

LAKEFRONT COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF
Wednesday, June 15, 2011, 6:30pm
Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Ave. Room 2402

MEMBERS PRESENT: M. Wynne, C. Burrus, J. Fiske, J. Grover, P. Berger,
M. Eberle, C. Ernst, D. Reynolds, M. Sloane

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: D. Gaynor, P. Belcher, N. Radzevich

OTHERS PRESENT: J. Shabica, M. Vasilko, A. McGonigle, M. White, H. Dimges
M. Struve, B. Seidenberg

PRESIDING MEMBER: J. Grover, Committee Chair

DECLARATION OF QUORUM

A quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

The meeting minutes of May 11, 2011 were approved with noted changes from P. Berger.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

M. White has wondered for a long time why downtown ended before the lakefront. Lake Michigan is a great asset for Evanston and there should be ways to turn that asset into better usage in terms of economic development. He is in favor of M. Vasilko's proposal to use the lake. He has concerns about the possibility of getting permits but emphasized that it's still something Evanston ought to pursue in terms of being able to generate additional tax revenue. Clark St, the division between Northwestern campus and Evanston lakefront, is an area that Northwestern is looking at developing with performing arts venues and we ought to be looking at having the Evanston side of Clark St consistent with that plan by having retail stores and so forth, almost like a mini beach town, generating those additional retail sales.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

M. Vasilko provided the committee with a packet of material which included responses to comments made at the May 11, 2011 meeting. He didn't go over each response but noted that one question in particular stood out for him. "*What are you looking for from this committee?*" M. Vasilko wants the committee to understand that he is not here because he wants to do something to the lakefront. His proposal is a direct response to Evanston's need for a new significant source of tax revenue. He is looking for the committee to:

- provide constructive criticism to help him refine the proposal
- achieve a consensus about the list of building types that should be considered for the market study and cost estimates.
- recommend a formal market study by an independent market research group
- recommend that a formal cost estimate be prepared for the configuration of revenues illustrated
- recommend that Shabica Associates do a topographical survey of the lake bottom

Once these steps have taken place, a conceptual package of information can be assembled giving guidelines to investment groups who respond to a request for proposals. This committee should reassemble at that time to evaluate the merits of each proposal.

M. Vasilko presented a new illustration with the development site directly east of Northwestern campus. Evanston and Northwestern could each benefit from a collaboration regarding lakefront development and this is a way of sharing the expansion. The size of the island would depend on information from a topographical survey but it would be large enough for what he hopes to have for Evanston, a convention center, a hotel and a marina.

C. Burrus is still very much of a proponent of a marina. She sees Evanston as a beach summer community along the notation of entertainment venues in one way; but said we need much more of a critical map of entertainment venues and not necessarily one central draw. This will help us more long term giving a variety of options. Chicago is really the draw for major entertainment. She doesn't believe we can get a major draw coming to Evanston for concerts or conventions. We have to have a variety of venues throughout the city.

M. Wynne agreed that Chicago is always going to be there for the very big names. We need to add more types of cultural draws in a variety of places so that we stimulate what we already have in terms of our economic space. She still has issues with the marina and thinks working with Northwestern will make this even more complex. They're not in the profit business so she doesn't know how this would work.

J. Grover said we can agree that Evanston needs additional tax revenue. Is this concept the only way to address our need or should we wait out a couple of things that are brewing in the arts community with the Noyes center, the Varsity Theatre and our Evanston arts groups. Let's see how that unfolds and whether the arts community itself can gather toward some kind of larger arts facility. And maybe there are additional source of revenue at our lakefront that are compatible to the master plan's recommendation for finding the highest and best use of that public lakefront. A subcommittee of the Economic Development Committee of the City Council may not be the most effective venue to discuss the concept. The Evanston 150, which is a bigger community venue, would give a concept like this a larger audience and perhaps also get the community engaged in it.

P. Berger agrees with respect to the tax revenue issue in general, but still thinks we're way out in front of any analytical process that would make sense at this stage. He said M. Vasilko is to be commended for getting out in front and beginning the discussion but a lot more discussion has to be brought in.

D. Reynolds said in large cities, most arts organizations don't support themselves; they get almost half their funding from donors. It would be tough for Evanston to raise the kind of money to support a venue the size of 2,500 to 3,000 seating. He thinks Evanston would be looking at something more on the line of Skokie's Northshore Center of Performing Arts, which is the size (850 seat theatre) we might be able to support. Unfortunately that operation is not profitable. It cost the City of Skokie around a half million dollars a year to support it. They've started taking money out of their capital improvement fund to support the center's needs. He doesn't see Evanston's ability to raise enough money or have great enough attendance to support a large venue.

M. Wynne said this in not a 2011 issue and mentioned a case in 1954 where Evanston fought a proposed zoning change that would have allowed a developer to build Plaza del Lago on the lakefront. Evanston likes having a passive lakefront that is residential and for all those years, people said we're going to let our downtown be our downtown and let our lakefront be our lakefront. The lakefront master plan may be four years old but people came out for 10 meetings over ten months to develop that plan. She said there is so much economic development happening with our economic development department. We would be short sided

to look immediately to the lakefront for a silver bullet. We have so many other aspects we need to keep working on.

P. Berger noted that approximately 100 out of 75,000 residents attended the meetings for development of the lakefront master plan. Should we be thinking about the next 25 years and what is best for the next generation or the next two generations rather than preserving the lake front for the prior generation. We know personally from the whole taxing structure that if we were to continue in this direction we have to find other ways to be able to fund the city or this decline will continue and the next generation will have a passive lakefront with a horrendous tax base where many of the people will not be able to afford to live here.

C. Burrus agreed that the attendees of the lakefront master planning meetings were not necessarily a citywide representation of what Evanston is and what Evanston needs. If we want a passive lakefront and we don't want large buildings and we don't want real commercial, at least let's do interim steps to make it more of a resort summer community to draw more people to the lakefront. We have the opportunity to bid more on the lakefront. Bike rentals, Umbrella rentals, or a more substantial café for example. She agrees with D. Reynold's comment about arts fundraising. It's not there; not going to happen.

C. Ernst said his vision of the lakefront is something that has passive usage but also has activities going on. The idea of bicycle rentals and low impact things such as that are wonderful. One of the issues with the lakefront is that there is no public transportation to the lakefront. He suggested that a tram that went to the lakefront from downtown on weekends during the summer would increase usage of the lakefront. People are not being excluded from the lakefront it's just not easily accessible which is one of the reasons why he thinks an intensive plan in the lake doesn't fit in. He said there are other venues or other options we also need to explore in the city. There are places around Evanston where you can put development that is activity / economic generators.

M. Wynne noted that transportation to and from the lakefront was discussed a lot in the master plan. The city offers a free and discounted beach token program. In addition they just started a 10 punch beach pass for Evanston youth 13-18. You'll see families from Chicago all along the lakefront. They don't necessarily go to the beach they just set up a tent and have all day volley ball or soccer. That's partly why the lakefront plan talks about not having a festival or an event every single weekend. The discussion was that we should have the lakefront be there just for what ever you want and not have it booked with festivals and events every weekend.

P. Eberle said M. Vasilko brought us together as a way of finding a source of revenue for the city and a new tax base. One way of increasing the size of Evanston is building out the beach and filling in the land behind it and then over time filling that in. Unfortunately that isn't the way of solving our current tax problems. We would be carrying massive costs as a city, increasing our problems for generations to come. In the end we would end up with a beautiful business district behind the lakefront but it doesn't solve our tax problems.

M. Vasilko disagreed that the lakefront master plan was a broad approval by the city of Evanston. Most of the people who participated in the visioning process were residents who lived within 2-3 blocks of the lakefront.

A. McGonigle agrees that transportation from downtown to the lakefront is vitally important. The concept of looking to raise more tax revenue from the Evanston residents by making them use the lakefront more is a negative concept when considering a large number of these people are underprivileged. The people that we need to bring in revenue are the people who live outside of our city and that's a radical concept that people need to engage constructively. We have a

lakefront that we need to share; how do we share it; how do we get people to our lakefront; how do we attract them into our town; and with what type of venues. We've got to wrap all those things together and utilize the resources we currently have. He's not saying the marina or arts complex is right or wrong, but he thinks we need to look at what we currently have. We have to accept that we need to bring the people in to spend the revenue because we don't have the revenue in town. M. Vasilko's antidotes are better spent trying to develop a process or work on another planning scenario within the framework of the city.

J. Grover suggested maybe one of the recommendations of this committee is to update the lakefront master plan; maybe a recommendation is to consider pulling aspects of M. Vasilko's concept for further study and discussions such as a pier, a restaurant or some of the things C. Burrus suggested. The committee agrees to the premise that we need to develop new tax revenue and we can all agree that the lakefront is one Evanston's best assets. At the next meeting the Lakefront Committee will formulate a recommendation to pass on to the economic development committee.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

SELECTION OF NEXT MEETING DATES

The next meeting has been scheduled for 6:30pm on Thursday, July 14 at the Civic Center in room 1700.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Note: minutes are not verbatim