

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
June 2, 2022
FINAL

Members Present: Gregory Milliken, Chair; David Burgess; Brian Pittelko; Jennifer Swan; Michael Harrison; Shardae Chambers; Sakhi Vyas, Vice Chair

Members Excused: Mariah Phelps; James Pitts

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Chris Praedel, City Commissioner; Peter Eldridge, Assistant City Planner; Nolan Bergstrom, Community Planner

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Commissioner Milliken called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Planner Anderson proceeded with roll call and determined that the aforementioned members were present.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Commissioner Vyas, seconded by Commissioner Burgess, moved approval of the June 2, 2022, Planning Commission agenda as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Harrison, seconded by Commissioner Pittelko, moved approval of the April 7, 2022, minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

Commissioner Milliken shared information about how people can call in for Public Comments on non-agenda items.

G. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

1. P.C. #2002.05: Community Sustainability Plan Presentation

Planner Bergstrom shared that there have been dozens of engagement events since the Community Sustainability Plan (CSP) was kicked off in 2019. He indicated that touchpoints with residents helped form

the CSP. Planner Bergstrom said the most recent engagement activities included an open house at City Hall, a virtual townhall, presentations to the Kalamazoo Climate Crisis Coalition, the rotary club, Friendship Village, and multiple Boards & Commissions. There have been 55 responses of online feedback. Planner Bergstrom emphasized that it was the engagement that helped them get the 10 goals, 83 actions, and 29 strategies that are present in the CSP. The CSP visions formed into Chapters which include Green Circular Economy, Accessible Complete Network, Healthy Prepared Community, and Affordable Efficient City. Staff reviewed engagement and determined the top six strategies: 1) Remove barriers and develop tools that lead to more solar deployment; 2) Align local policies with the circular economy; 3) encourage density for more sustainable land use; 4) Invest in programs that protect community health; 5) retrofit and weatherize existing buildings to reduce energy waste; and 6) Pilot a community solar project. Mr. Bergstrom said that these are starting points. As the plan is implemented, priorities may shift. He shared the items currently on their wait list. These are things they don't want to forget but will take more time and resources than currently available. Those items are: 1) Mitigate flooding to protect people and property; 2) Equitably increase the tree canopy; 3) Electrify city light-duty fleet; and 4) Invest in resilient stormwater infrastructure. Planner Bergstrom said the draft was available for public viewing, and the feedback portion had since closed. He said it was time to incorporate the feedback into the final draft. The next steps are a presentation at a Committee of the Whole meeting on June 6. It will then be up for adoption at the City Commission business meeting on June 21.

Commissioner Vyas asked if there are restrictions in the zoning code for solar panels. Planner Bergstrom indicated there weren't restrictions in the zoning code, but said they are formalizing a permitting process for solar panels. They are also looking into a program to help them get a better sense of where the panels are going, who is getting them, and who is installing them.

Commissioner Milliken asked what feedback they had received. Planner Bergstrom said there had been positive feedback about their top priorities. He thought there was some hesitation about the implementation of the plan. Planner Bergstrom said the plan will need to be reviewed often. They have strategies they are prioritizing now, but there may be time when priorities shift. For example, if they get funding to target flooding and stormwater infrastructure, then that work will become their priority. He said that people seemed unsure about the community solar project – what that would look like and where would it go. Planner Bergstrom said their first step would be to explore those questions and have more engagement in the neighborhoods.

Commissioner Milliken asked if the six strategies outlined would be their first things to implement. Planner Bergstrom said they worked with the Environmental Concerns Committee (ECC) to score and rank the strategies. He said there is a strategy for each chapter. Three of those strategies deal specifically with internal processes and zoning. Those items will take time but won't have a large financial cost. Commissioner Milliken thanked all those involved in creating the CSP.

2. Public Participation Plan Update

Planner Anderson announced that they were not streaming on Facebook but were streaming live on YouTube.

Planner Anderson said the Public Participation Plan (PPP) was created after Imagine Kalamazoo in order to put together an engagement process that could be used for other programs, policies, and projects. Also, a PPP is required as part of the Redevelopment Ready Certification (RRC) through the MEDC. The PPP helps to understand the impact of a project, who should be at the table, and how to reach those people. Planner Anderson said they began the update process before Covid and are now bringing it back. She plans to bring this presentation back to the Planning Commission in July for an approval.

Planner Anderson reported that the policy is a commitment to outreach and engagement as part of everyday work with the City. It is an understanding of who should be at the discussion table and the importance of engaging before, during, and after an activity. She said they need to make sure they are communicating results to keep in touch, and to measure the success of their work and what should be adjusted. Planner Anderson explained there are three major areas of changes to the policy: developer and applicant outreach; creation of an internal community of practice group; updates to the engagement guide and tool kit.

Planner Anderson stated that staff already recommends a minimum level of engagement activities when an applicant comes with a rezoning or special use request. Now they have formalized what outreach the applicant is required to do on their own. The document outlines different requests and recommended/required activities. She said they want to make sure the engagement activities are being done consistently. Planner Anderson said the PPP had loosely been out for review since 2019/2020, but they didn't receive a lot of comment.

Planner Anderson said they are working on creating a Community of Practice group. This is a group that shares a common interest or activity and collaborates to do the work better. She explained how that fits several departments within the City. They are all engaging the community on programs, projects, and policies. If they work collaboratively, it will keep from causing meeting/activity fatigue for residents and staff. The Community of Practice group will help support each other's creation and implementation of each department's public participation strategies. This will help them to collect, evaluate, and share data among departments regarding engagement techniques. She thought this group will help them tell the city's story. They hope to start meeting this summer – quarterly or bi-monthly. They will have a short-term focus of who is going where in the next month and a long-term focus of how they can better communicate/evaluate. Planner Anderson said they hope to do a barrier engagement study. This study should help them know how they can change activities to make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate.

The Engagement Guide and Toolkit is a step by step guide. It goes into detail on how someone can define their project: who is served, who are the stakeholders, what level of engagement is needed. Then you create an engagement strategy. Planner Anderson said there is information in the tool kit about how to plan accessible and inclusive activities. There are also tips on promoting participation and communicating results. Planner Anderson talked about templates which are included in the toolkit. She said the idea is to see the same documentation across the board. This tool will allow discussion of what has/hasn't happened and keep a record of that work. Tools are organized based on type of engagement such as informing or collaborating. Planner Anderson said staff, Neighborhood Associations, or developers can go through the list and think about what will best serve them for the project.

Planner Anderson said they also added some pictures and tweaked some of the language in the plan. She shared that the plan was presented internally to Directors of departments. The Community of Practice group was well received.

Commissioner Milliken asked if the PPP was referenced in the zoning ordinance. Planner Anderson responded that it was not referenced in the zoning code because it can be used for everything. She indicated that when they update the administrative review and approval section in the zoning code, they can reference the PPP. Commissioner Milliken wondered if an applicant didn't follow the PPP, would it be a zoning violation. Planner Anderson explained that it wouldn't be a violation of the zoning ordinance, but it would be a violation of the policy. She said that when they update application forms for this board and others, they note that if the applicant hasn't done engagement, they are not setting themselves up for success. They may risk not being heard at the meeting. Commissioner Milliken noted that their two most frequent cases are zoning requests and special use permits. For rezoning requests, engagement is required, for special use permits, engagement is recommended. He thought it will be a more subjective call. Commissioner Milliken said it was helpful to have the policy more cut and dry. Cases may not have to come before them if they haven't met that requirement. Planner Anderson said that she believes the value of engagement activities has been seen. People want to come before boards and have success with their request. If there is a guide to reach out and collaborate, the applicant's chance of success at this stage will only increase.

Commissioner Pittelko shared that he liked the Engagement Activities Toolkit Benefits and Challenges section. He asked if City staff steer the applicants in certain directions depending on the activity. Planner Anderson said they have guided rezoning the most because they have larger impacts. They want to make sure the activity is effective. She said that when they do neighborhood plan engagement, the more robust engagement kit will be handy. Planner Anderson noted that with work coming up in the City, they will be mindful to follow their own policy.

Commissioner Burgess thought it looked very impressive. He liked the variety and structured responses (if you want to achieve this, use these tools). He cautioned against having a rigid plan that stifles new ways to engage.

Planner Anderson said this plan would be on the Planning Commission agenda in July to ask for their support for approval.

H. REPORTS:

Planner Anderson announced the special meeting scheduled for June 22. She said they would also have the July 5 meeting.

Planner Anderson said that staff (Nolan Bergstrom, Zach DuMont, and Jae Slaby) have been busy with many neighborhood activities. There are four or five neighborhood plans actively in the works as well as others that are working on internal organization.

Planner Anderson announced that the City offices will be closed on Monday, June 20th for the Juneteenth holiday. The City Commission meeting will be on Tuesday, June 21. She said they will be doing an in-depth presentation on streets projects at the COW meeting that afternoon. A website will be live shortly. Planner Anderson encouraged them to attend in-person or tune in.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

No in-person or call-in comments.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

Commissioner Praedel asked the Planning Commissioners to keep Commissioner Pitts in their thoughts. He reported that the City Commission tabled the text amendments to Ch. 50 zoning at the May 16 meeting. He said they needed more time to understand changes and engage with City staff.

Commissioner Praedel said they approved project design work (\$955,000) to convert to two-way streets. He emphasized that this will be game changing for the City of Kalamazoo – taking it to the next level. They will dig up everything under the road. This will include new sidewalks, islands, traffic calming initiatives, bike lanes, sidewalk safety enhancements. Commissioner Praedel noted that there are essentially two highways through downtown. He said people speed, it's not pedestrian friendly, and it isolates Northside and Eastside neighborhoods. This conversion will be underway in 2024.

Commissioner Praedel said that 75 intersections will be given safety enhancements this summer. Forty of them will get audible speakers, crosswalk markings, backplate enhancements, and span wires. The City of Kalamazoo launched a new website. He announced that Kalamazoo was selected as one of 13 international cities to participate in the Bloomberg Center for Public Innovation to examine sidewalk safety in winter. Commissioner Praedel shared that fireworks will be acceptable on Juneteenth. He felt it was important for equity to allow them on Juneteenth as well as July 4.

J. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

Planning Commissioners noted the special meeting on Wednesday, June 22 at 7pm and the regular meeting on July 7.

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 7:54 pm.

Planning Commission

June 2, 2022

Page 6 of 6

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "C. Anderson", is positioned above a solid blue horizontal line.

Christina Anderson,

City Planner

Community Planning & Economic Development