

**PRAIRIE TOWNSHIP ZONING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MAY 17, 2011 SPECIAL MEETING**

Members Present: Howard Balzer, Christopher Finn, Glen Hymer, Hulda Moffitt, Bruce Whyte

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Connie Swisher, zoning inspector; Dana Scott, zoning clerk; Chris Rymer, alternate

Call to Order: Mr. Balzer called the special meeting of the Prairie Township Zoning Commission to order at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 17, 2011, at the Township Hall.

Meeting Minutes:

Mr. Balzer asked for a motion to approve or correct the April 26, 2011, Prairie Township Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes.

Mr. Hymer made a motion to approve the April 26, 2011, Prairie Township Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes as written.

Mr. Whyte seconded the motion.

Roll call as follows:

1. Glen Hymer Aye
2. Hulda Moffitt Aye
3. Bruce Whyte Aye
4. Christopher Finn Aye
5. Howard Balzer Aye

The motion was approved unanimously.

Old Business:

Big Darby Town Center Master Plan Questions

Ms. Swisher distributed to each Commission member a list of questions written by Mr. Whyte. The list includes Town Center general questions and property owner specific questions that will likely be posed to the Zoning Commission by Township residents, especially during the public hearing on the adoption of the Master Plan.

Adoption Process for Big Darby Town Center Master Plan

Ms. Swisher said that she was going to continue her review of the Big Darby Town Center Master Plan from the April meeting. It is important for the Township Zoning Commission to have a thorough understanding of the Plan's contents so that the board will be prepared to undertake its function in the adoption process.

PRESENTATION 2 HIGHLIGHTS

ECOLOGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Protection of Tiers 1, 2, and 3

The Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan¹ prioritized protection of environmentally sensitive lands by designating three tiers of sensitivity. All tiered lands are to be prioritized for protection through land acquisition and other programs.

The message underlying all of the Accord design principles is that the ecosystem services of the Big Darby Creek Watershed must be protected and restored. The planning principles highlight the importance of preserving ecological systems and using them as the basic underpinning for all development strategies.

The Town Center Master Plan is designed to meet the land use recommendations and water quality goals of the Accord.

Tier 1

Tier 1 lands are the primary priority for protection through land acquisition and other programs. Resources within Tier 1 are significant in maintaining the overall health of the Big Darby Watershed. No development is recommended in Tier 1. Resources include:

- 100-Year floodplain
- Wetlands
- Critical groundwater recharge & pollution potential zones

Tier 2

Tier 2 lands are the secondary priority for protection through land acquisition and other programs. Resources within Tier 2 include.

- Highly erodible soils
- Contiguous wooded areas greater than 3 acres in size

¹ *Big Darby Accord Watershed Master Plan*, 3.0 Land Use Plan, pages 3-6 and 3-7, 2006.

Tier 3

Tier 3 lands are the third priority and provide habitat connectivity and natural resource buffers. They are well-suited for passive recreation and naturalized stormwater treatment.

Water Quality & Stream Restoration

The Darby Accord emphasizes the need for water quality protection and effective control of stormwater runoff.

Environmentally sensitive stormwater management can enhance habitat by reducing the volume and flow rate of stormwater runoff with naturalized detention and infiltration elements upstream of receiving water bodies. The use of native plants in alternative stormwater management systems will increase local wildlife diversity and provide aesthetic benefits to people in the surrounding developments.

Stream restoration is another critical component of the Accord. The restoration of the impaired Hellbranch Run subwatershed, including Hamilton and Clover Groff Runs, is a priority.

OEPA Water Quality Standards

The Darby Accord general stormwater permit enforces Franklin County's riparian setback regulations and also requires that stormwater management practices meet water quality volume to comply with OEPA² water quality standards. The general stormwater permit also specifies infiltration requirements for the Big Darby Watershed.

Water quality management requirements for the Town Center will be set by Franklin County.

The stormwater strategy proposed in the Town Center Master Plan exceeds the minimum requirements of current regulations.

There is some concern among stakeholders that current stormwater requirements (drafted in 2007) are not stringent enough to protect high-quality aquatic ecosystems and the rare species they support. However, the OEPA is updating its stormwater permit for the Big Darby Watershed. The permit is to be determined in November 2011. The OEPA has reviewed the recommendations in the Town Center Plan, and the organization agrees with the proposed performance criteria.

TOWN CENTER SITE

Big Darby Accord Site

Originally envisioned to be located between West Broad Street and Interstate 70, the site for the Town Center has been moved south—with the majority of its 2,500 acres being located

² OEPA – Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

south of West Broad Street. The southern portion of the Town Center falls primarily in Prairie Township.

Northern Portion of Site

The northern portion of the Town Center falls primarily in Brown Township. Because of significant environmental constraints, the northern portion of the site is not well-suited for centralized urban development.

This northern portion is subdivided by a break between the Hellbranch Run and Middle Big Darby Creek subwatersheds. Agricultural drain tile lines running north to south into McCoy Ditch follow hydric soil linkages and indicate historical drainage patterns that may be restored for naturalized stormwater management.

The Brown Township portion of the original Town Center site also contains a number of isolated, forested wetlands.

Southern Portion of Site

The southern portion of the Town Center site falls primarily in Prairie Township. While some environmental constraints exist in this area, there are larger tracts of land along West Broad Street that are suitable for urban development.

There are fewer ecological restrictions in this section than there are north of the railroad right-of-way.

Further south, portions of the Darby Dan airport property and adjacent parcels are also suitable for development from an ecological perspective.

FRAMEWORK OF OPEN SPACE

Town Center Urban Core

The Town Center's urban core will be the most densely populated area in the Darby Accord. The Town Center Master Plan proposes an interconnected network of open space that begins with environmentally sensitive lands (Tiers 1, 2, and 3) identified in the Accord. Additionally, the plan identifies historic drainage patterns and the best locations for passive stormwater treatment facilities and wetlands.

All of these areas will work together and become a comprehensive open space framework that creates a beautiful, thriving, and functional system throughout the planning area.

Key to Making It Work

The key to making the concept work over time is to identify different types and functions of open space and then link them to management and maintenance structures. For example:

- Native landscapes require minimal upkeep, but restoration will need to be done to damaged systems within the Darby Watershed and within the Town Center area.
- Larger structures and systems can be easily linked and coordinated with Metro Parks, Franklin County Soil & Water, and other civic conservation and park services.
- Smaller green spaces and corridors can be managed and maintained by Homeowners Associations (HOA) or master developers as amenities within the plan.

TRANSPORTATION

New I-70 Interchange Not Needed

The 2006 Darby Accord looked broadly at transportation and connections, providing some general goals and guidelines without conducting a comprehensive traffic analysis.

Also in the absence of a comprehensive thoroughfare analysis for the Town Center and its immediate surrounding area, the Town Center Master Plan identifies some basic strategies for how to handle the expanding population over the next 20 to 30 years.

These strategies include three scales of intervention: (1) highways, (2) surface connections, and (3) access management within the Town Center framework.

Based on Urban Design Associates' conclusions, a new interchange at I-70 is neither justified nor needed to support the Town Center as conceived. ODOT³ is not currently evaluating this alternative, and no design investigation has begun.

Other Arterial & Potential Connections

In the absence of an interchange at I-70, the consultants evaluated other arterial and potential connections for linking the Town Center with other parts of the city.

- Opportunities were identified for new connections to the south, providing access to I-270 at Exit #5 (Georgesville Road).
- The consultants also identified a potential benefit to previous plans for a grade-separated extension linking Galloway Road to Hilliard Rome Road, providing an additional crossing over the railroad tracks.
- West Broad Street will function as a central spine to the Town Center development. Meetings with ODOT were not only supportive of strategies to beautify this stretch of West Broad Street by incorporating a greenway on each side of the road, but also to eliminate driveway access in favor of more frequent intersections with local streets and a limited number of signalized intersections that will calm traffic and provide safe pedestrian and bicycle crossings.

³ ODOT – Ohio Department of Transportation

FINANCIAL AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Town Center Master Plan responds to the directive to create an implementable plan that reflects market realities and presents an attractive opportunity for private developers.

Additionally, a main goal for the development of the Town Center is to generate additional revenue for land conservation and other Accord purposes.

Market Realities

In 2006, the vision included 5,000 units of housing and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space with an anticipated build-out of about 20 years. In 2011, there is no justification for this amount of development.

The Town Center Master Plan recommends a phased approach to construction with a total of 3,500 residential units and 700,000 square feet of commercial space and an anticipated build-out of about 30 years.

Revenue Model

Utilizing a revenue model developed for the Accord that relies on (1) tax-increment financing (TIF), (2) developer contributions, and (3) additional fees imposed by a New Community Authority (NCA), it is estimated that the Town Center will generate significant amounts of additional revenue. However, the amount generated is unlikely to cover the costs of conserving all of the land designated for conservation by the Darby Accord.

The ability to structure a financing plan for the Town Center depends largely on the permitted uses of the revenues available for the project. The contributing local governments have placed certain restrictions on the use of the three identified revenue streams.

Development Entity & Master Developer

Several development directions were explored, but the Town Center Master Plan outlines only one way forward.

To realize this vision, a development entity must be established that can negotiate with individual property owners, partner with them, and utilize land as equity in the project.

This entity would solicit a master developer to take on the Town Center development in its entirety with specific intent of realizing the Master Plan as conceived in the document.

The development entity, or authority, would be structured so as to be able to contract, acquire, hold, manage, and convey real property, as well as issue debt for development, public infrastructure construction, and land preservation.

The timeline of events related to the public/private partnership scenario could continue up to 53 years and includes the following steps:

- Step 1: Creation of authority;
- Step 2: Operating funds granted and allocated pending budget availability;
- Step 3: Landowner outreach and contract negotiation;
- Step 4: RFP issued for master developer; authority sells land to developer post-RFP;
- Step 5: Physical build-out of Town Center (30 years); and
- Step 6: Oversight by authority, upon completion of land purchases from bond issue (up to 20 years)

UTILITIES

Accord Agreement with Columbus

In the Big Darby Accord, the city of Columbus agreed to provide 5,000 residential equivalent units of sewer and water capacity to the Town Center without annexation. While this unprecedented policy change makes denser development possible in the Town Center, it raises questions as to how these utilities are to be installed, managed, and maintained.

Installation, Funding & Maintenance of Utilities

Sewer and water to the Town Center can be achieved with offsite gravity sewer extension, offsite water line extension, and a water storage tank.

It is highly likely that the biggest cost related to creation of the Town Center will be extending sewer and water infrastructure to the site. The total cost to construct these services is estimated at \$13.7 million. The mechanism for funding these improvements has not been resolved. However, several funding options exist, including applying a \$2,000/REU (residential equivalent unit) fee to all buildings that tap into the system.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) should be negotiated among the various jurisdictions to confirm the funding mechanism. This MOU should also address the cost of long-term maintenance of the sewer and water system services. Ideally, the managing entity (probably Franklin County) would secure a steady revenue stream for this purpose.

New Business:

Ms. Swisher said that she recommended that the Zoning Commission have two meetings in June in order to complete the review of the Town Center Master Plan by month-end. Although she had not heard from Franklin County as to where it was in the adoption process; according to the project schedule, the process is to reach Prairie Township as soon as July.

Following a discussion, by consensus, Commission members decided to hold a special meeting on Monday, June 27, 2011, and a regular meeting on Tuesday, June 28, 2011. Both meetings will be held at 3:00 p.m.

Next Meeting:

Mr. Balzer announced that the next meeting of the Prairie Township Zoning Commission will be Monday, June 27, 2011, at 3:00 p.m. at the Township Hall, 23 Maple Drive.

There being no further business before the Prairie Township Zoning Commission, Mr. Balzer adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Hulda Moffitt, Secretary

