JOINT TRAINING MEETING

Planning Commission & Brownfield Redevelopment Authority

December 11, 2024

A. Call to Order/Roll Call

Planning Commissioners:
Mitchell Curtiss; Ian Smith; Greg Milliken; Michelle Audette-Bauman
BRA Directors:
Kyle Gulau; Rachel Bair; Sharon Ferraro; Jason Novotny; Alonzo Wilson
City Staff:
Jerrid Burdue, Neighborhood Business & Special Projects Coordinator; Bobby Durkee, Assistant City Planner; Beth Cheeseman, Executive Administrative Assistant; Jamie McCarthy, Development Manager

Planner Durkee and Mr. Burdue took roll call of their respective boards.

Planner Durkee asked Board members to introduce themselves and state the reason they wanted to serve on the Planning Commission or Brownfield Redevelopment Authority.

B. Adoption of Formal Agenda

None.

C. Public Comments

None.

D. Staff Presentations
1. Zoning Changes

Planner Durkee indicated that many zoning changes came from Imagine Kalamazoo 2025 (IK 2025). He spoke of the code for mixed-use properties and how development became messy with the number of variances required for first floor use. A big part of their work was to implement form based codes. Planner Durkee explained that the zoning code is now in line to promote density, human scale, and walkability. He felt they are now able to give a “yes” response to many requests from developers. Planner Durkee referenced an example of the parking code going from a minimum parking requirement to a maximum parking requirement.

Traditional & Form based zoning.

Planner Durkee reviewed traditional zoning (which looks at building, use, setback, and area) vs. form based zoning (which looks at building entrances, transparency, and focuses on stories instead of building height). He mentioned Live Work zoning. Planner Durkee shared that it takes a significant change to the building to trigger form-based requirements for existing buildings.

Planner Durkee gave an example of an area on Burdick where there are small businesses and homes. He said it is a place where there are no parking minimums. A house could be transformed into a beauty salon, or some stores could be transformed into a duplex. Live Work zoning by right will permit a single-family home, mixed-use, five units or more, or a broad range of commercial uses. As far as parking is concerned, the intent of the code is to let the market decide how much parking is needed.

Relaxed setback & Density standards

Planner Durkee shared information about previous density terms in the City of Kalamazoo – such as RS-5, RD-19. These numbers were originally dwelling units per acre. Those lots were incredibly small parcels. He indicated that the number is now RM-36. Density is now 1,000 square foot minimum for a dwelling unit, and the setbacks were reduced. Planner Durkee indicated that under Live Work zoning, the City went from approximately 38% of lots not big enough to support a dwelling, down to under approximately 20%. He also stated that form based codes do not have a dwelling unit density. The limits for that are set through maximum height or building coverage.

Planner Durkee reviewed a chart of action steps included in the IK 2025 Master Plan and how zoning has changed to align with them.

2. Economic Development Strategy

Mr. Jerrid Burdue stated that recent zoning changes have been great for economic development. He said the Economic Development Strategy was approved by the City Commission in October. Mr. Burdue read the vision of the Strategy and emphasized that it was essential for planning, zoning, and economic development to work together. He shared that partners outside of the City were also a part of the stakeholder groups to create the strategy. This allowed for a broader document that helps all to go in the same direction. Mr. Burdue said this is the first economic development strategy for the City in 20 years. It was instigated as a part of the RRC certification requirement. City staff worked with a consultant who evaluated and said that the City does community planning well. They also said the City does not do traditional economic development well. That would include business retention and expansion, business attraction, business friendly mindset, targeted industries growth, and workforce development. Mr. Burdue said they are looking to improve. The Economic Development Corporation (EDC) will help City staff stay accountable and will provide recommendations.

The four goals of the Economic Development Strategy:

1. Foster the business environment, target markets, and entrepreneurship
2. Strengthen neighborhoods and community connections
3. Advance conditions for growth
4. Improve the downtown experience.

Mr. Burdue reviewed the performance metrics that could be used to track success: per capita income, poverty rate, A.L.I.C.E., childcare, properties on the tax roll, and job creation at a livable wage. He said the EDC will be coming up with leading indicators.

3. Brownfield Redevelopment Update

Ms. McCarthy shared that brownfield redevelopment lives between planning and economic development as a tool and resource to the City. She said that a recent expansion in State law allows them to offer more to developers in the area of real estate development. Ms. McCarthy said they have been changing how they pair traditional brownfield tools, expanding tools, incentives, land resources, and their revolving fund.

Ms. McCarthy shared that the City Commission approved their first housing project at the beginning of this month. Traditional brownfield had a narrow definition and focused on contaminated properties and associated costs. The State now allows Brownfield Authorities to offer incentives as a gap financing tool for housing projects. They can offer that tool for almost all costs on a project if they are offering housing at a certain price point. She said it doesn't have to be highly affordable housing; it's essentially work force housing. They would use Tax Increment Financing (TIF).

Commissioner Milliken asked if the qualifying condition was that the property has housing on it. Ms. McCarthy said it does have to have a housing unit on the property. The BRA used to be limited to more traditional brownfield costs, but now they can fund construction and infrastructure. The State has really expanded eligible costs. Ms. McCarthy said that they have also done a lot more stacking of incentives. If a project is of high value to the community, they put everything on the table and see what it takes. The BRA Board is also interested in leveraging their Brownfield Revolving Fund more than they have in the past.

E. Discussion: Collaborative Opportunities

Planner Durkee asked Board members to share what opportunities they see for collaboration between the BRA and Planning Commission. He wondered about their involvement in IK 2035.

Director Gulau shared that the BRA owns properties. He said they know about the money and where the properties are, but they don't understand the zoning well. A developer needs money, permission, and people. He felt that the Planning Commission was part of the permission. Director Gulau felt there would be opportunities for the Planning Commission to refer people to the BRA and vice versa.

Director Gulau asked about the customers of the Planning Commission. Commissioner Milliken shared with him that Planning Commission mostly responds to and addresses policy. They do have some people requesting rezoning or Special Use Permits. He explained what a Special Use Permit was for the EDC Board members. Commissioner Milliken thought that Director Gulau's idea was good, but that it would happen at a staff level. He felt their opportunity for collaboration would be with IK 2035 to set up and support that strategy. Commissioner Milliken explained that the Master Plan cascades down to the zoning ordinance and the land use policy. Those ordinances and policies can make it so that land use is not an insurmountable barrier to developers. He said collaboration could be meetings or a Planning Commissioner and/or BRA Director attending the other boards meetings to give input.

Director Gulau cited a meeting he had just come from regarding hosting IK 2035 focus groups by topics. One of the topics was economic development. He noted that they need people with some expertise in the topic along with those who can affect change. Director Gulau suggested getting a group meeting scheduled.

Commissioner Curtiss suggested distributing information to board members when the focus groups are scheduled and letting them come if they want. He did say they would have to be cautious about having quorum at an event.

Commissioner Milliken spoke about mobilizing and creating opportunities for people to go out into the neighborhoods and determine how to make building/transforming properties more affordable and accessible to people.

Director Novotny said they currently give people different tools depending on their focus. He suggested they should find a tool that helps people think about their project from both sides of the table. Director Novotny said that anything that could make the work of the applicants easier would be welcome.

Commissioner Audette Bauman asked if there was an effort to map out pattern home books and lots around the City where they could be built by right - including Brownfield sites. Director Ferraro shared information about the Department's pre-approved housing plans. She said there were some minor details to work out, but they did have someone who was going to use them to build some houses. Commissioner Audette Bauman suggested there could be a connection using the BRA housing TIF, the pattern book, and BRA property. She also wondered if there would be opportunities in IK 2035 to call that out as a priority in specific neighborhoods.

Commissioner Milliken indicated he saw action items targeting certain parcels of land or targeting City/BRA owned land. He suggested creating a map in IK 2035 showing those parcels. Commissioner Milliken said there may be a reason not to make that public. However, they could possibly connect parcels of publicly held land with the future land use map. Planner Durkee shared that the challenge for staff would be many different opinions about where to develop and why, and the prioritization of sites.

Commissioner Curtiss noted that the Planning Commission was going through the redevelopment of the zoning code. When people approach the zoning code, it could be helpful to have cheat sheets. These could include directing people to see if they qualify for BRA.

Director Bair said she was curious about bringing in entrepreneurial developer work. Through discussion, it was suggested that Can Do Kalamazoo and Room 35 should be brought into those conversations. It was also noted that MEDC, LISC, and CEDAM have programs that can help developers.

Director/Commissioner Comments

F. Next Steps

Planner Durkee announced they would have a Developer Information Session soon. He explained they were refining the development Intake and review process into three lanes: pre-development, site plan review, permitting and inspections. They will update the website and do some open houses beginning in 2025. Ms. McCarthy shared that those in design and development would get notice of a meeting in January or February. They plan to have one point of contact for the process to help developers navigate their projects.

Ms. McCarthy shared that in 2025 they would be rolling out more of the tax abatement and incentives policies – OPRA, revolving fund policy, and housing TIF.

Planner Durkee said that they would be moving out of the listening sessions for IK 2035 and getting into the neighborhood meetings and soliciting feedback to start to develop the documents. He said there would be Road Shows and opportunities for engagement. Every comment would be recorded and logged.

Mr. Burdue said that the feedback from the Economic Development Strategy would be passed on to the Planning staff to help inform Imagine Kalamazoo. He announced that they anticipate the Business Development Fund would be returning in 2026 with improvements and hopefully FFE funding. Mr. Burdue also spoke about a loan program available through the EDC. He said they are looking to reformulate that from job creation to gap financing. They would potentially run the loan program through a credit union or bank.

G. Adjournment

Adjourned at 8:10pm