

**VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST  
PLAN COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES  
MARCH 7, 2019**

A meeting of the Village of River Forest Economic Development Commission was held on Tuesday, March 7, 2019, at 7:00 p.m. in the First Floor Community Room of Village Hall, 400 Park Avenue, River Forest, Illinois.

**1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: Commissioners Fishman, Gottlieb, Cragan, Armalas, and Chairman Crosby

Absent: Commissioners Kilbride and Kirk.

Also Present: Village Administrator Eric Palm, Assistant Village Administrator Lisa Scheiner, Assistant to the Administrator Jon Pape, Management Analyst Sara Phyfer, Village Attorney Greg Smith, John Houseal, of Houseal Lavigne Associates

**2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - FEBRUARY 12, 2019**

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Fishman and SECONDED by Commissioner Gottlieb to approve the February 12, 2019 meeting minutes of the Plan Commission.

Ayes: Commissioners Fishman, Gottlieb, Cragan, Armalas, Crosby

Nays: None

Motion Passed.

**3. PUBLIC HEARING - COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Chairman Crosby explained the purpose and process of the public hearing. Assistant Village Administrator Scheiner swore in all parties wishing to speak.

John Houseal, Houseal Lavigne Associates, introduced himself and stated that he is the Village's planning consultant. He described the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan and the process that was followed to obtain public input and draft the plan. Mr. Houseal summarized each section of the plan.

Chairman Crosby invited members of the audience who had signed in to come to the podium and share their comments.

Dan Lauber, 7215 Oak, discussed his concerns about the plan, including the discussion regarding relocation of the Public Works facility to a location outside the Village, the impact of the traffic control upgrades and the safe routes to school plan. He called for a phased approach to implementing changes. Mr. Lauber stated that at a previously held workshop regarding the comprehensive plan, participants raised issues regarding the adequacy of street lighting and affordable housing. Mr. Lauber stated that he did not believe the draft comprehensive plan

sufficiently addressed either of those issues. He suggested changes to the plan to address preservation of existing affordable housing and inclusion of regulatory language requiring that new development include a certain number of affordable housing units in exchange for zoning relief. Mr. Lauber urged the Village to maintain the existing zoning restrictions regarding building heights and grant relief only as a density bonus in exchange for affordable housing units.

Marilyn Thomas, 7911 North, echoed Mr. Lauber's comments regarding affordable housing. She stated that there is concern among people living in the TIF district regarding what their long term viability is for living in River Forest.

Phyllis Rubin, 411 Ashland, 6B, stated that she would like to see a commitment to affordable housing and that the Comprehensive Plan could be stronger in this regard. She discussed her concerns regarding possible modifications to building height restrictions and the variations granted that allowed buildings to exceed existing height restrictions. Ms. Rubin shared her concerns regarding the installation of stop signs throughout the community and possible unintended consequences that could reduce pedestrian safety. She echoed Mr. Lauber's calls for testing changes in certain areas before implementing them throughout the community.

Tilda Agalanin, 1535 N. Forest, asked what role the Village would play in ensuring that residents receive fair market value for their property if it is sold. Chairman Crosby, Assistant Village Administrator Scheiner and Mr. Houseal explained that property sale and property acquisition are private transactions that are done on a voluntary basis and that the Village does not play a role or force residents to sell. Developers are not allowed under Village regulations to submit development proposals without the consent of the property owners.

Cheryl Phillips, 1535 N. Forest, discussed her concerns regarding affordable housing and asked how the Village would ensure transparency in reporting how TIF district funds are spent. Village Administrator Palm responded that the Village files an annual report with the State of Illinois that is available on the Comptroller's website and also on the Village's website.

Kris Cihlar, 7206 Oak, discussed concerns regarding affordable housing and how it is addressed in the plan and asked what "affordable" means in River Forest.

Laurel Ahlenius, 16 Gale, discussed her concerns regarding the Civic Center and the discussion regarding possible property acquisition. She also discussed her concerns regarding emergency response times if cul-de-sacs are installed on the streets near Madison Street. She called for additional traffic impact studies regarding emergency response and the impact on neighboring streets before changes are made.

Village Administrator Palm discussed current joint efforts to evaluate the current and future needs of the Community Center. He stated that the participating agencies solicited proposals to hire a consultant to conduct a space needs study but that the study had not yet begun and all discussions were preliminary at this point. He stated neighboring property owners do not have to sell their homes if they do not want to. In response to a follow-up question from a member of the audience, Administrator Palm explained that the Madison Street TIF District is a financing tool. He noted that within the TIF District property transactions have to include willing parties. He explained that while the Village does possess eminent domain authority, River Forest does not have a history of using that authority.

Marla Santucci, 21 Thatcher, discussed her interactions with the Community Center over the year and her concerns regarding parking demand for the current facility as well as a possible expanded facility. She discussed traffic patterns and what it is like to live along Thatcher Avenue given traffic volumes. Ms. Santucci shared her concerns about the impact of installing cul-de-sacs on streets in this area. She stated her fear is that the Village will use its eminent domain power and that she thinks there are better areas to locate the Community Center.

Mike Corr, 21 Gale, stated his concerns about a possible cul-de-sac on Gale Avenue and its impact on emergency response times and neighboring streets.

Emily Hampson, 11 Thatcher, asked for modified language on page 45 indicating that there is no intention to take property involuntarily to expand the Community Center. She discussed her concerns regarding cul-de-sacs, traffic, and pedestrian crossings. She stated that, although Thatcher Avenue is a 25 MPH zone, there is a lot of speeding in the area and asked for the Village's continued assistance in addressing that issue.

Julie Patterson, 7575 Lake Street, encouraged resident participation in the Village's processes and thanked everyone for coming. She shared her concerns regarding traffic, parking and pedestrian safety, particularly in the area of Lake and Lathrop. She suggested that the Comprehensive Plan be modified to include language encouraging resident participation in addressing parking concerns. She said that it would be helpful to include neighbors in the discussion who are familiar with the problems in the area.

Assistant Administrator Scheiner swore in additional parties wishing to speak.

Margie Cekander, 531 River Oaks Drive, asked for clarification about the process of adopting and implementing the Comprehensive Plan. She asked for additional opportunities for public comment. She shared her concerns regarding the wish list, priorities and cost of implementation of the recommendations in the plan. Ms. Cekander noted that Concordia University's Chapel is available to the public.

Charlie Okacek, 230 Keystone Avenue, shared his support for preserving and encouraging affordable housing in River Forest. He echoed Mr. Lauber's thoughts on requiring a portion of new development to include affordable housing units.

Hearing no further comment, Chairman Crosby closed the public hearing. He explained that the next step in the process would be for the Plan Commission to discuss and deliberate and make a recommendation to the Village Board of Trustees. He invited the public to stay for the discussion.

#### **4. DISCUSSION, DELIBERATION AND RECOMMENDATION REGARDING COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Commissioner Gottlieb suggested that the document be changed to recommend that certain measures recommendations, such as lighting, be implemented on a trial or gradual basis and that residents have the ability to voice their opinions. Mr. Houseal said the language could be added but stated that he does not believe it is appropriate for the Comprehensive Plan to regulate implementation. He said there are processes the Village uses to roll these items out and that it may take 20 years to implement all of the recommendations.

Commissioner Cragan stated that, since the document is aspirational it should say that the Village hopes for more public involvement and input when implementing changes. In response to a question from Mr. Houseal, Village Attorney Smith suggested adding or enhancing the narrative in the Implementation section that discusses use of the plan on a day to day basis.

Chairman Crosby stated he found it difficult that, throughout the document, there are many areas where he wants to drill down into specifics and that he found the action matrix helpful because the details will be worked out when recommendations are passed on to the Committees.

Chairman Crosby asked whether the State of Illinois defines affordability. Mr. Houseal said the document refers to affordable housing in several places and that he believes the resident who spoke earlier was talking about the area along North Avenue. He said there is a lot of housing that's probably technically affordable as deemed by the state but that there may be other properties that are not technically be affordable by the State's definition. Mr. Houseal continued that the Comprehensive Plan identifies the location of existing affordable housing, discusses its importance, the desire to preserve it and the desire to consider affordable multi-family housing as part of potential new development. He noted that the Village is working on a separate affordable housing plan to satisfy the State's requirement. He said Mr. Lauber got into specific detail about how to leverage inclusionary zoning. Mr. Houseal stated that he believes that regulatory specificity is better suited for an affordable housing plan than a Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Fishman stated that the Comprehensive Plan is a vision. Mr. Houseal agreed and said it is also a playbook for the next 20 years. He noted that it may take many years to implement the recommendations and that some of them may require in depth analysis first, such as the stop signs identified in the joint Safe Walking Routes to School study. The Comprehensive Plan reinforces and identifies what the Village is looking to accomplish over a 10 or 20-year horizon.

Mr. Houseal addressed the questions regarding cul-de-sacs, at Gale Avenue in particular. He said the plan illustrates the use of cul-de-sacs as a possible consideration at a few locations where it might make sense to implement them development as a package deal and it made sense. The plan specifically says cul-de-sacs have to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Commissioner Gottlieb said he and his neighbors requested a cul-de-sac on their street but it was denied because of opposition from residents on other streets because of the traffic impact. He said even when a request is presented it does not mean it will be implemented. Mr. Houseal added that the Traffic and Safety Commission and the Village's traffic consultant would carefully study the impact of a possible cul-de-sac's impact on the traffic volumes on nearby streets, emergency response times, etc. The Comprehensive Plan tries to flag things like cul-de-sacs that will likely come up and be prepared to discuss them but they are not advocating cul-de-sacs nor any particular development that would cause cul-de-sacs.

Commissioner Gottlieb asked that quotes around "affordable" on page 58 be removed and Mr. Houseal agreed.

Commissioner Cragan asked where it says in the Plan that the Village wants to preserve existing affordable housing. She asked that a stronger statement regarding the preservation of affordable housing be included in the Plan than that the Village is going to do an Affordable Housing Plan. Mr. Houseal stated that he believes the language in the Plan is stronger than that. He said it indicates where most of the affordable housing currently exists as well as the value of

maintaining and enhancing it over time. If property is to redevelop through market forces that we don't control, any new development ought to consider additional affordable housing. Mr. Houseal said the Plan talks about the importance of it to this and future populations and residents, however, it doesn't identify from a regulatory perspective exactly what the Village is going to do. In addition, the Village is developing an Affordable Housing Plan that will satisfy the state's legal requirement that the Village have one. If the Plan Commission wants to direct him to insert strong language they can do so.

Commissioner Armalas said he did not see a lot about preserving affordable rental property in the Plan. Mr. Houseal said zoning ordinances typically have to be silent on rental versus ownership housing. Village Attorney Smith stated that the Federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination on many bases. The courts have trended toward interpreting that Village's cannot make zoning decisions based on whether it's owner-occupied or tenant occupied housing because of the implications of who typically tends to own more property versus who tends to rent property in terms of socioeconomic status that draws down into race, gender, etc. The River Forest Zoning Ordinance is nearly silent on ownership structure and it is for that reason. Mr. Houseal said that the state's formula for determining what is considered affordable is fairly complex and is derived based on the cost of housing in the County. He said the formula considers both monthly rental price as well as purchase price.

Commissioner Armalas noted areas within the Comprehensive Plan that reference single family residential (e.g. the section on buffering with commercial activity) and asked that it be broadened so that it doesn't show preference toward single-family. Mr. Houseal said he understood and would correct that so that multi-family doesn't seem "less than."

Commissioner Armalas said residents commented at the hearing about fears of displacement and land taken through eminent domain and being forced out. He said he thinks quality of life can be impacted by involuntary property acquisition as well as the building heights. discussed in the document. He said he traveled on Madison Street and the alley along Madison. He noticed some of the homes are right on the alley. Commissioner Armalas said that putting up a five-story building with a fence, possibly abutting the property, would block sunlight and impact the neighboring property owners. He thought that the possible increased building height discussed in the Plan, particularly along Madison, was inappropriate.

Mr. Houseal stated that his recollection from the discussion at the previous Plan Commission meeting was to change language that says these weren't recommended heights but leave the heights and stories in there. He said the language was changed to discuss possible considerations and exploration, but the table was not changed and the heights are not a hard recommendation. Chairman Crosby agreed with Mr. Houseal's recollection.

Commissioner Cragan stated that she was very concerned about overlaying increased building heights along entire streets where there is existing residential property. She said the building heights stated on pages 37 and 103 purposely sends a signal to developers. She said she does not want the building heights in the document because they are too prescriptive and that they are jumping zoning. Commissioner Cragan asked the attorney whether this language could create legal ambiguity because of the difference between the current Zoning Ordinance regulations on building height versus what is in the Comprehensive Plan.

Village Attorney Smith responded that there is no ambiguity because this is a planning document, not a zoning document. He said there are multiple factors the DRB considers when reviewing a planned development including compliance with the Comprehensive Plan as well as the impact of the development on surrounding property owners. He said, in some cases, the applicant may be required to submit additional analysis and evidence regarding possible impacts. Village Attorney Smith said that, by having this information in the Plan, plan the community would be signaling that buildings of these heights might be appropriate in a certain case, but it does not guarantee it. He said if the Village denies a planned development permit to an applicant and a judge is asked to review the decision the judge could look at the effect a building has on the neighbors as an equally important factor.

Mr. Crosby said this is an area that he struggles with and that he has flipped his perspective. He stated that the DRB has not denied an application based on building height and that the approved height exceeds current zoning regulations every time. He said that this matter has to be addressed and reevaluated.

Mr. Gottlieb asked where there are so many variances from the code. Mr. Houseal said that it is his professional opinion that the Village's current zoning regulations are out of date based on contemporary development practice and do not reflect a viable development envelope. He said that regardless of what people think the height should be, every developer that has come forward has made a pretty compelling case to go higher than what is allowed. He thought it was interesting, both on Chicago Avenue for the senior project and Lake and Lathrop, a lot of the residents came out and suggested the Village reexamine its Zoning Ordinance in response to the pattern of granting height relief. Mr. Houseal suggested that the Village take a step back, not in reaction to a development proposal, but proactively to analyze the matter and write a code that meets the market requirements and works for the community.

Commissioner Gottlieb stated that, in order to change that, the Village doesn't need the Plan Commission saying it prescriptively but asked Mr. Houseal if he thinks that would help. Mr. Houseal said the yin and yang of the plan is safeguarding the Village's character, neighborhoods, charm, and quality of life with the need to appropriately accommodate new investment in the community's limited commercial opportunities. He said the Comprehensive Plan suggests the Village examine the Zoning Ordinance and be as aggressive as appropriate to get desirable development and investment in a way that maintains quality of life.

Commissioner Armalas said developers always look to make developments bigger and denser and reiterated his concern regarding the possible increases to permitted building heights.

Chairman Crosby noted that the charts referenced are very specific to properties. He said there are areas on Lake Street where he doesn't support a 50-foot building height but there are other areas where he would. As he gets more specific it starts to make sense to him but as a Commission they need to evaluate whether or not they want the table in the document.

Commissioner Cragan clarified that she supports transit-oriented development where it makes sense but her concern, and what she thought she heard echoed repeatedly from the public, was that it appears the charts overlay entire street lengths. Her concern is that by making this suggestion they're also suggesting that the Zoning there would then be changed from residential to commercial where it's currently all residential.

Mr. Houseal said the tables don't suggest changing land use or zoning and clarified that the zoning standards in these corridors related to commercial development should be examined. He reiterated that the Comprehensive Plan is not zoning.

Ms. Cragan clarified that what she means is that houses may be acquired for commercial purposes, which is what happened in Chicago and Harlem. She stated it's a signal to the homes on that block and other similar blocks, and the homes that are behind it that moved into a residential area, to come and tear down the housing and put up something taller. She suggested that it is welcoming that change and it seems to be fighting against the notion that the Village wants to preserve character and affordable housing.

In response to a question from Chairman Crosby, Commissioners Fishman, Crosby and Gottlieb stated that the charts regarding building height on pages 37 and 103 should remain in the proposed Comprehensive Plan. Commissioner Fishman stated that, as a DRB member, she would prefer to have it in. Commissioner Gottlieb stated that the Village needs to attract business and if it helps change the Zoning regulations they should provide that guidance. Chairman Crosby stated he is ok with it in here and would hope and expect restrictions such as setbacks on upper floors and other tools to reduce the impact on other areas. Commissioners Cragan and Armalas stated that the charts should not be included. Mr. Houseal and Mr. Crosby noted their discussion regarding the Lake and Lathrop development and stepping back upper floors. Mr. Houseal stated that there will be public hearings before zoning changes are made and anticipates that they would be robustly attended meetings.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cragan, Mr. Houseal said the building heights were derived by examining buildings that were approved or that already existed along these corridors. He said there are a lot of new and old developments that do not comply with existing zoning.

Chairman Crosby stated that Assistant Village Administrator Scheiner pulled information from the Forest Park Zoning Ordinance regarding maximum building heights along Madison Street. He noted that that east part of Madison has a limit of four stories or 50 feet. The west part of Madison cannot exceed five stories or 60 feet in height. Mr. Houseal described buildings along Harlem Avenue in River Forest that have fewer stories and lower ceiling heights in the residential units than what is built today. He described a new development on Madison Street in River Forest to provide context. Commissioner Armalas pointed out that the development on Madison Street in Forest Park isn't shading their residents and he might have a different view of height on North Avenue than on Madison Street.

Chairman Crosby said the attorney has advised that it requires majority to remove the tables from the document.

Commissioner Cragan noted the time the Commission has had to review the document and asked whether they voting on what's in front of them as-is and whether there is an opportunity to hear concerns. Village Attorney Smith stated that the Plan Commission is able to make a vote on the document before them with changes made. If a majority votes in favor a written recommendation, which has been prepared, it will be sent to the Village Board. Chairman Crosby stated that when he referred to other Commissions and Committees taking action he was referring to the implementation phase after the Village Board approves the document.

Mr. Houseal said before the draft Comprehensive Plan came to the Plan Commission, Village Staff suggested that it be routed through Sustainability, Historic Preservation, Traffic and Safety, and Economic Development Commissions and Bicycle Task Force to get obtain and include their comments. He noted that not every recommendation of every Commission was included. For example, the EDC wants the maximum building height in the tables higher. He said there was debate among 100+ people regarding aspects of community life that has been boiled down to the version before them. He thinks it's important to underscore what the attorney said, which is that there can be a recommendation to approve the Comprehensive Plan with the revisions requested by the Plan Commission that will be made before it is sent to the Village Board. He said the Village Board will see the record of the debate.

Commissioner Gottlieb asked Commissioner Cragan if she thinks the public needs more time. She asked how long it would be before this goes to the Village Board. Mr. Houseal said that if a positive recommendation is made the Village Board will consider it on April 8<sup>th</sup>. Village Attorney Smith noted that the public hearing was closed after the public had an opportunity to speak so the Plan Commission will not be accepting more public comment, however, there is oral and written comments to the Board available.

Commissioner Armalas noted that the bicycle route is not shown on Park Avenue south of Hawthorne Avenue and said this is a safe route to the Prairie Path. He said Forest Avenue is safe too but cutting through the cemetery is discouraged. Mr. Houseal noted that since the Plan Commissioners received their draft of the Plan, more fine-tuning has been suggested by the Bicycle Task Force and there are additional changes that will be made to the map. Mr. Houseal reviewed the changes regarding bike routes and racks based on the February 28, 2019 KLOA memo.

Commissioner Cragan suggested modifying the language regarding assembly of residential lots for Community Center expansion on Page 45, "Thatcher to Gale" section. She said she knows it doesn't say eminent domain but it infers that. Mr. Houseal suggested striking certain language to address this concern.

In response to a request from Commissioner Gottlieb, Village Attorney Smith reviewed the requested changes.

Assistant Village Administrator Scheiner stated that the Village received one comment to include the approved the Lake Street business districts in appropriate maps and to including a description of the business districts in the document. She said it doesn't modify any recommendations but memorializes their existence.

In response to a question from Commissioner Cragan, Ms. Scheiner stated that the minutes will reflect the debate and concerns expressed by Commissioners regarding the height charts on pages 37 and 103.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Gottlieb and SECONDED by Commissioner Fishman to recommend that the Village President and Board of Trustees approve the Comprehensive Plan with the changes requested by the Plan Commission.



Ayes: Commissioners Fishman, Gottlieb, Cragan, Armalas, Crosby  
Nays: None  
Motion Passed.

Mr. Houseal thanked all those who participated in the process of composing the Comprehensive Plan.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Gottlieb and SECONDED by Commissioner Fishman to approve the Report and Recommendation of the Plan Commission of the Village of River Forest.

Ayes: Commissioners Fishman, Gottlieb, Cragan, Armalas, Crosby  
Nays: None  
Motion Passed.

**5. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

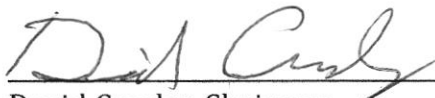
A MOTION was made by Commissioner Gottlieb and SECONDED by Commissioner Cragan to adjourn the Plan Commission meeting at 9:48 pm.

MOTION PASSED by voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted:



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Lisa Scheiner, Secretary



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David Crosby, Chairman  
Plan Commission

Date: 11/1/19