

2011 Solon Master Plan Citizen's Committee
February 24, 2011 – 7:00 p.m.

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

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

Absent: Citizen Members Richard Perry and Greg Rosenberg

Also present: Bill Mazur/Planning Commission member

Mr. Frankland announced that the meeting minutes of the February 10, 2011 will be completed and distributed via e-mail to the committee members.

There was discussion on changing the meeting dates for the month of March and it was decided the committee would meet on March 10 and March 24 at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Frankland said a couple of questions have come up from a few of the members in regard to the general plan and how the committee should proceed. He explained that while his role is primarily to facilitate discussion and that he does want to cover three topics for both legal and professional reasons. The three topics are the History of Planning, Legal issues associated with planning, and How Plans are Prepared. These were all discussed at the last meeting.

Mr. Frankland explained the strategy for the next couple of meetings will now be to review the current 2010 Master Plan. He would like to review the Central Retail District Plan tonight and hopefully focus on the Industrial Core plan at the next meeting. Then the committee can begin to focus on formulating goal statements.

Mr. Frankland asked if the committee members would like to select a chairperson at this time, and the committee members opted to wait on making that decision until a later date.

The Current Central Retail District Plan - Section 1

The Central Retail District Plan is probably the most important section of the Master Plan. This area faces pressing challenges due to aging infrastructure, since most of the buildings were built in the 1960's and 1970's. Also, there is increased competition around Solon, for example, the development occurring to the east in Bainbridge and to the south in Twinsburg. Prior to the slowing of the national economy there was a lot of interest in Solon for retail development. There is still interest in Solon for redevelopment and as the economy recovers

Solon needs to be ready so that the city does not miss out on the opportunity to achieve quality redevelopment.

The current Master Plan for the Central Retail Districts examines such questions as:

- What are the general economic development strategies that are appropriate for the Central Retail District?
- How should specific sites within the Central Retail District be redeveloped?
- What is the appropriate zoning for the Central Retail District?
- What types of infrastructure improvements are necessary within the Central Retail District?

Summary of Current Conditions with the Central Retail District

Section I of the plan looks at the conditions as they exist within the area, the zoning, total land area, total building square footages (commercial/office space), and the roadways and infrastructure that service the Central Retail District.

It also establishes the fundamental planning goals, strategies, and tactics applicable to the Central Retail District. *The principle goal is to achieve quality redevelopment.*

After meeting with a number of commercial real estate brokers over the years, Mr. Frankland explained that the experts have indicated the problem facing Solon is that modern retailers do not want to move into old buildings, they instead prefer to have new buildings to bring their businesses into. This is a definite problem considering the average age of Solon's building infrastructure. However, he noted that Solon does currently have a 90% retail occupancy rate, which is a great number to have during this type of economic climate, and that under normal economic conditions the occupancy rate is typically higher.

The current Master Plan states that the primary strategy to achieve the goal of quality redevelopment is to concentrate on the four core shopping centers of the city, which are:

- Uptown Solon
- Sears/Marcs/Carter Lumber Shopping Center
- Solon Square
- Solar Shopping Center

He displayed a map showing the locations of the four core shopping centers. The Master Plan establishes that these are natural strategic focal points for the entire commercial area. The focus should be on these areas because how these four shopping centers succeed or decline is going to impact the success of all the surrounding areas rather than vice versa. Focusing on the core shopping centers provides the most effective use of limited government resources. *The recommended tactic to implement the strategy of achieving redevelopment of the four core shopping centers is to facilitate contacts between current shopping center owners and outside developers.* This is because developers have

relationships with whole sets of retailers, developers are experts in the technical areas of achieving redevelopment, and developers can get the financial groups and/or partnerships together necessary to achieve the city's desired ends.

The Master Plan recognizes that some level of public investment will also be needed in order to achieve redevelopment and attract developers. As a rule, developers are more attracted to open vacant land due to the complications and higher costs typically associated with redevelopment. This mere fact is challenging for the city, and the city will likely need to offset this disadvantage with some form of subsidies.

In reply to Mrs. Matia's question as to whether or not the city has money budgeted for demolition, Mr. Frankland explained that the city does not have a specified amount budgeted for demolition, however, the city does currently have a program named G.R.I.P. The city's G.R.I.P. program can be used for demolition, which can be a way the city could help facilitate a redevelopment project. Mrs. Matia suggested that the city might have to promote developers from outside of the area and market the larger developers from Chicago and New York.

Mr. Frankland agreed that outside developers will be necessary and he explained that the existing plaza owners do not have the technical skills and resources necessary to achieve quality redevelopment themselves. He further noted that there have been developers interested in the redevelopment of Solon specifically based upon their review of the city's current Master Plan, verifying that having a Master Plan does serve an important economic development function.

Mrs. Lichtcsien asked for more details in regard to the G.R.I.P. program, and Mr. Frankland explained that the G.R.I.P. program has been around for a couple of years and it allows the city to give grants to help facilitate improvements throughout the commercial areas, such as renovate building/demolition. G.R.I.P. stands for Growth Revitalization Investment Program, which came about through Master Plan related discussions he and Mrs. Dorfman, Planning Department's Economic Development Manager, had in regard to the need for more commercially based programs to help achieve redevelopment. Mr. Frankland said Mrs. Dorfman needs to be recognized and complimented on her innovative development of the G.R.I.P. program, which is now being copied by other communities. This is now the city's principal commercial retail redevelopment tool.

Mrs. Lichtcsien asked if there is any kind of program in place that requires the different shopping center owners maintain their buildings to a certain standard. Mr. Frankland explained that the city was not organized for property maintenance until the rewrite of Solon's Zoning Code in 2005, which establishes detailed property maintenance standards for both residential and commercial properties for the first time. Over the recent years, the city's focus has steadily changed towards property maintenance through means of the new Zoning Code, the Master Plan, by having the position of zoning inspector relocated directly to

the Planning Department, and by the combination of Building and Planning functions under the Department of Planning and Community Development. The tools and organizational foundation is now in place to significantly advance property maintenance functions.

Mr. Frankland further explained that the zoning code has been changed to require building materials and design standards for every commercial zoning classification, so that now when improvements are proposed to renovate, add an addition, or build a new building it specifically requires the use of either brick, stone, or solid wood siding; and the use of any other building material will require variance approval. It also requires an equal level of finish on all four sides of the building and it requires that all facades have significant architectural details on all four sides, thus preventing blank facades from being used on the sides and rear elevations. These requirements under the design standards of the Zoning Code were followed for the recent renovations to the Arby's, D.O. Summers, and Carquest buildings as well as for the LeChaperon Rouge, Sgro building, and Fire Station #2.

Mr. Frankland said that the city needs to focus on maintaining high property values; however, noting the most significant impacts will occur when we achieve the redevelopment of the core shopping centers. Once the redevelopment of one of the core shopping centers occurs, it will very likely cause the buildings around them to also redevelop as well. In response to question from a committee member, Mr. Frankland explained that the city can not go in and tell a private commercial building owner and/or a private residential owner that he/she needs to upgrade now, referring back to the earlier discussion regarding private property rights.

Mr. Gordon noted that redevelopment in an area that the City does not have control by ownership is a lot more difficult to redevelop because you have to deal with the existing property owners. Mr. Gordon agreed that the city may need to help subsidize a redevelopment project. Mr. Gordon believes this will be tough, since we are talking about four separate individually owned shopping centers with owners that may or may not want to cooperate.

Mr. Gordon said that Uptown Solon is fairly new and it's fairly isolated along SR 422 and the others shopping centers are all located within the downtown area. He said what Coral was proposing to do with the Marc's plaza is typically what a developer would do, acquire all the land, clear it off, get the public support they need, and then redevelop the area as per the city's approved site plan.

Mr. Frankland thanked Mr. Gordon for sharing his insight on the difficulties involved in redevelopment based upon his professional expertise in working with Forest City Land Development. Mr. Frankland stated his opinion that the Mayor and City Council are willing to provide meaningful incentives to bring in developers to achieve the redevelopment of the core shopping centers. He assured the committee that there are reputable developers interested in Solon even now with a slow economy and that developers like the fact that Solon has

a Master Plan. Mr. Frankland reiterated that while there is a demand for redevelopment here in Solon, once the developers start crunching the numbers it may require the city to help subsidize particular projects that could bring the city closer to achieving its Master Plan Goals.

Mr. Frankland explained that based upon the findings of the Market Analysis Study that was performed back during the early talks with Start Enterprises and Coral Company, that the southeast area of Cuyahoga County and adjacent areas are positioned for major retail growth. With that said, the only problem is that this southeast area can only handle one major regional development, which is why he emphasized the importance of being ready and how by having a Master Plan in place will help give Solon a competitive edge when the economy rebounds.

Mr. Frankland took this opportunity to ask the committee members if they would like to have a maximum time limit placed on these meetings, and it was the consensus of the committee not to go past 9:00 p.m. Mrs. Olbinsky suggested it would be helpful if the members could have advanced notice on what topics and/or chapters will be presented, and Mr. Frankland said he hopes to complete his presentation on the Central Retail District tonight, and at the next meeting he will review the current Industrial Core Plan, Chapter 18.

If the committee would like, Mr. Frankland said he could invite Economic Development Manager Peggy Weil Dorfman to present the Economic Development section of the plan at a future meeting. He also offered to assist in making arrangements for any of the other department heads to attend a meeting to answer questions if the committee felt it was needed as we go through this process.

Mr. Newberry said he would like Mr. Frankland to finish his review of the current Central Retail District Plan, so that the committee can have an understanding of what is in the current Master Plan. Mr. Newberry noted that last Master Plan Committee had to start from scratch, and this committee has an advantage because there is a current Master Plan document.

Mr. Frankland offered to take the time to answer questions as he continued to give an overview of the current Central Retail District plan.

Current Central Retail District Plan – Section 2

The current Central Retail District plan also looks at any possible alternative uses for the four core shopping centers, which are mentioned as industrial, residential, office, and commercial or any mixture thereof. Evaluating alternatives is an important part of any Master Plan process. The alternative use as residential could allow for upscale apartments; however, this would very likely adversely impact the Solon City Schools and city service levels. One of the other alternative uses could be offices; however, having an office park development located within the Central Retail District would probably harm the

existing industrial districts. Mr. Frankland indicated that the current Master Plan, therefore, recommends that the appropriate future use for the core shopping centers should remain commercial in nature.

Mr. Frankland briefly reviewed the recommendations for the four core shopping centers as stated in the current Master Plan.

Uptown Solon – Current Master Plan Recommendations

- It will not require redevelopment, but that it might need façade updates within the next 10 to 15 years.
- It needs to remain a neighborhood shopping center.
- To provide off site directional signage to promote visitors to the shopping center.

Solar Center – Current Master Plan Recommendations

- Tear down/rebuild is recommended as opposed to refacing the existing facade.
- It should remain a neighborhood shopping center; not a good location for a regional shopping center due to increased traffic concerns.
- Eliminate the existing long continuous façade by having multiple smaller free standing buildings, shallow street setbacks, rear yard parking, not more than one major anchor tenant on site, lining up the access points to Baldwin and Linden Drive along SOM Center, and reconfiguring the existing access points.
- Provide cross pedestrian access to the senior housing development and providing for walkability within the project site.
- Require architectural design style referred to as Classic/Traditional theme within the Master Plan.
- The preferred zoning classification for this site would be Planned Unit Development.

Mr. Frankland said the city currently has a development agreement that follows the recommendations of our current Master Plan with the owners of the shopping center. Responding to question from the committee, he noted that the Giant Eagle project is tentatively moving forward and that Visconsi Company recently became the managing and controlling party for the shopping center. This large scale project would be the first time the city's Master Plan recommendations have influenced a plan for redevelopment.

It again demonstrates the value of having a Master Plan as a planning tool for redevelopment. He reminded the committee that Master Plans are not always implemented exactly and that it is more likely the end result will reflect the desires of the Master Plan and not replicate it. He referred to the fact that one of Giant Eagle's marketing conditions is to have a Get-Go Gas Station on the property, which was something the city did not envision in the Master Plan. He pointed out the proposed location for the Get-Go Station and he noted that it will not have direct street access.

Mr. Frankland explained that approximately 75% of the existing Solar Center plaza will be torn down. The new buildings will have a Western Reserve style of architecture, which is the same style of architecture used for the recent renovation of the D.O. Summers building. The remaining undemolished buildings on site will be refaced to blend in with the architectural style of the new buildings. Also, he noted that the building south of D.O. Summers will be making application to the city for exterior improvements that will follow the same architectural style for the purpose of providing a coordinated theme throughout this area.

Mrs. Matia suggested that city require Giant Eagle to keep all the grocery carts inside of the store and not allow outside storage of grocery carts in the parking lot.

Mrs. Lichtcsien asked if Visconsi Company will have all the decision making power or will there be talks back and forth with the owners of the shopping center and the city. Mr. Frankland briefly explained that prior to Visconsi Company having the controlling interest there were about 20+ individual family members that all had to agree to achieve anything. Based upon discussions with representatives from Visconsi Company, it is his understanding that one half of the family is buying out the other half of the family, and the costs of the improvements to shopping center will cause them to lose money in the short term, but in the long term a return is expected. In answer to Mrs. Lichtcsien's question, Mr. Frankland indicated that Visconsi will not have complete control, but they will be dealing with far fewer principal partners which will greatly aid the project. The city will have control through the development agreement, Zoning Code, and Master Plan.

Mr. Frankland assured the committee that the Mayor and the administration are committed to holding the developer to a high standard on this project.

Solon Square Shopping Center – Current Master Plan Recommendations

- A complete tear down and rebuild of the existing shopping center is preferred.
- Eliminate the continuous façade by having multiple smaller free standing buildings with shallow setbacks from the street; similar recommendations as previously stated for Solar Center.
- Remain a neighborhood shopping center; accommodating a maximum of two major anchor tenants.
- Classic/traditional style architecture.
- Two-story look to the buildings; false facades are a possible option.

Mr. Frankland displayed a conceptual redesigned layout for Solon Square as he reviewed the characteristics of the plan, which shows Melbury Avenue eliminated and Solon Blvd would be extended to become the main entrance access point in to and through the shopping center. He noted that the city owns 4 to 5 strategic acres in this area, which is something that developers find attractive

because the city would be in the position to possibly help subsidize a redevelopment project by providing some of the land. This layout also shows the expansion of the shopping center outward towards SOM Center Road and also expanded outward towards Solon Road. This plan does not show Station Street as being incorporated into this conceptual plan; however, this is something for the committee to possibly consider.

Mrs. Olbinsky asked what is being planned for the area across the street from the shopping center, and Mr. Frankland explained that if the Solon Square Shopping Center would redevelop then all the properties across the street would increase in value, which would likely cause them to redevelop as well. Mrs. Olbinsky asked if there are any plans for the existing multi-family buildings located across the street, and Mr. Frankland said the Future Zoning Plan recommends that area be rezoned from multi-family to a new light commercial zoning classification and that he plans to discuss that topic later at a future meeting.

In reference to the question whether or not Solon would consider having a special election for a rezoning issue, and Mr. Frankland said he believes the city would hold a special election if it involved a redevelopment project that significantly helped to meet Master Plan goals and if the project was time sensitive.

Marc's/Sears/Carter Lumber Retail Area

Mr. Frankland said this site is important because this area has the most potential for redevelopment to occur within the city, and that the redevelopment of this site is the key to encouraging high quality redevelopment throughout the other shopping centers. This is the only feasible location in the city to have a regional style shopping center based upon its high visibility on SOM Center Road, its buildability factor due to the size and orientation of the property (approx. 20 acres), and traffic accessibility from the interstate. This is the only site in the city that could reasonably support a smaller scale Crocker Park, or a First & Main type of development.

A conceptual redesign layout for this site was displayed. Mr. Frankland said this site could accommodate two to four story buildings, noting a mixed use development approach having second floor residential units could be possible.

Discussion followed as to whether or not residential units would fit into this development, whereas, some members felt it might increase the student population and adversely impact the schools and other members felt it might attract empty nesters and young professionals thus having little to no impact on the schools.

Mr. Frankland reviewed that this layout shows a street grid pattern, which enhances walkability and has been very successful elsewhere. He noted that

this type of redevelopment could be extended northward to the properties past Carter Lumber and wrap around Solon Road.

Mr. Newberry suggested that the Master Committee needs to focus and help to identify what character should the city encourage for each of the other shopping centers.

Mr. Frankland indicated that both Penny's and Macy's have shown an interest in the past in the Marc's/Sears/Carter Lumber shopping plaza. These are among the most likely anchors for any potential redevelopment project.

Mr. Gordon commented that the Sears/Marc's area should be the primary focus for redevelopment, and he believes we might want to redevelop Solar Center in a different direction to possibly reduce or at least control the amount of retail along Aurora Road.

Mr. Newberry commented that retail is slowly making a rebound, and from a Master Plan point of view, the committee needs to focus in general on how best retail development should be distributed. He noted that the placement of the anchor stores usually determines what other types of retail stores would follow.

In response to a question from the committee, Mr. Frankland said the Master Plan needs to look at alternative uses for these sites, such as possibly offices or a medical campus, which might do well here, if retail continues to decline. But he reiterated his belief that continued retail use is the most viable option when viewed from a broad planning perspective.

Standardized Street Signs – Follow up

In reference to the standardized street signs for the city, Mr. Frankland presented several computer renderings as prepared by Planner Crombie on what could be used for the street signs. As previously mentioned, Mr. Frankland said that he did contact the service department in regard to making a mock up sign, but unfortunately it was not possible for this meeting. The brackets would be black and they would help add some detailing. Mr. Frankland said that he needs to convey the committee's preference for the street signs to the Engineering Department as soon as possible due to time restraint on this project.

The committee meeting ended at 8:38 p.m.