

OWATONNA PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES FOR APRIL 23, 2024

The Owatonna Planning Commission met in regular session at 5:30 p.m. in the Charles S. Crandall Center – Chambers at City Hall with Chairperson Kelly Rooks conducting the meeting. Present at roll call were Commissioners Rachel Springer-Gasner, Kelly Rooks, John Eickhoff, Mark Wilson, Nick Peake, and David Effertz. Commissioner Mark Meier was absent. Community Development Manager Greg Kruschke, Planning Specialist Ashley Zidon, and Administrative Technician Kristen Kopp were also present.

Kruschke said they've been working diligently drafting the Comprehensive Plan. He gave the example of Southpoint apartments, as that was controversial. The Land Use Plan was the backbone of approvals for that request. Kruschke introduced Phil Carlson and said he has prepared a presentation of the draft plan.

Phil Carlson of Stantec presented the review draft of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan. He reviewed the highlights of the plan. He said the plan is the high level guide with enough detail to tell the story. It gets filled in with the Zoning Ordinance and other plans. It's sort of a menu of ideas. He said they are now in the phase where they are preparing the plan elements and later this year will refine that with Planning Commission and City Council. The vision: (copy from PowerPoint) The values: One of the key elements is land use and housing. They are trying to introduce more places you can do that. There has been a focus on building apartments, but there is a missing middle—so a range of housing is important. Form-based zoning, what it looks like, the shape and size, is as important as the use. They want to recognize the different commercial categories in the city. Owatonna is a growing community. There is a robust and diverse economy. A good part of that is the downtown. Owatonna was centered on a downtown and is very lucky. A lot of cities are trying to create that. He highlighted the land use goals: explore developing a regional destination community center and improve housing opportunities and neighborhoods in Owatonna, supporting economic development. He spoke about the idea of mixed use. He explained Walk Score. They've identified four areas for possible mixed use development. Eickhoff asked how much would the town need to grow to handle these areas. Phil said that it's more than enough to handle the growth. Eickhoff asked how to prioritize it. Phil said there is the marketplace. If they're not on the map, developers and builders will have to figure out what to do. If you identify an area that has mixed use... With this in the plan and if the economy is still decent, you could expect one or two to start in the next few years. You're laying the framework. Kruschke said that it is meant to be aspirational, too. Carlson said this is a plan, not a project. Springer-Gasner asked if there were other model cities we could direct people to think about. Carlson said there are many. Once that comes to mind is Arbor Lakes in Maple Grove. Kruschke said what they heard in public engagement is that people want to walk. Carlson said the reason they show those circles is that people who walk, they have to make economic sense. There has to be a certain density within that area. It can be density in a way that the community approves of. He highlighted the node near the high school. Eickhoff asked how to address the intersection by the high school so that we're not dealing with accidents. Kruschke said they've been battling that speed limit with Mn/DOT and they say we need three to four years of traffic counts. The railroad could pose a significant problem there and we are trying to address it. Carlson said the fourth node is near the industrial park. Building on Westlake Meadows is an opportunity. These are conceptual, but if it's in the plan as something to work toward, you can start to see something. He talked about density. Medium density could be townhomes. He said they focused on the downtown. It is the center of the cultural and economic life. The plan will build on the plan from 2019. There are five areas that they want to focus on. The Bridge Street corridor. It is one of the main entry points to the city. He asked the Commissioners their thoughts. Eickhoff said that it was surprising this wasn't a current node. Kruschke said it's easy to put a plan together where there isn't development yet. These next four or five are into more redevelopment. For instance, Caribou wanted to come in a few years ago. They bought a house and we had to rezone it. The school district offices are moving in June. How do we look at

these things? The area in front of Target is identified as industrial. This is where we talk about what we want this to look like in 20 years. Peake said you have a big commercial area downtown connecting to this. He said connecting with more commercial makes sense to him. Springer-Gasner asked if they can combine industrial with commercial. Carlson said that is possible. Mixed use in a different direction. Kruschke said they need to talk about that school site. Bridge Street is the busiest street in the city. They should look at some more commercial in that area. Being a little visionary isn't always the easiest thing. Carlson said Focus Area B is along Hoffman Drive. Eickhoff said the trains should play a part in the plan. Carlson said Focus Area C is Cedar Avenue North. This is a transitional area and also fronts the river. Kruschke said the majority of this area is zoned heavy industrial. How do we transition this area into more usable areas while still recognizing our history and uses that will probably be there a while. There could be a new transitional zoning district for this area. Peake said there could be another commercial-industrial use here, too. Effertz said he likes that downtown is feeding into it. Kruschke said it is different, though. It doesn't have the downtown Main Street feel, but more of the old industrial feel. Carlson said Focus Area D is Cedar Avenue South across from Federated. Eickhoff said it strikes him as an area where mixed-use would make sense. Kruschke said it is unique. It is essentially Owatonna's entertainment district. There is a lot of activity throughout the year. Zidon said think about the experience as a pedestrian or cyclist... Would you enjoy this area now, versus what it could be? Eickhoff said it's right off Highway 14, too, and close to the high school. Carlson said the other area they want to highlight is the Pillsbury campus and the former high school. He asked what their thoughts would be? Effertz asked if this would be on the list for the new community center. Kruschke said that it will be talked about. One of the things is to have an institutional designation. Pillsbury has property. We have to do some sort of designation on this old high school site. They are open for suggestions. Wilson asked if they have a current plan. Kruschke said that the school district is putting the district offices in the old C building and using Ag building for district maintenance. Everything else is going green. The track and field are staying. Carlson said today it's zoned single family. He said there is a whole parks and trails chapter, which incorporates the recent Parks and Trails Plan. We heard that parks are very important and we want to continue that. Rooks asked if the Parks and Trails Plan talks about the old high school site. Carlson said that a few ideas have come out in the Parks plan. Healthy living is a trend that will continue. He talked about economic development. Young people are a key driver. Parks and trails, housing should all be a part of the business plan. He highlighted Sustainability and Resilience. The discussion comes back to the five focus areas.

Rooks said she likes the fact that they're making the former high school site green. It has the elements of what would make a good park, and maybe part could be mixed use. Kruschke said by planning this, it doesn't say that it can't change and the plan can't be fluid. The institutional might be a copout, but he said communitywide he doesn't know if the community is ready to make a decision. There is a lot of emotion still tied to this site. It would be easier to have a discussion a couple years down the road. By doing institutional, we're saying this is the school district site. Carlson said they can said this area warrants future study. Rooks agreed that there is still a lot of emotion tied to the site. Effertz said geographically it's a hard place. Kruschke said we don't know what the school district is willing to part with. It will take some time. Peake agreed that keeping it institutional says it's still public land.

Bridge Street. Rooks said she likes where you have the commercial corridor between the downtown to the interstate. That's what people see when they come to town and if we extend the commercial corridor east, we can get people downtown. Peake said not just commercial but mixed use. Peake said the north side of Bridge is commercial near the park. Zidon said it has a nice neighborhood feeling and feels different than closer to the interstate. Peake said on the north side there are also some historic houses. Rooks said that Bridge Street is what sold her on Owatonna when she came to interview. You still want to get that feel. Mixed use might be the happy medium. If we do mixed use through the district offices. On the north side,

expand that as a regular commercial area to state ave, or mixed use. From what he's hearing, State Avenue is a break point for that. Kruschke said a mixed use building with a salon and restaurants, an accountant. Kruschke asked what if the area in front of Target was all commercial. Commercial is Target, Walmart, Caribou, McDonalds, and industrial is warehouses, manufacturing, distribution... Springer-Gasner said she feels commercial will bring the most opportunities. Rooks said it started when Target and Fleet Farm in and we could continue it to 24th. Carlson said we wouldn't fill these up in 25 years, but we can't predict what's going to happen, but we're pointing in the direction we want to go. Kruschke said we do look at these land uses and we can plan into the future. It gives developers something.

Area B. Cemstone, Hoffman Drive. Kruschke said we do allow high density residential in a commercial area. Rooks said you have the grocery store and residential to the south. Peake said you have to think about the floodplain. Kruschke said the Cemstone piece isn't in the floodplain, just the area along Hoffman Drive. Rooks said she votes commercial with high density residential. Eickhoff said commercial makes more sense.

D. Commercial. Kruschke said. They could look at mixed use.

Kruschke asked for thoughts on the nodes and this concept.

Commissioners spoke about the node on the north side. Kruschke said they're shoing a neighborhood park and mixed use and .

There was some discussion on the node around the high school.

Carlson thanked the Commissioners for the comments they had. He said if you have other ideas, let us know. Get them to Greg and Ashley. As important—is there anything we've really messed up? We want to know about that, too. This will go to Council on May 7 and a community open house on May 16. Kruschke said to please note process wise, by statute the Planning Commission is required to hold a public hearing. At the end of the day, the Commission will have to recommend approval of this to City Council. It is a very formal process.

A motion was made by ... and seconded by .. to. approve the minutes of the regular meeting of April 9, 2024. All Commissioners voting Aye, the motion carried.

Community Development Manager Kruschke provided updates on previous items. City Council approved the plats of Marthaler Addition and are moving forward. The next meeting is May 14 and will have a number of public harings.

Community Development Manager Kruschke provided the March Building Reports. The valuation and total number of permits are ahead of 2023 so far.

A motion was made by ... to adjourn was seconded by Peake at 5:35 p.m. All Commissioners voting Aye, the motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Greg Kruschke
Community Development Manager