil right to be included in the codes.

Make a final public parking plan. Think of parking as a social policy and not as a problem. The parking plan requires a complex analysis because if parking on site is not provided the price of the area is lowered. Move as soon as possible regarding parking and plan for twenty five years out, for both downtown and other commercial areas. Allow for longer term parking in upper levels of parking garages. Add two additional floors to the Pierce Street parking deck.

Do smart land trades but never sell green space, only paved surfaces. Use the funds from the sale of paved land to buy additional land for parks and public use. Provide the necessary Charter amendments. Consider trade of uses between buildings.

Focus on the common good. A second generation public process method is recommended for the future to focus on the common good as current discussion is dominated by the immediate neighbors. The essence is that the public process should not be preventing the neighbors from participating but should prevent them from dominating or distorting the public process. Democracy requires an untainted sample and solid results can be obtained by using random samples. It has to be random. It does need to be untainted. The basic problem with public participation is that people alert their immediate neighbors and immediate neighbors' opinions are given higher weight (and thus is privileged), but these neighbors do not necessarily have the interests of the city as a whole in mind and thus say that decisions are questionable. This generates lack of confidence in the public process. To correct this, notify the neighbors and use a projected list to have a random sample of the population as a whole. Thus, at the public hearing the neighbors speak, but the whole community also does so that decision makers take into account both the neighbors and the community as a whole. People don't confuse the neighbors with the community. The neighbors participate but they don't dominate.

Do not validate what is stupid. Make smart proposals backed up by strong arguments and valid ideas.

Plan to finish Birmingham's development in the next real estate cycle before the next economic crash.

The secret of everything is to try. Try new ideas! Make a test and see what happens. do a series of successional plans, a two-phase plan with phases depending on the available money.

Think creatively.