

**MINUTES
DOWNTOWN PLAN COMMITTEE
EVANSTON PLAN COMMISSION**

Tuesday, August 14, 2007 / 8:00 a.m.
Evanston Civic Center, Room 2404

MEMBERS PRESENT.....Larry Widmayer (Chair), James Woods,
.....David Galloway, Diane Williams (Evmark), Stuart
.....Opdycke

STAFF PRESENTJames Wolinski, Tracy Norfleet

CONSULTANTS PRESENTTom Smith (Duncan Associates)

.....

I. CALL TO ORDER / DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Chair Widmayer called the meeting to order at 8:10a.m.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The July 13, 2007 minutes were approved.

III. DISCUSSION: JULY 16-21 DESIGN CHARRETTE AND CLOSING PRESENTATION

Committee members discussed the June 21 and July 12 downtown planning community meetings, as well as the July 16-21 downtown design charrette (presentations and meeting summaries are available online at www.cityofevanston.org/downtown). Mr. Tom Smith, consultant, provided a summary of public comments received thus far:

- Downtown is a central place, and it functions well overall. It has historically had density, although it has experienced ups-and-downs over the years. People do not seem to understand that downtown is the only place in Evanston where density is allowed and that it is a better place for density than the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Urban design principles were strongly expressed during the charrette, especially in terms of maintaining the pedestrian experience (e.g., ground floor shops, density/scale/setbacks for new construction).
- Underutilized spaces were looked at during the charrette, and suggestions were made during the 7/21 closing presentation (e.g., Fountain Square).
- People generally think of downtown as a shopping district instead of a residential area. There were more comments about retaining and diversifying retail than about residential

towers. Chair Widmayer asked if there were comments about chain stores vs. local retailers. Mr. Smith stated that people generally did not want to lose local retailers. Member Williams stated that there are lease restrictions at Old Orchard that prohibit stores from locating within a certain distance of the mall, even if there is a market.

- People generally liked the guiding principles but wished that some were stronger, such as energy conservation and LEED. Member Galloway thought it was unfortunate that the public was focusing on LEED instead of sustainable practices, such as driving less and biking/walking to downtown more. Mr. Smith agreed that lifestyle changes may be preferable and less costly than changing the building code. Member Galloway asked if there is a LEED program for streetscapes and public spaces. Discussion followed on the new LEED for Neighborhood Development program. Ms. Jeanne Lindwall, audience member, thought it was important to rehab and preserve buildings instead of tearing them down. Mr. Andrew McGonigle, audience member, suggested that the City have a construction debris recycling requirement. He also thought the LEED issue may be skewed due to lobbying during the downtown planning process. Chair Woods thought if LEED is the consensus, the City needs to make its buildings comply with LEED first.
- The function of downtown is to be a central place and hub of commercial activity. More density and ‘activity generators’ (e.g., shops, restaurants) are needed to make downtown work, even if this means more traffic. People do not seem to understand that shops and restaurants generate more traffic than residential development.
- People seem to want to park in front of shops instead of in garages, even though there are several parking downtown garages. Chair Widmayer asked if valet parking had been considered. Member Williams stated that this is similar to a trolley, which has high costs and often is not used to the fullest extent. Mr. Jim Corirossi, audience member, thought that several Plan Commission members spoke in contradiction to parking/sustainability goals at the August 8 public hearing for 708 Church. One member complained that she cannot find a space in a downtown garage, and another complained about the amount of time it takes to get from Ridge to downtown. He thought that people take cues from the Plan Commission.

Additional discussion followed. Member Opdycke asked if the 35-50 story height limit for the Fountain Square block (as indicated in 7/21 closing presentation) was based on consensus. Mr. Smith stated that height is a matter of taste and aesthetics. Some form based codes do not have height limits because the code considers how the building meets the street. The Fountain Square block and other sub-districts shown in the 7/21 closing presentation are meant to reflect the diversity in the downtown. It is important to also look at the opportunity sites shown in the presentation, which are fairly limited. Chair Widmayer stated that the infill and rehab concepts are also important, especially in the sub-districts corresponding to the traditional areas.

Member Galloway liked the ideas for Clark and the pedestrian gateway to Northwestern, as shown in the 7/21 closing presentation. He also liked the concepts for alleys as public spaces and thought that in addition to the alleys shown in the presentation, there could be an additional opportunity behind the Burger King on Clark. He thought that Wisconsin's Rustic Roads program could be a model. Mr. Smith stated that other cities have done similar things with alleys as proposed during the charrette. They have been successful because the spaces are constrained, but people understand that they are still working alleys. Mr. James Wolinski, Community Development Director, thought there was a question of what to do with dumpsters since there is not a lot of space for them.

Member Woods asked if the charrette proposal to change some of the streets to two-way, as shown in the 7/21 closing presentation, will be part of the downtown plan. Mr. Smith stated that it could be part of a long-term plan. Member Woods was particularly interested in changes to Sherman/Orrington/Davis and Elgin/Orrington that allow for public space.

Member Williams commented that the kiosks on Fountain Square, as shown in the 7/21 closing presentation, had the potential to be tacky. Member Woods liked the ones on Benson. Mr. McGonigle commented that similar ones in Paris are owned and maintained by the City.

Chair Widmayer asked about next steps. Mr. Smith stated that the consultant team is in the process of compiling focus group summaries and preparing an outline for the plan. Zoning recommendations will be part of the plan. There will be an update at the next Downtown Plan Committee meeting.

IV. SCHEDULE NEXT MEETING / ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 11, 2007 at 8am in the Civic Center.

Respectfully submitted,

Tracy Norfleet
Planning Division