

VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
May 3, 2023

A meeting of the Village of River Forest Economic Development Commission was held on Wednesday, May 3, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in the 1st 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 6:05 p.m.

Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: Chairman Cuyler Brown, Commissioners Tim Brangle, Robert Graham, Katie Lowes, Carr Preston, Walter Wahlfeldt.

Absent: Commissioner Chiplunkar.

Also Present: Village Administrator Matt Walsh, Village Planning Consultant John Houseal.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chairman Brown welcomed the audience and acknowledged the concerns that residents might have about the proposed changes. Chairman Brown stated that the Commission and residents share agreement on many subjects. Chairman Brown provided a brief history of the project and explained the process. Chairman Brown explained the goal is to attract development options.

Teresa Peavy of the 000 block of Ashland read a letter to the EDC that addressed two items. Peavy stated disagreement with the claims that traffic modeling could not be done for the proposed zoning changes. Peavy asked that TIF funds be used to study the traffic impacts and impacts on village services, including schools. Peavy then expressed disappointment in Commissioner Graham's comments from the April meeting regarding commercial districts. Peavy explained that the neighborhood was beautiful when she moved in, and the Village has made it a commercial district by creating the TIF district. Peavy asked for recognition that the decisions will impact neighbors. Peavy noted that no additional information appeared to be included in the packet since the April meeting. Peavy also requested an economic impact study for any proposed development and questioned the proposed parking requirement. Peavy asked for reassurances that future variations would not be requested.

Annette Madden of the 000 block of Ashland asked how the EDC has arrived at its decision to proceed with a vote.

Ms. Madden asked that the EDC postpone their vote to an alternative meeting when Commissioner Chiplunkar is present.

Ms. Madden noted that she supports development in the village but not the particular high-density development that may emerge from these changes.

She also asked the commissioners to say no to the proposed zoning changes.

Beth Cheng of 00 block of Franklin gave public comment regarding the proposed zoning changes. Ms. Cheng spoke out against the proposed zoning recommendations from the Village Planning Consultant.

She reported that the resident feedback appears to be left out of the recommendation. She asked for additional explanations to the residents' questions. Ms. Chang also asked if the Village could create a workshop with residents, developers, and planners on the soon to be vacant Madison St. demolition site. Ms. Cheng asked the commission to alter some of the following zoning requirements to favor residents' interest: building height, floor area ratio, lot area per unit and parking requirements. She also asked that the cul-de-sac be removed from the images as it does not relate to the zoning requirements.

Renee Duba-Clancy of the 00 block of Franklin reiterated her opposition to the zoning recommendations. Ms. Duba-Clancy worried about the quality of developer that would be attracted to the site. She asked that the Village take an incremental approach to increasing development along Madison St.

Freida Pantos made public comment regarding the proposed zoning changes. Ms. Pantos asked if a rental unit was being proposed.

Mr. Houseal stated that there are no proposed developments being considered.

Village Administrator Walsh noted that zoning regulations do not speak on whether buildings are owner occupied or rental.

Ms. Pantos stated that she did not support the proposed zoning alterations due to the possibility of rental units changing the character of River Forest.

3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES – April 5, 2023

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Graham and SECONDED by Commissioner Lowes to approve the minutes of the April 5, 2023 meeting of the Economic Development Commission. MOTION PASSED by unanimous vote.

4. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE UPDATE

Village Administrator Walsh noted that the Executive Director of the OPRF Chamber of Commerce was not able to attend tonight. Mr. Walsh noted that he heard the recent OPRF chamber event on Health and Wellness was a success.

5. DISCUSSION OF MADISON STREET & NORTH AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Administrator Walsh introduced John Houseal of Houseal Lavigne and provided some background on the corridor planning process.

In response to one of the questions from the Residence, Mr. Houseal explained the process the EDC took to get to this point. Mr. Houseal reminded everyone that this process is about creating the preliminary data for the Zoning Board of Appeals to then consider. Mr. Houseal stated that the presentation depictions were exploratory and will not even be included in the presentation to the Village Board.

Mr. Houseal responded to comments and questions from the public comments.

Mr. Houseal explained that the Village has previously made these zoning changes for past developments.

He further explained that attempting to analyze potential impacts the proposed zoning changes may create in the Village before a development has been proposed is not a regular practice and difficult to do. He reminded everyone that any proposed major development in the Village is required to display that proper traffic measures will be taken place and many of the other concerns residents have voiced are not negatively impacted.

Mr. Houseal also addressed comments made in a letter to the Wednesday Journal regarding the EDC recommendations.

Chairman Brown reminded everyone that this is not a final recommendation.

Member Preston stated the changes would allow the Village to choose the best potential development and stated that the Village has a robust review process that allows for public input.

Member Graham noted that financing for projects is difficult in today's environment.

Member Graham apologized for their comments regarding the location of real estate. He reminded residents that developments take time and that he thinks nothing is happening quickly and that nothing is on the table.

Member Lowes stated the importance about publicizing information to the public and to be transparent. Chairman Brown agreed.

Commissioner Brangle stated that in the past the EDC has put forth recommendations with qualifications and that may be an option to consider.

Mr. Brangle stated that from his professional experience, this sort of zoning code review is happening in many other villages/cities in the area.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Wahlfeldt and SECONDED by Chairman Brown to recommend that the Village Board refer the zoning changes as proposed in the memo from Houseal Lavigne to the Zoning Board of Appeals for consideration. The proposed zoning changes are also to accompanied by resident input that was provided during public comment.

MOTION PASSED by unanimous vote.

6. CONTINUED DISCUSSION REGARDING BUSINESS COMMUNITY RETENTION/SUPPORT STRATEGIES AND COMMUNICATION

None.

7. DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

Administrator Walsh provided brief updates on the demolition of the Madison Street site and the Lake & Lathrop project.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Graham and SECONDED by Commissioner Preston to adjourn the May 3, 2023, meeting of the Economic Development Commission at 7:35 p.m. MOTION PASSED by unanimous vote.

Respectfully Submitted:

Matt Walsh, Village Administrator

Date: _____

Cuyler Brown, Chairman Economic Development Commission