

City of Kalamazoo
PLANNING COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
October 3, 2024
FINAL

Members Present: Mitchell Curtiss; Gregory Milliken, Chair; Christine Dascenzo; Ian Smith, Wendell Tolber; Brian Pittelko; Michelle Audette-Bauman; Shardae Chambers; Jennifer Swan

Members Excused:

City Staff: Christina Anderson, City Planner; Bobby Durkee, Assistant City Planner; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Charlie Bear, Assistant City Attorney

A. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

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

Planner Durkee proceeded with roll call and determined there was a quorum.

B. ADOPTION OF FORMAL AGENDA

Planner Durkee announced that the application for the Special Use Permit (Public Hearing - P.C. #2024.09) was withdrawn earlier in the week.

Commissioner Swan, seconded by Commissioner Pittelko, moved approval of the October 3, 2024 Planning Commission agenda as amended. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Swan, seconded by Commissioner Chambers, moved approval of the July 8, 2024 minutes as presented. With a voice vote, the motion carried unanimously.

D. COMMUNICATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Planner Durkee shared that there would be a special use permit request at the November meeting.

E. PUBLIC HEARINGS

Commissioner Milliken announced that there were no public hearings on the agenda.

F. DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEMS

None.

G. REPORTS:

1. City Planner's Report

Christina Anderson shared that Imagine Kalamazoo 2035 (IK 2035) officially kicked off last month. She wanted to give Planning Commissioners a quick overview of what that is, where it is going, and what the process looks like. Planner Anderson stated that after her brief overview, Commissioner Curtiss would do a Meeting on the Go exercise with the Planning Commissioners.

Imagine Kalamazoo 2035

Planner Anderson reported that they are nearing the end of the life of the plan/policies that came out of IK 2025, so they are restarting that process. She reminded Planning Commissioners that they are the keepers of the Master Plan – which is one of the documents that comes from that process. The Master Plan is the land use and transportation plan that the zoning code implements. The Planning Commission is the one who reviews and approves the Master Plan. Planner Anderson said that according to the state, zoning codes should only last about 10 years. The current Master Plan expires October 2027. She said they hope to have a new Master Plan in 2026. Planner Anderson indicated that they learned a lot from the IK 2025 process. These lessons have made them think about how to organize themselves for IK 2035. She said they want to appropriately capture what the community tells them in the goal statements. Then they need to be very specific about desired outcomes, think about barriers, and opportunities for achieving those goals. They will clearly define strategies (projects, policies, plans), and track their success. Planner Anderson said the Strategic Vision has goals and outcomes; and the Master Plan is where the strategies, projects, policy updates, and plans live.

Planner Anderson said they are doing this work in three phases.

1. Imagine It - High level review of Strategic Vision goals and the City Vision Statement.
 - a. Meetings on the Go!
 - b. IK Reads!
 - c. Strategic Vision Goal Survey.
2. Plan It - Take the goals and pair them with outcomes.
3. Design It - Strategies and measures are detailed.

Planner Anderson reviewed the IK 2035 timeline with Master Plan approval tentatively scheduled for early 2026. She also gave more information about the three main activities of the Imagine It Phase. Planner Anderson explained the Meetings on the Go tool kit. IK Reads is centered around discussion about the book, Happy City by Charles Montgomery. The book is available at the library, at This is a Bookstore, as an audio book, and as a Ted Talk. There is a Happy City toolkit. Planner Anderson announced that the book club initiative is led by a senior at Kalamazoo College, Emerson Wesselhoff. The Kalamazoo Public Library is planning to do a parallel children's activity. She said they had a book club discussion with

approximately two dozen people participating. Another one is planned for October 23 at Jerico. They are planning a December event with the library, and more events between now and March.

Planner Anderson explained that there are currently 10 Strategic Vision goals. They want IK 2035 to build on the successes of IK 2025. They want to understand what needs to shift and change in the goals so they can carry for another 10 years. She said they are starting with a survey to be released this month. Planner Anderson encouraged everyone to participate in the process. She asked them to pick up a Meeting on the Go, read/watch Happy City, and have conversations with those around them. People can sign in or check in to stay up to date. Planner Anderson encouraged people to go to the City's website, kalamazoocity.org, and search for Imagine Kalamazoo.

Commissioner Dascenzo asked if any consultants had been or were going to be hired for this process. Planner Anderson said they have used consultants to compile data. They are now using the WMU Innovation Center to help compile and organize data and pull out key words to help them move forward. She said they are looking to partner with someone who does local facilitation with focus groups. The facilitator would train volunteers.

Commissioner Tolber asked when they need Meetings on the Go to be completed. Planner Anderson said they will start to compile data at the end of November and then see where they stand. She said the timelines set are mostly internal. They will constantly be checking to see if they've heard from enough people. If they need to extend the deadlines, they will. The book read will go through March.

Commissioner Milliken asked if the IK website was still the clearing house for all information. Planner Anderson shared that it had been folded into the City website and could be accessed through kalamazoocity.org.

Commissioner Tolber asked if the results of feedback were segmented by demographics/neighborhoods. Planner Anderson explained that some of it is segmented. With each activity, they initially ask everyone for name, email, and neighborhood. Later they will send out a demographic survey to anyone who has attended. They want to be sure they are reaching the broader community.

Planning Commissioner Meeting on the Go

Christina Anderson explained the handouts on the dais.

Commissioner Curtiss said they are actively asking for the members of the Planning Commission to give their personal opinions on things. He gave the disclaimer that these are the personal opinions of the individual citizens sitting on the Planning Commission. This was not the board opinion of the Planning Commission as an entity.

Commissioner Curtiss noted he would skip getting to know you questions and lead them through activities A & B. He requested the Planning Commissioners to shout out answers, but also to write them down.

What has changed for the better in Kalamazoo in the last 10 years?

- Recently a big reduction in gun violence.
- A plan with a clear focus on implementing the steps in the plan.
- Neighborhood plans and neighborhood associations have been built up.
- Increased density in housing in the downtown and core neighborhoods.

What has continued to be a challenge to Kalamazoo?

- Bike lanes and street parking.
- Housing.
- Poverty and social justice issues still have a geographic home.
- Frequency and reliability of public transit.
- Having a truly connected network of bike lanes.

Describe what a happy & healthy city means to you.

- A place where people feel safe walking, stopping and talking to neighbors, being able to be outside.
- A place where people want to live - not just drive to work.
- Having the ability and a reason to go to public spaces.
- Having the infrastructure available and motivation to avoid littering.
- Those who walk, bike, use public transit, are afforded the same dignity and ability of those using motor vehicles.
- Amenities that are close to your home.
- No barriers to getting to the amenities.

Something in your neighborhood that exemplifies a happy, healthy city.

- Parents/kids walking to school. Parents walking and talking together.
- Asylum preserve - green space.
- Ability to walk to commercial centers. All folks are able to access sidewalks, bike lanes, and make that an accessible and easy destination.
- Spring Valley Park – disc golf tournaments, movie nights, walkable neighborhood.
- A church nestled in between three distinct neighborhoods that has a playground open to all. It is a central and engaged location that helps facilitate a sense of community.
- Bus stop park – great spot to get energy out before sitting on the bus.
- Milham park, Milwood Elementary, Loy Norrix. There are always things going on in the neighborhood, but it is a quiet place to live.

What needs to stay, endure, be built upon for Kalamazoo to be the happy and healthy city you described?

- Inclusivity to all. Make sure those with mobility challenges can get around the City. Make sure there are bike lanes. Keep it inclusive so everyone has their spot in the City, and/or can get around the City.
- Remember the streets will be better when road construction is done.
- Kalamazoo should lean more into each neighborhood having a distinct commercial district.

- Physical and community connections. Talking to people and knowing what is going on in the City as a whole.

Commissioner Curtiss encouraged them to look at activities C, D, and E.

Planner Anderson thanked them for going through the exercise. She said not to hesitate if they want to have a Meeting on the Go in their office where everyone doesn't live in the City of Kalamazoo. This is for anyone who lives, works, or plays in the City.

General City Planner Updates

Planner Anderson reported that the Michigan Avenue engagement process started. She said that all of the work was being federally funded through the infrastructure bill. That results in a two-year process (2027-28 construction). Planner Anderson said there would be four in-person meetings. One was held in September, another on October 10 at the KNAC building. They will schedule a meeting in November and one in December. Each meeting builds on the previous meeting's activity and input. Planner Anderson shared that they had a table at Sounds of the Zoo, they met with Downtown retail shops, and they have Walk and Roll Audits planned for Michigan Avenue. They will also release an online survey.

Planner Anderson said that a lot of street construction projects would be wrapped up in the next month. She shared that MichiKal would be open the next week. It will remain one way until changes can be made on the other roads at the intersection.

Site Plan List

No questions.

H. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

No in-person or call-in comments.

I. CITY COMMISSION LIAISON COMMENTS

Commissioner Praedel said it was nice to hear the dialog on the IK 2035 exercise. He thanked everyone for their patience during road construction. Commissioner Praedel confirmed that it was challenging to get around, but the City is being very intentional about the future. Better infrastructure will make sure they don't have to dig up the roads for decades to come. He asked Planning Commissioners and the public to do their best to support local businesses. There are a number of businesses that depend on us to go out of our way to help sustain them.

J. MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS BY PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

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Commissioner Milliken thanked Commissioner Curtiss and others for their participation in the Meeting on the Go exercise.

Commissioner Chambers shared that ballots are out. People can get them from the City Clerk's office.

K. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Milliken adjourned the meeting at 8:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Christina Anderson,

City Planner

Community Planning & Economic Development