

2011 Solon Master Plan Citizen's Committee
March 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 Eileen Siebert, Teresa Lichtcsien, David Gordon, Cindy Bomeli, Greg Rosenberg, Richard Perry, and Bob Neides; Planning Director Rob Frankland, and Secretary Cheryl Shackelford

Absent: Citizen Members Eugene Kotmel, Marilyn Matia, Regina Olbinsky

Also present: Chris Bryant (*present on behalf of Citizen Member Marilyn Matia*)

Mr. Frankland said several members are absence tonight, and he introduced Mr. Bob Neides, newly appointed representative for Ward 5, who is taking Mr. Newberry's place on the committee.

Mr. Frankland also introduced Mr. Chris Bryant, who was sitting in as an observer for committee member Marilyn Matia.

In turn, the committee members introduced themselves.

Mr. Frankland gave a brief review of the topics that have been covered to date and indicated that he will review the current Industrial Core Plan tonight.

Mr. Frankland reminded the committee that the next two meetings are scheduled for April 7 and April 21. He noted the importance of these upcoming meetings because the committee will begin to formulate goals. However, since several members stated that they will be unavailable April 7, the committee decided to cancel their April 7 meeting. The next meeting will be on April 21 at 7:00 p.m.

Standardized Street Signs – (Follow up)

Mr. Frankland reported that the Safety & Public Properties Committee approved switching to the blue street signs and he verified that the blue used for the mock up sign is the only blue that is available per the requirements of the FHA. Mr. Frankland said he discovered at the Safety & Public Properties meeting that the grant program is only for the replacement of the street signs for the mast arms located in the industrial and commercial areas of the city only. He clarified that the street signs on the smaller poles like for Station Street would remain green.

Mr. Frankland and the committee members mutually agreed it would be unacceptable to have both blue and green signs mixed in together.

Therefore, the committee decided to change their recommendation to go with the green signs, so that the city could still take advantage of the grant money to purchase the signs. Also, the committee members requested that Mr. Frankland convey the committee's recommendation to include the scalloped white vinyl trim border for the new mast arm signs with the understanding that all the other street signs throughout the city would be replaced with the green signs that have the same scalloped white vinyl trim border, so that eventually all the street signs will match in color and design by 2018.

SOM Center Road Bridge (Follow up)

Mr. Frankland took this opportunity to present the committee with a rendering of the SOM Center Road bridge that was prepared by the same architectural firm that worked on the Fire Station #2 building a couple of years ago.

Mr. Frankland pointed out this rendering is similar to what Mrs. Lichtcsien had suggested at the last meeting for the bridge, whereby, wrought iron work incorporating "Solon" is displayed along the top of the bridge.

In response to Mr. Perry's question asking if a cost estimate was received by the city at the time this rendering was done, and Mr. Frankland said no.

Mr. Gordon asked if the renovations to the bridge could be included as part of a redevelopment project for the Marcs/Sears site, and Mr. Frankland responded by saying it does not need to because it could be tied in with a streetscape project for SOM Center Road. However, he noted that until the economy turns around the city would not be doing any streetscape projects because it would be considered to be a luxury, not a necessity.

Industrial Core Plan

Section 1 – Summary of Current Conditions

Mr. Frankland indicated the location of the Industrial Core area as he highlighted the existing characteristics, which are as follows:

- 1,938 acres
- 219 Buildings
- 15.3 million square feet of industrial/office space

Mr. Frankland reported that 76% of all the buildings located within the Industrial Core were constructed between 1960 and 1990 and a vast majority of these buildings are 30 plus years old and to meet the current industrial standards these buildings are going to require redevelopment or the city needs to find appropriate secondary uses for these buildings. Mr. Frankland explained that these existing buildings are not designed for modern warehousing or industrial uses, whereas, the existing ceiling heights

are only 21 feet high, and modern users want at least 24' or higher ceiling heights. Mr. Frankland further explained that a lot of these buildings have narrow truck lanes for maneuvering the semi-trailers to and from the loading areas. In an attempt to improve this situation, he explained that the city encourages adjoining property owners to enter into cross access agreements as site plan improvement projects come before the city for approval.

Mr. Frankland said both of these deficiencies pertain to warehousing and manufacturing, noting that in many instances Solon is not set up to meet the needs of modern warehousing/manufacturing operations. He mentioned that Solon still enjoys a strong manufacturing and warehousing base, but these use categories are likely to decline over time as Solon's buildings continue to age.

Mr. Frankland indicated that the plan looks at solutions to these problems and recommends focusing our economic development strategies on attracting offices, high tech, and R&D businesses. He explained the reasoning behind this strategy is because these businesses would fit well with our existing industrial building infrastructure, noting there is a high demand for these types of uses in Solon, and attracting these businesses is actually a good tax generating strategy for the city by means of payroll tax.

Mr. Frankland asked the committee to remember that the success of the industrial area is related to the success of Solon's schools, and the success of the schools is related to the success of the city as a whole. Mr. Frankland noted that there are a lot of challenges ahead, but he believes Solon can transition to meet these challenges.

Section 2 & 3 - The Future Industrial Zoning Plan & Land Use Plan

Mr. Frankland gave a review of the recommendations for potential zoning changes that are included in the current Master Plan, which are as follows:

Nestle Parking area: Recommends the existing parking lot area of Nestlé's facility located at 5750 Harper Road to be changed from residential to I-2 zoning.

Mr. Frankland noted that this would constitute a minor change to the zoning and it would basically correct a non-conforming use situation.

Harper/Bainbridge Road: Recommends the existing O-1, General Office zoning classification in the area where the Cleveland Clinic and the Nestlé's buildings are located at the corner of Harper & Bainbridge Roads be changed to an O-2, Office Park zoning classification.

Mr. Frankland explained that the current O-1, General Office zoning classification per the zoning code is to provide a transitional zoning between residential and commercial properties, since it allows for smaller building

sizes. This recommended zoning change to O-2, Office Park would be a more appropriate zoning classification because the existing buildings at this location are multi-story corporate office buildings.

Mr. Frankland noted that this also would constitute a minor zoning change, and similar situation to the Nestle site; the change would allow the properties to become conforming.

C-5 – Industrial Retail: Recommends the current C-5, Industrial Retail & Service zoning classification be altered to remove the requirement that all the permitted uses within this district must primarily serve the surrounding industrial area.

Mr. Frankland explained that the recommended change would not change the zoning classification itself, but that it would change the list of permitted uses for this district. He further explained the reason for expanding the list of permitted uses is because presently the code says the uses that go in to the C-5 district have to primarily service the surrounding industrial properties.

Mr. Frankland said that he believes this zoning classification has been serving its function to a degree over the years. However, it also has penalized the property owners unnecessarily because each time a new business wants to move into this district, he has to base his review of the occupancy application on whether or not this business use will act to serve the industrial area. He indicated that in some cases, it is very clear, naming restaurants and day care facilities as examples of allowable uses, which do act to service the industrial area and other uses are not quite so clear, such as barbershops and beauty salons. When a questionable use wants to move in to this district, Mr. Frankland explained that he and the city's law director have to make a determination, noting this is not an ideal way for a zoning district to operate.

The current Master Plan recommends the city expand the uses for this district to allow general retail. Mr. Frankland said he reviewed this recommendation with the city's Economic Development Manager and she is in agreement.

Mr. Frankland informed the committee that the primary property owner within this district is Davis Development and that Mr. Davis is aware of this recommendation. Mr. Frankland said he anticipates Mr. Davis will make a formal request to the city to expand the permitted uses in the very near future, since he feels this restriction is harming their ability to bring in tenants.

When asked how the movie theatre was considered a permitted use, Mr. Frankland answered by saying there was a specific exception made in the zoning ordinance.

A committee member asked if this area could become a shopping center, and Mr. Frankland answered by saying it already is considered a shopping center now, however, Mr. Frankland explained that the one potential problem he foresees is that the existing zoning does allow for buildings that are up to 60,000 sq. ft., which is about the minimum building size required for an anchor store to move into this district.

Mr. Frankland said by expanding the uses for this district it could open up the potential for any retail use that requires a 60,000 square foot building to move in, and he noted that Davis Development has approached him in the past by asking if a Costco could go in the back parking lot. If the committee feels it is important to prevent large anchor stores from moving into this district, Mr. Frankland suggested that the committee might want to consider reducing the building square footage down to 40,000 when formulating their goals.

Mr. Rosenberg questioned why we would want to reduce the maximum square footages in this district, and Mr. Frankland explained that from a planner's perspective having too much land zoned for retail can cause over use of retail which would actually harm the existing four core shopping centers. Mr. Frankland said the previous Master Plan committee was concerned about zoning any additional land in the city for retail use.

Mr. Frankland further explained by giving the scenario that if the all four core shopping centers were redeveloped and operating at full occupancy, and additional retail use was in high demand, then at that time the city could justify designating more land be changed to retail zoning.

Mr. Rosenberg, former Chairman of the Solon Chamber of Commerce Retail Committee, said he is not in favor of any restrictions in preventing retail development to occur in a legitimate area that would serve the city and the population.

Bainbridge Road West Planning Area:

Mr. Frankland said this recommendation is probably one of the more substantial recommendations within this section of the Master Plan because it would affect the existing residential properties located to the west of Uptown Solon on Bainbridge Road. He indicated the location on the map, which totals 50 acres of residential land that is surrounded by commercial and industrial zoned land.

Mr. Frankland explained that the railroad tracks were once considered the northern boundary of the industrial district as depicted in the 1966 aerial photo included in the Master Plan; however, over time this boundary changed after US State Route 422 was built, which then separated this area off from all the residential neighbors to the north.

Mr. Frankland reviewed that the current Master Plan recommends that a new O/S-1 (Office/Service) transitional zoning classification for this area be established, which would allow this area to transition to office/service uses, such as, real estate offices, banks, barber shops, etc.

Mr. Frankland explained this new zoning classification would have regulations in regard to maximum building size, architectural design features, and landscape buffering. The intended concept for this type of zoning is to allow this area to gradually transition overtime.

Mrs. Lichtcsien expressed a concern in regard to requiring adequate landscape buffering to protect the residential properties. Mr. Frankland assured the committee that the plan calls for landscape buffering as a requirement.

Mr. Frankland explained that the current Master Plan recommendation has built-in language to protect the residents, whereas, it states a majority of the property owners within the residential area would need to petition the city for the zone change, or if there is a noticeable deterioration of the houses and the properties within the neighborhood the city could initiate the rezoning of the properties. This new zoning classification would require voter approval as per the City's Charter.

Mr. Perry said he always thought this area of Bainbridge Road would be a good area to have an additional exit off US 422, and Mr. Frankland noted the exit would be closely situated to the existing exits, but that it certainly could be explored as an option.

I-3 Auto Repair:

Mr. Frankland said the city currently does not have a zoning classification that permits general auto repair and he noted that all the existing auto repair businesses are all non-conforming, which means they were there before the zoning change. The current Master Plan recommends a zoning change to establish an Auto Service zoning classification that would be in the area of Old South Miles Road that would allow for auto repair, auto storing, and it would also allow manufacturing and warehousing. This new zoning classification would require voter approval as per the City Charter.

I-2 Industrial Manufacturing (Solon/Richmond Road):

Mr. Frankland explained that there was a recommendation for industrial zoning to be expanded at the corner of Richmond Road and Solon Road; however, the city received a lot of opposition from the area residents. He further explained that city Council decided not to include this recommendation in the 2010 Master Plan, but instead wanted this matter referred to 2011 Master Plan Committee.

Mr. Frankland said the reason this area was recommended is because it was considered to be the only viable area within the City to expand industrial uses; however, Mr. Frankland said he believes the viability of this area may be questionable due to the rough topography of the land, existing wetlands, and lack of utilities.

Joseph and Candice Geary, 27400 Solon Road, were present in the audience. Mrs. Geary questioned why Council recommended this be referred to the Master Plan Committee, since a similar rezoning request that would have affected the ABC streets residents was simply deleted from the 2010 Master Plan. Mrs. Geary said she feels the Solon/Richmond residents were treated differently.

Mr. Frankland explained that a couple of rezoning recommendations were included in the 2010 Master Plan draft, and he specified that Mr. & Mrs. Geary are referring to a recommendation that was deleted from the Center Retail District Plan that would change the existing residential properties located across from the Giant Eagle shopping center to commercial as possible future rezoning recommendation. Mr. Frankland agreed that the situations were similar, noting the city did receive a lot of opposition from residents in the ABC streets neighborhood, and Council did delete that recommendation from the Central Retail District Plan without referring it to the Master Plan Committee.

Mr. Frankland said whatever the committee decides to do with this referral; some type of recommendation for this area will be needed. He suggested that the committee might want to incorporate their recommendation for this area as part of the Residential Master Plan by making a positive statement that commercial/industrial zoning should not expand into this residential area and include the reasons why.

Based upon Mr. Frankland's recent review of the Industrial Core Plan, Mr. Perry said he feels the city already has sufficient land area dedicated to industrial uses, and the city needs to concentrate on improving and updating those buildings, and not try at this time to expand the industrial uses.

The committee gave Mrs. Geary the opportunity to speak on several points; whereas, she noted that the residents strongly oppose the rezoning to industrial; a petition was circulated within a short time to address the opposition; the Mayor from Oakwood Village also was opposed to the rezoning; and this area is populated by wildlife that warrants protection.

The committee members indicated that they fully understood the Geary's concerns and they mutually agreed that this area should remain residential, whereas, Mr. Perry made the recommendation that this area between Richmond Road and Solon Road, specifying this area that was previously under consideration for a rezoning change, that this area remain a low density single-family residential neighborhood.

Mr. and Mrs. Geary thanked the committee members for their support.

Mr. Frankland said this goal statement recommendation will be written in to the 2011 Master Plan and the same will be reflected in the meeting minutes. As previously mentioned, Mr. Frankland reminded the committee that he hopes they will assist with achieving the goal for a much needed Residential Master Plan section for the 2011 Master Plan.

Mr. Frankland reviewed that the city's Residential Growth Management Policy recognizes the need to manage the population growth by promoting low density residential developments. Mr. Frankland said that recently he has heard it said that the city should practice "New Urbanism" and he warned the committee to be aware that "New Urbanism" or other related terms, such as "Smart Growth" or "Green Development" at their foundation promote compact high-density, residential development. In general this is a good concept; however, if applied to Solon, this could be quite harmful to the city.

Discussion followed, whereas, the committee members agreed that high-density residential development would adversely affect the city in many ways by stressing the schools, sanitary/storm sewers, traffic, and the infrastructure of the roadways.

Mr. Perry said he feels it is important for the committee to maintain some level of consistency to safeguard against inconsistencies within the Master Plan. Mr. Frankland noted that Mr. Perry's concern is valid and he believes the current Master Plan is consistent because it systematically addresses solutions to the major issues facing Solon in regard to aging buildings and infrastructure, need for redevelopment to occur in the Central Retail District Plan, infrastructure improvements, etc.

In response to a comment from the committee, Mr. Frankland agreed that the success of Solon industrial areas can largely be attributed to Solon's former Mayor Carter, who through zoning had the foresight to designated 2000+ acres of land for industrial uses.

Sections 4 & 5 – Physical Infrastructure Improvements Plan & Communication Technology Plan

Mr. Frankland highlighted some of the recommendations for infrastructure improvements, which are follows:

Street & intersection improvements:

The plan recommends adding an additional lane on Solon Road from Carter Street to Cochran Road. It also recommends making Bainbridge Road a three lane road along the stretch that services the industrial area from Kruse Drive to Harper Road.

Intersection improvements are recommended for Solon & Aurora Road, Solon & Cochran Road, Aurora & Cochran, and Cochran & Carter Road by adding additional turning lanes to improve the level of service.

Sidewalk improvements:

Mr. Frankland reported that approximately 50% of Industrial District does not have sidewalks and this deficiency needs to be addressed by the city because sidewalks are as essential to the industrial area as they are to residential areas; it is both an economic development and a marketing issue.

Mr. Frankland said he is frequently asked by the industrial business community when sidewalks are coming to their area, and the plan does provide a prioritized list of areas within the industrial district where sidewalks should be installed.

In reply to Mrs. Lichtcsien question in regard to the anticipated start time for these projects, Mr. Frankland responded by saying these improvements would occur as city funding and/or grant monies become available.

Mr. Perry left the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Communications Technology Plan:

Mr. Frankland reviewed that this section recommends the city strive to provide and improve upon the fiber optic capabilities throughout the industrial area to better service our industrial users. He emphasized that if it is going to be the city's Economic Development strategy to pursue office and high-tech businesses, then it is essential that the city provide the basic infrastructure necessary to support these businesses.

Mr. Frankland indicated the plan provides the following recommended strategy plan be implemented:

- Encourage competition by permitting more providers within the city.
- Seek to influence the route of privately funded communication line extensions.
- Consider option of above ground communications lines in underserved areas.
- Incorporate fiber optics into any new development sites.
- Utilized consultants/liaisons to identify and promote underserved areas.
- City funding policies.

Mr. Gordon asked if wireless technology was addressed back when the 2010 Master Plan was written, and Mr. Frankland recalls wireless was discussed and he suggested this committee might want to explore wireless technology and/or any other means of new technology that could serve the industrial areas when making their goal statements.

Section 6 – Landscape, Signage, and Aesthetic Character Plan

Mr. Frankland explained that the aesthetic character of the industrial area is not always thought about as being important; however, it is often important when businesses look at the area when considering moving to Solon.

Harper Road/422 Interchange Landscaping Improvements:

Mr. Frankland reviewed that the plan recommends some landscaping improvements be made to the interchange as illustrated on "Map 18-5-A", which was prepared in-house by planning department staff to show a generic landscape layout. A more comprehensive and professionally designed landscape plan would be required by the city for review and approval by city council if this recommendation were to be implemented.

Signage:

Mr. Frankland explained that this signage plan is similar to the one recommended for the Central Retail District. It recommends that signage be used to identify the Industrial Core District at key locations, as one would enter the city. It also recommends unique street signs and directional signage to key spots in the city.

Mr. Frankland said he believes our industrial district looks pretty good right now and our zoning code provides a lot of protection to maintain green space and landscaping, and by doing some of these recommended projects it would only enhance the area.

Public Transportation:

Mr. Frankland reviewed that the plan recommends we maintain effective hourly coverage for all streets, maintain hourly and weekend and late night bus service, and provide bus shelters at strategic locations.

Mr. Frankland explained that public transportation is important to Solon's industrial community by providing a much needed means of transportation for their employees.

Mr. Rosenberg suggested having a park area with walking trails within the industrial area, and Mr. Frankland said he felt that could be something the committee might want to include as one of their goal statements.

In conclusion, Mr. Frankland said the primary goal of the Industrial Core Plan is to identify ways to maintain the viability of our industrial area in the face of aging infrastructure by implementing the strategies to achieve the goals as described in the Master Plan.

The meeting ended at 8:49 p.m.