

2011 Solon Master Plan Citizen's Committee
February 10, 2011 – 7:00 p.m.

The City of Solon Master Plan Committee met at City Hall on the above date.

Present: Citizen members Eugene Kotmel, Eileen Siebert, Teresa Lichtcsien, Marilyn Matia, David Gordon, Regina Olbinsky, Richard Perry, and Cindy Bomeli; Planning Director Rob Frankland, Planner II Linda Crombie, and Secretary Cheryl Shackelford

Absent: Citizen Members Roger Newberry and Greg Rosenberg

Also present: Mayor Susan Drucker and Bill Mazur/Planning Commission Member

Mayor Drucker was present to welcome the members. She personally thanked the members for taking the time to participate by volunteering their services to serve on the Citizen's Master Plan Committee. She explained that Planning Director Rob Frankland would be leading these meetings and that normally she would not be attending these meetings. The city's Master Plan is important because it serves as the fundamental planning tool used by the city. The former Master Plan Committee met five years ago, noting the city's Master Plan had not been rewritten in 35 years, and that was accomplished this past year. She explained that under the requirements of the City Charter the Master Plan needs to be reviewed every five years by a citizen's committee to evaluate whether or not the goals/vision of the Master Plan are still up to date and if they meet the current goals/vision for the city's future.

Mayor Drucker introduced Linda Crombie/Planner II and Cheryl Shackelford/secretary from the Planning Department and she acknowledged also present were Bill Mazur, Planning Commission member, and Mr. Nolan, Ward 6 resident.

In turn, each member introduced themselves.

Director Frankland congratulated the members on their appointment to the committee and thanked the members for agreeing to participate in this very important project in devoting their time to serve on the Master Plan Committee. He explained that he has been the Planning Director for the City of Solon for about 10 years, and has more than 20 years of experience in the municipal/township and institutional planning environments and that this is his third Master Plan. He said he looks forward to working with everyone on this committee.

Mayor Drucker acknowledged that two of the committee members, Roger Newberry, Ward 5 representative and Greg Rosenberg, Ward 7 representative could not make the meeting tonight. Roger Newberry also serves on the Planning Commission.

Mr. Frankland explained that this first meeting will be a little more formal than our future meetings because before we can get started on the Master Plan it is important that we have a good understanding of the purpose of Master plans; their

strengths and weaknesses, and what we should expect from a plan before we can move forward with setting goals.

Mr. Frankland said he would like to cover three main topics tonight:

- What is a Master Plan
- How are Master Plans prepared and what is the Committee's role
- Review of the current city Master Plan

What is a Master Plan?

A Master Plan is the most basic and fundamental planning document in a community. It should represent all of the city's general planning strategies, policies, and goals in one easily accessible location. It should explain the What, Where, When, How and Why of the City's development policies for the next 10 to 15 years. It should introduce consistency to land use policies over time. A Master Plan is not legally binding; it only lists potential planning strategies. The two main functions are practical and legal; practical referring to "consistency" in land use change decisions and legal referring to the "demonstration of adequate forethought".

A primary purpose of a Master Plan is it introduces consistency to the land use planning process. It is the only way you can achieve coordinated land use change(s) overtime. There are a couple of reasons for this, the one being that land use change occurs slowly, it does not happen overnight because you are dealing with private property. You might have the most wonderful plan and ideas, and yet the property owner might feel it is not the best plan for them right now possibly due to the economic climate or other circumstances. What a Master plan does is to continually focus the attention of the administration, Mayor and Council towards achieving the Master Plan's goals overtime. Also, it is important to have a Master Plan in place is so that every time there is a personnel change within the city, such as the city's Planning Director, and/or the city council changes or every time the Mayor changes you don't end up with a completely new set of planning concepts, which would be the equivalent of having no Master Plan at all. You need to have a master plan if you are to achieve a coordinated development pattern over time. He used Solon as an example because he believes that most people would agree that the downtown area of Solon is not an attractive area, and part of the problem is that when all of the development was occurring Solon did not have a Master Plan. Therefore, random development occurred during this time.

It's important to understand that Master Plans are prepared in a professionally prescribed manner and that cities may need to show that they followed the proper procedures in preparing a Master Plan if they ever face a challenge in the courts. It's important to recognize a Master Plan is not legally binding, but if it is not legally binding, then why do we have a master Plan? A Master Plan performs three main functions. The first function is that it gives you consistency in planning goals over time. You can not achieve a land use goal if you do not have it written down in an accepted and adopted Master Plan, otherwise it would change with every personality that comes through the city. Secondly, a Master Plan does serve a legal function, because it demonstrates forethought, which is one of the primary

purposes of a master plan. Before you can re-zone a property or otherwise alter the land use pattern in any area, and withstand a legal challenge, you must be able to demonstrate reasonable forethought. A Master Plan is helpful to prevent court imposed zoning, something that Solon has had quiet a few of in the past. The Master Plan if it is put together properly will help to protect the city from the courts overturning the city's planning and zoning decisions.

Thirdly, a Master Plan serves a strong economic development function because if a Master Plan demonstrates an agreed to redevelopment goal for the community a developer is much more likely to feel comfortable putting forth the time and money and other resources necessary to pursue such a project. He gave examples of where this has already occurred in relation to the city's most recent Master Plan.

Mr. Frankland said there are two very important points he wanted to emphasize, so that the committee members would have realistic expectations for the Master Plan. First, land use change occurs slowly as you are dealing with private property. Second, the final results from a successfully implemented Master Plan will more often resemble the plan than replicate the plan, which can result from real world complications, such as, unforeseen environmental issues, poor soils, economic conditions, etc.

History of Master Plans

Mr. Frankland explained that the first modern Master Plans came about around the turn of the last century. These early Master Plans were a reaction to urbanization and the problems it caused. At this time people were dealing with finding solutions to issues that we now take for granted: they were looking at separation of incompatible uses, trying to logically plan the layout of infrastructures (streets/sidewalks), seeking to implement rational neighborhood designs, etc. The problem was that the idea of Master Planning typically out ran the tools available to effectively implement Master Plans at that time.

The Master Planning Era in Ohio officially began around 1926, which was the year that the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act was adopted. The Standard State Zoning Enabling Act was developed by the Federal Department of Commerce. Its primary purpose was to establish model language for the adoption of Zoning. The model language said that *zoning could only be adopted in accordance with a comprehensive plan*, which is the legal basis for both Planning and Zoning in Ohio.

1926 was also the first year that a zoning code was upheld comprehensively by the U.S. Supreme Court. He said this famous case was called *Euclid Vs Ambler Realty (Euclid, Ohio)* and it finally established that it was a legitimate government public purpose to regulate the use of private property. Prior to this case, the principal legal way to regulate private property was through deed restrictions. Therefore, it is reasonable to understand why at that time zoning was looked at as being an important tool and Master Plans were considered secondary. In fact, while our State's legislation said you can only zone in accordance with a comprehensive plan, it does not define what a comprehensive plan is. Therefore, in the resulting confusion the courts have ruled that a comprehensive plan can be merely a zoning

map or a zoning code. But thankfully over time, planners and the planning profession have established an accepted definition of what a Master Plan is, what are the proper steps to prepare a Master Plan, and what the components of a Master Plan are. It is important to have a general understanding of these Master Planning concepts before we can move forward.

Differences and Relationships between Zoning Codes and Master Plans

Master Plans and Zoning for better or worse, are inseparable tools because the zoning ordinance is typically the primary method for implementing a Master Plan.

To summarize the differences between a Zoning Code and a Master Plan, Mr. Frankland explained that zoning ordinances are laws that deal with permitted use types, maximum and minimum dimensions, setbacks, and design standards, to name a few. Whereas, Master Plans lists a communities land use preferences by stating what should be permitted. Therefore, the language in the zoning code needs to be precise and in accordance with case laws, but the ranges of uses that are permitted in the zoning code have to be very broad as the zoning code regulates the use of private property. Conversely, the language in a Master Plan does not have to be so precise because it does not directly regulate private property and it therefore allows a community to "dream" by identifying goals which over time can eventually be attained through legal means.

The two most common ways that Master Plans are implemented are through "zoning" and "buy in" from city decision makers. Zoning is the number one way and it is the primary legal mechanism through which Master Plans are implemented. So the zoning code should reflect the Master Plan. The second most common way of implementing a city's Master Plan is from "buy in" from city's decision makers, such as the Mayor and Council members. If decision makers are committed to referring to the Master Plan when development and/or redevelopment opportunities arise, if they seek to subsidize Master Plan endorsed project in some manner through TIF funding, by providing needed infrastructure, by making strategic land purchases, etc., and if they otherwise encourage Master Plan endorsed developments this can be an extremely effective in achieving Master Plan goals in a broad and meaningful way.

Mrs. Lichtcsien asked if the committee members will have a part in trying to understand how the city tries to attract developers, or does the committee try to come up with its own ideas. Mr. Frankland explained that the typically role of a Master Plan Committee is to establish the goals of the Master Plan. Once the goals are established the committee is disbanded. However, that is not the process that we are proposing here. Mr. Frankland said that in addition to formulating goals he likes to gather input from the Master Plan Committee on various planning related topics. It might be that the Mayor might determine to call in some of the committee members as representatives of the city, but normally it is going to be the role of Mayor and the administration, and possibly council representative(s) to promote the Master Plan to developers.

Mr. Frankland explained that his role is not to steer the committee in preparing the goals, rather, his role is more of a resource to answer questions.

Mayor Drucker agreed that she and the administration are looking for guidance from the committee and that her role is not to participate actively so as not to influence the committee's opinions in any way. This is basically the same approach that would be used with any citizen committee groups that serve the city. Mayor Drucker offered herself as a resource to the committee if needed, and said she would assist the committee in way that she could or provide assistance and input from others within the administration.

Mr. Frankland said if time allows tonight, he may review with the committee samples of the goals from the 2010 Master Plan. However, he noted that he does not want the 2010 Master Plan Goals to influence the committee on their task at hand. And more to the point, he would like to review the principals as to how these goals were written and later he will go over the new goal formulation process, which will involve informal discussions relating to the strengths and weakness of the city as well as the problems the city is likely to face in the future. Then the results of these discussions will be pared down in to new Master Plan goals. The committee will also need to determine which goals listed in the 2010 Master Plan are still viable.

Mr. Kotmel said consideration of past zoning uses needs to be understood, which leads to grandfathering clauses, so that just because a property has been rezoned it doesn't mean that the business has to go. He noted that we can not forget the past zoning uses.

Mr. Frankland said that is correct, and he clarified that the term for that type of situation is a "non-conforming use". He said under the law you can not zone a property so that it is illegal, and that non-conforming uses can continue to legally exist under the laws. Again, land use change is a slow process. He noted that a few meetings ago soon after the Master Plan was adopted, there was a question at a Council meeting inferring that okay we have a master plan--So where are the changes? This is an example of unrealistic expectations, to say the least. However, he does believe the city will begin to achieve some changes in the downtown area sooner than one may think.

Mr. Perry noted that it seems that Solon is careful to restrict the development of multi-family and two-family housing units in the city. He asked if there is a distinction between senior housing multi-family developments and apartment housing units from a zoning perspective. Mr. Frankland said the 2010 Master Plan does not encourage high density development. The primary reason multi-family developments are not encouraged is because high population growth would be harmful to the city, placing a significant strain on the school system, city services, and general infrastructure. An exception is made in the 2010 Master Plan for senior housing. The former Master Plan Committee felt this exception was warranted as senior housing was an overriding need and as it does not put a strain on the schools.

Mayor Drucker thanked everyone again and she told the committee if they need her for future meetings to not hesitate to ask, and due to a prior meeting commitment tonight she left the meeting. (7:45 p.m.)

The Master Plan Process

Mr. Frankland explained that Master Plans are typically prepared in accordance with a 6 step process. He referred to the chart as he reviewed the 6 general steps of "The Rational Model of Master Plan Preparation", which is the foremost model used for preparing Master Plans.

- 1) Gather Relevant Land Use Data and Demographics
- 2) Solicit Input Relating to Community Planning Goals
- 3) Establish Goals
- 4) Identify Alternatives to Achieve the Goals/select the preferred alternatives
- 5) Write the Plan
- 6) Adopt/Monitor/and Revise the Plan, as needed

Mr. Frankland said it is customarily the responsibility of the Master Plan Committee to establish the goals of the Master Plan. He explained that these goals are typically broad statements reflecting community preferences and desired ends. In some instances they may be more specific, but are generally no so. Goals are developed through free flowing exercises asking questions such as, what do we like about the city, what are the strengths, what are the weaknesses, do we want a pedestrian friendly downtown area, do we want more green space in the city, do we want more shopping of a certain type in the downtown area, etc. The answers to these types of questions will all be amalgamated down into the goals. Although these goals are typically very broad, they are the most important components of the Master Plan, and will provide the foundation on which all other sections of the plan will be based.

A brief history of the way Master Plans were written up until the mid 1960's was explained, whereas, it was indicated that the planners would write the Master Plan without consulting anyone else, and that the plans were thus typically placed on a shelf and forgotten about; never used and/or looked at again. So eventually, after about 60 years or so it was realized that the reason no one was listening to the plans was because planners were writing these plans without community input and there was no "buy in" to the plan. Therefore, citizen committee concept was developed to provide a vehicle for public input and allow the public to determine what the goals of the plan should be and what the plan should be attempting to achieve.

Mr. Frankland explained that after the goals are determined by a Master Plan Committee, most cities who follow the standard model will disband their committee and then the planning department, or an other entity, then writes the Master Plan. However, he likes to take a different approach because he finds it most helpful to have the Master Plan Committee convene from time to time to get feed back from the committee as the plan is being written. This same process was actually codified at Mr. Frankland's recommendation in 2005 through the City Charter. This

was the same process that he used with the previous Master Plan Committee. Also, the Master Plan Committee may be called upon to provide input on specific community planning related issues that arise during the course of these meetings. The concept is that as you represent a cross section of the Solon community, your opinions are important and useful in providing insight in to general community attitudes.

Standardize Street Signs

Mr. Frankland took this opportunity to ask the committee for input on a current issue related to implementing standardize street signs throughout the city. The Federal Highway administration is currently requiring all cities to come up with a standard street sign program. Coincidentally, the 2010 Master Plan also recommends uniform street signage to promote a "sense of place", and he showed the committee a sample of what could be used. He asked the committee if distinct signage was warranted and he polled the committee on what colors they felt would be appropriate. Everyone agreed that the standard green and white signs could be improved upon. Conceptually, he asked about black street signs with white lettering. However, the committee members expressed a preference instead for dark blue background color with white lettering. The committee asked for more information as it relates to the specifications for the street signs, material type (metal/wood), size limits, font styles, clarification on the use of capital and lower case letters.

Mr. Frankland explained that these new street signs would be first implemented within the downtown area. It's his understanding that these signs would be ordered in mass quantities and this project needs to be fast tracked because the decision needs to be made in March or April. He believes that the Mayor is also in favor of having new street signs that would give Solon a distinct sign package.

Mr. Kotmel asked if the subdivisions can have their own street signs, and Mr. Frankland said the subdivisions can still have their main entrance signs, but all the street signs would eventually be replaced in accordance with FHA requirements.

Mr. Frankland will check with the service department to see if a mock up sign in a dark blue background with the white lettering could be made for a sample, and Mr. Frankland said he will get more details from the Engineering Department in regard to specifications.

The question was asked if the galvanized posts would be replaced, and Mr. Frankland said the Engineering Department plans to paint them black, but the idea of new posts could also be investigated. Any extra costs associated with the project would have to go before City Council.

In reply to Mr. Perry's questions, Mr. Frankland stated these signs will be made in mass quantities, which will keep the costs down, and they will be outsourced through one single company.

In reference to the sample street sign rendering, Mr. Kotmel pointed out the size of the letters in relationship to the size of the sign it leaves a lot of empty space at the top and bottom of the sign. He suggested narrowing the height of the sign itself. Mr. Frankland said he would have more samples of street signs to bring to the next meeting for the committee to offer their input.

Review of the current Master Plan

Mr. Frankland explained that the current Master Plan was adopted by City Council in 2010 and that prior to 2010 Solon had no viable Master Plan. However, there was plan a prepared in 1975 by the precursor to the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission. He described the former plan as having only some demographics listed and about two pages of recommendations. The problem was that the 1975 plan was never followed, which unfortunately is not unusual for a Master Plan that is prepared by an outside entity. The time lapse between the 1975 plan and the 2010 plan spanned 35 years, unfortunately this time period was also the time period when the city experienced it greatest growth.

Mr. Gordon asked what happened in 2005 in relationship to the Master Plan, and Mr. Frankland explained that in 2005 the rewrite of the City Zoning Code was adopted by City Council. He noted that when he was first hired by the city he discovered that the zoning code was 75 years old and the Master Plan was 35 years old. He explained that the old zoning code was sadly outdated, and being a legal document, it required priority attention. He noted that the rewrite of the zoning code was also one of the identified Master Plan goals. Also, in 2005 a Charter amendment was approved to mandate a review of the Master Plan every six years, noting the next Master Plan update will occur in 2017. The Charter amendment actually codified the master plan process that Mr. Frankland was following at that time, which is also the process this committee will be following.

Mr. Frankland explained that the goals of the 2010 Master Plan will need to be reviewed. However, for the purpose of tonight's meeting he asked the committee to try and view the chart of the 2010 goals as it relates to form only. He noted concern that he does not want this committee to be influenced by the former goals in anyway, and that the committee might want to formulate their own goals before they review the 2010 goals in any depth. The reason this Master Plan Committee has been formed in such a close proximity to the 2010 plan is because of the 2005 Charter amendment which requires that a new committee be formed in 2011.

Even though the 2010 Master Plan has been put into place there is still a lot of work to do. The priority of this committee will be to review and update the 2010 plan as needed. As the committee goes through the process of examining the 2010 goals you may decide that some of the goals have been achieved and/or will need to be modified. He emphasized the city's need to have a Residential Neighborhood plan, which can reinforce the statement in our 2010 Master Plan that the city does not want commercial uses allowed in a residential areas, etc. The main purpose of this committee will be establishing the new goals that the city should be seeking to achieve.

Mr. Kotmel asked if the Master Plan can address issues that might arise when a bordering community starts a new development on properties that abut Solon, and he named Glenwillow as an example. Mr. Frankland said the Bainbridge Township development that occurred off of Aurora Road, nearby the Station 43 Restaurant—is also a good example. He explained that as the consequence of the neighboring communities decision that there will now always be interested parties who would like to see that area re-zoned to commercial. He emphasized that this is not recommended in the 2010 Master Plan, but that there is little that we can do to prevent adjacent communities from making decisions that are not in Solon's best interest.

As time allowed Mr. Frankland reviewed a couple of the 2010 Master Plan statement of goals in order to give examples of the form that goal statements would likely make in the 2011 plan:

1) Commercial Design Standards: Improve community character, identity, and aesthetic quality, over time through the establishment and implementation of unifying design concepts throughout the City's commercially zoned areas.

In the 2005 zoning code this was addressed by requiring architectural and building design standards for the first time in the commercial zoning districts.

2) Center of Town: Promote the Development of a pedestrian oriented Center of Town that will provide an attractive, recognizable focal point of community identity and which emphasizes and advances the historic character of the City of Solon.

Mr. Perry asked where does the center of town begin and end, and Mr. Frankland displayed a map that was prepared by the Planning Department in 2002 as a "fast tracked" component of the current city Master Plan. The 2002 map shows the area of the intersection of Bainbridge Road and SOM Center Road, which during the same time was being considered for the development of the new Walgreens store. This conceptual plan of 2002 was drawn to establish the future planning layout for the larger Bainbridge/SOM intersection area, which does in fact reflect what was eventually constructed at the corner. Solon now has a new Fire Station that is oriented towards the intersection, with the gazebo and fountain lining up with the indentation of the building with use of architectural features and Streetscaping, etc. as recommended by the 2002 plan. He said it is important to note that this is the first locale in the city that has ever been comprehensively planned in accordance with a Master Plan. There still is more development to occur on the east side of SOM as per the 2002 plan. He emphasized that the goal of the plan was to provide a visual center of town. It is difficult to do a coordinated center of town where you do not own the property, and fortunately in this instance the city did own three out the four corners.

In response to a question from the committee pertaining to walkability in the downtown area, Mr. Frankland noted that the 2002 conceptual plan also called for a pedestrian bridge over SOM Center Road, so that persons parking at either City Hall or at Veterans Memorial Park could use the bridge to cross over SOM Center Road. But what could make this area even more pedestrian friendly would be the

redevelopment of the Sears plaza. To have that become a reality you would basically have to straighten out Bainbridge Road, so it would become a 90 degree intersection. In the area of the Sears plaza, if a smaller scale Crocker Park style of redevelopment could occur, it would lend itself nicely to making the larger area more pedestrian friendly. He also, pointed out that if Bainbridge Road is straightened out it allows the area opposite the Arts Center to become more of a park setting, which would improve the pedestrian potential for the area.

Over the years some have expressed an interest that the intersection of Aurora and SOM Center Roads should be the Center of Town. He noted that while this might be the most visible corner it would be very difficult to establish a town center in this area primarily due to different land owners on all four corners, and the existing building configuration. It can be made to look very attractive, but it is certainly not an optimal location for a true town center.

It was mentioned by the committee that historically, the center of town was where the Trimbel's Store was located at the Bainbridge and SOM intersection.

Mrs. Olbinsky asked if the plans that were in place for the Central Parc development will ever be reinstated. Mr. Frankland said the city has been having talks with all the core shopping plaza owners and that the Sears plaza and Carter Lumber area is the priority location for redevelopment. It could be redeveloped to provide an attractive entrance to the city; however, the only downside would be traffic. The traffic problem that the city currently has is mainly due to through traffic. Mr. Frankland is interested in the opinions that this committee will be offering. For clarification purposes to a question raised by Mrs. Olbinsky, Mr. Frankland explained that Master Plan goals could actually be considered to be vision statements.

In reply to Mr. Perry's inquiry, Mr. Frankland said that a copy of the Traffic Study Plan and the Sanitary Sewer Plan should have been included in their packets; since they were both a part of the 2010 Master Plan. The Traffic Study Plan was prepared for the city by Wells & Associates and the Sanitary Sewer Plan was prepared by CDM (Camp Dresser & McKee Inc). Even though, the Traffic Study and Sanitary Sewer plan were prepared by consultants, they are included in the 2010 Master Plan as all plans should be incorporated in to one Master plan document, and a copy will be provided to each committee member.

Mr. Frankland noted that the Coral development would have potentially solved one of the city's greatest traffic problems by having a parallel road to SOM Center that would handle north and south traffic to the interstate. The committee asked if they could get copies of the marketing disc that was generated by the Coral development, one of committee member said he may have a disc that could be copied.

The Coral development would have been considered a large regional shopping development, which would have brought a lot of traffic into Solon. Mr. Frankland explained that in the Central Retail District Chapter of the 2010 Master Plan it does address this issue by saying if Solon is going to have a regional shopping center it should located at the existing commercial Sears shopping site, so that the traffic

can come in and exit out easily onto the interstate. The 2010 plan actually shows a proposed layout of the property, which would maintain approximately the same amount of building square footage as the current Sears site and would not expand in to adjacent residential areas as was proposed by the Coral Group. The problem with the former proposed Stark project area at the intersection of Aurora Road and SOM Center was that it would have brought all the traffic through town.

Mr. Frankland said the Giant Eagle plaza redevelopment is currently looking more positive and he noted that this center should be maintained as a local plaza that serves the community, as it is not an ideal area for redevelopment as a regional shopping center.

Mrs. Lichtcsien agreed, and she would prefer redevelopment of the Sears plaza site, since the idea is to not bring any added traffic into the residential areas that are close to the schools.

At the suggestion of Mrs. Matia, Mr. Frankland agreed he would like the committee members to visit the Sears plaza site and he would like the opportunity to explain the recommendations of the 2010 Central Retail District plan, and arrangements can be made to tour the area once the weather permits if the committee as a whole so desires.

It was mutually agreed upon by the committee members that the committee would meet on Thursdays evenings at 7:00 p.m. The committee members decided to meet in two weeks; whereas, the next committee meeting would be held February 24, and subsequently the meetings would be held on the first and third Thursday of the month starting in March.

The meeting ended at 8:50 p.m.