

Downtown Overlay Zoning Ordinance Amendment

Public Presentation Meeting Minutes

February 16, 2010

Artcraft Theatre

57 N. Main Street

7:00 p.m.

Joint Meeting: Redevelopment Commission, Economic Development Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, City Council and Plan Commission

Present:

Fred Paris, Mayor

Krista Linke, Director of Planning

Rachel Pendleton, Associate Planner

Mayor Paris stated that the overall process started with the Comprehensive Plan in 2002. One of the goals of the Plan was to create design guidelines. The Gateways, Greenways & Redevelopment Study was commissioned by the Redevelopment Commission in 2009. The key elements are to maintain the architectural heritage for which the city is known. He explained that the Planning Department held a design guideline meeting and open house at the Artcraft Theatre previously and have also had Plan Commission meetings to get public feedback. The Design Guidelines and Greenways Systems Trail plans were created from these meetings.

Mayor Paris stated that the trails would start at I-65 and go west to Forsythe Street. Upgraded sidewalks will be installed from Forsythe Street into Downtown. Trails, upgraded lighting, landscaping, trashcans, and benches will be installed throughout the City - tying back to the current park system and connecting to Franklin College. He stated on State Road 44 East, the concept is to have a gateway built, near where the new fire station is being built. He stated that it will be an estimated 5-7 years to get everything completed. There is a possibility that with the stimulus money coming into the county that the project could start to move forward as early as 2011 or 2012, but reminded everyone that the project is part of long range planning.

The reasons we need Design Guidelines are as follows: protect the assets of the community, preserve community identity, enhance and protect property values, protect investments and prevent inappropriate development. Mayor Paris stated these elements are all key to what government should do to promote economic development and to protect the value of your property. He stated the next step that's recently been asked of the Planning Department is to go back and revisit the Comprehensive Plan. He stated we need to figure out where the next industrial areas and housing developments will go. We need to decide as a City how we want to see the land to the west and north develop where eventually the Franklin city limits and Bartersville and Greenwood will meet.

Rachel Pendleton, Associate Planner, stated that the Greenways, Gateways and Redevelopment Study established what the purpose of the Design Guidelines are going to be. The three main purposes are to preserve, restore and plan for future development. She stated that part of preservation is part of the

downtown commercial core. This includes preserving the commercial character, storefront bays, display windows, window articulation, and materials and architectural details. She stated the residential preservation includes things like roof lines, windows and doors, porches, architectural details, ornamentation and materials.

Ms. Pendleton stated that during restoration details are preserved or enhanced. She stated that sometimes people get confused between restoration and repairs. Sometimes repairs can do more harm than good in cases where they can be a quick fix. She stated that hopefully the guidelines will help people to restore their houses instead of repairing. Concerning residential restoring, if a house has materials that are dilapidated beyond repair, some things could be replaced with new items but the new elements should match the existing.

Ms. Pendleton stated that the City wants to make sure they are not dictating to you what your houses should like. She stated a big concern is the paint colors of houses. Houses will not be allowed to be neon colors, but the City is not going to make you restore your house to the original color either.

She stated the third purpose of the Guidelines is to plan for the future. How do we plan for Franklin? She stated that we want to mimic the existing rhythm of the architecture, complement existing details, do not copy exactly, do not introduce architectural styles of other regions, plan for signs, and make sure the sign ordinance doesn't restrict placement of signs over architectural detail. Ms. Pendleton stated that concerning commercial plans, we want to make sure we're not detracting from original historic structures. Things to be addressed included: display windows, signage bands, upper story vertical windows, 2-4 story heights, 20 foot storefront bays, parapet walls with cornices, and appropriate materials.

She stated that the current sign ordinance does not restrict placing signs on any part of the building. The future plan for signs includes addressing the following issues: Not changing amount of allowed signage, not covering architectural details, wall signs (painted and sign band), projecting signs (vertical and horizontal), awning signs, and window signs.

Ms. Pendleton stated that with residential planning, the biggest concern is detracting from historic houses. Additions cannot be added on the front of houses and additions and accessory structure should match the existing structure. Appropriate historic materials or modern materials which complement the historic materials should be used whenever possible.

Ms. Pendleton stated that she has received a lot of concern from property owners regarding enforcement and that there will be a lot of jumping through hoops just to make a simple repair. Building Permits will still be needed as before but there will be a Certificate of Appropriateness required in addition. The Certificate of Appropriateness will be an additional letter of approval that states that the project will meet the Downtown Overlay standards. There is currently no fee for the Certificate of Appropriateness. She stated that some of the basic things will go through Staff Review and other things will have to go through a Design Review Committee. Items that will not need review include any repairs without alteration, reroofing a house with the same shingles and sandwich board signs for businesses. The items would still need to meet the requirements of the Downtown Overlay Zoning District, but would not need review. Staff could review the following items: Re-siding, replacement of windows and doors that are like for like, painting, cleaning of brick, and window signs.

She stated that the Design Review Committee's purpose is to enforce architectural standards and to be a resource to applicants. The proposed committee members would be comprised of a Planning Department employee, three owners of a downtown business or property, and a design professional. She stated that the Staff and Design Review Committee will be available to help with resources such as contractors and suppliers for projects.

The proposed Downtown Overlay Zoning District boundary has not been determined. There are three areas proposed and the Plan Commission expressed at their last meeting that the consensus of the group was either Proposal 1 or Proposal 2. Input regarding the boundary was also collected from the public at the last public meeting held at the Artcraft Theatre on October 28th, 2010. The area includes the downtown area and also some residential area.

Ms. Pendleton stated there is financial assistance available to home and business owners. She stated there are incentives available such as tax credits, loans and grants. There is also a 20% federal tax credit and 20% state tax credit available but it requires that the restoration follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards of Rehabilitation in order to qualify for them. The Franklin Development Corporation, or FDC, has both residential revolving loan funds and commercial loans and grants. The FDC has low interest rates for low to moderate income families.

The next steps include a Plan Commission meeting on February 23rd, 2010 and following that there will be two City Council meetings with an introduction and hearing for the proposed Downtown Overlay Zoning Ordinance Amendment.

Comments and questions from audience members:

Scott Richardson, Monroe Street, questioned the residential standards and those that would be unable to afford repairs. He questioned if it would leave the houses looking worse. Ms. Pendleton stated that not being able to afford it won't prohibit you from making repairs. She stated it will prohibit people from taking something good and removing it. It will prohibit things like covering up windows. There are loans & grants available. Mayor Paris stated that the people who did the study looked at other communities and they feel this will help people keep their property values protected. Mr. Richardson questioned the where else this had been done. Mayor Paris stated in Muncie, Zionsville and Broad Ripple. Ms. Pendleton stated that there are cities all over Indiana and the US including downtown Indianapolis and New Albany, Indiana that have design guidelines in their downtowns.

It was questioned if they are standards not guidelines? Ms. Pendleton stated that there are standards that you would have to follow. If it says "shall" it shall be done and if it says "may" or "should", those are the guidelines. Mayor Paris stated there is also an appeal process that you can go through to appeal your case if you don't agree with the Committee's decision.

It was questioned how long it takes to get certificates? Ms. Pendleton stated that the Committee meets once a month, but if something simple that could be done by Staff review, it could possibly be issued on the same day.

It was questioned if the cities listed have had the guidelines in primarily commercial districts? Ms. Pendleton stated that no, they did residential too. It was questioned if a list of those cities could be obtained. The questioner stated that Noblesville rejected something like this a few years ago. Ms. Linke stated that there is a difference between guidelines and historic preservation commission, which is what

most bigger cities have. With a historic preservation commission you can only restore buildings back to their original materials. She stated that Franklin's guidelines are more flexible and allow for the use of more modern materials. She stated that Planning Department staff can provide lists of Indiana cities and others throughout the country that have design guidelines and will put them on the Planning Department's website.

The use of vinyl siding was questioned and if it would be allowed. Ms. Pendleton stated that there are different types of vinyl siding. This would be something that would go before the committee to determine if the vinyl would be along the same character with the rest of the house. It will also depend on if you are replacing all of the vinyl or just doing maintenance. Ms. Pendleton stated that all vinyl siding is not the same. There are different types/grades of vinyl and vinyl that is more appropriate for a historic house may be approved by the Committee.

It was asked by a member of the audience if the guidelines say no vinyl. Ms. Pendleton stated yes, but the Committee would have the right to approve what is historically appropriate. Mayor Paris stated that we trying to get away from siding that covers details and architectural features. The goal is maintain the architectural integrity. He stated there has also been a lot of discussion with windows. He stated the main goal is to keep the windows the right size. The committee has leeway to approve more modern materials. He stated that the FDC has adopted higher standards that would need to be followed in order to be eligible for low interest loans. The mayor responded that the FDC may require higher standards to be approved for a loan than the City would require.

Ms. Pendleton stated that under Section F in the Decision Criteria section, it spells out what the committee needs to consider when deciding on a case. She stated that a building is considered historic if it is listed in the Johnson County Interim Report.

Mayor Paris stated there was a lot of discussion at the Plan Commission meeting about the size of the Downtown Overlay district. He stated that is the belief of group that did the study, the Planning Department and Franklin Government that the downtown core lives and breathes and dies together. The goals are to get the homes back to single family investments and have home values climb.

It was asked if the FDC could have matching grants for residential homes. Craig Wells, FDC, stated that there are strictly loans right now. The FDC can consider matching grants as they get more funding.

It was asked if the financial capabilities of the homeowners be considered anywhere in the review process. Mr. Wells stated that the loan fund is for residential areas. There are certain rules set up by state and federal guidelines. It is primarily for low to moderate income households. Ms. Pendleton stated that as far as standards are concerned, they don't look at what the household income. There is some financial consideration with feasibility of the project but neither the Design Review Committee nor the Plan Commission will ask for financial information from the property owner.

Another member of the audience asked how the balance between the financial capability of the property owner versus the desired outcome of keep the historic value of the property? Mayor Paris stated the balance was made by not going all the way to a historic preservation ordinance and also being open to the idea of still allowing vinyl siding and windows. He stated the biggest thing with the standards is making sure things are the correct sizes. They are not trying to keep people from painting or maintaining their homes. He stated that we don't want to destroy the architectural look of the house.

It was asked about trying to correct mistakes of past home owners. Ms. Linke stated that it would be encouraged but wouldn't be required.

It was asked about a list of resources for remodelers or special materials. Ms. Linke stated that as part of the role of the Design Review Committee. The Committee will help with names of contractors and vendors and helping people with their projects. Ms. Pendleton stated that anyone can schedule a meeting with Staff at anytime to get help with resources.

Jeff Bergman, King Street, stated that he is concerned about diversity of incomes and age groups in the neighborhoods. He stated that the list of things required to submit for approval can be intimidating to them. He stated that the things that have been explained tonight seem a lot more approachable than the way the Guidelines read in the actual document. He questioned if the City is planning to help in other aspects such as sidewalks, streets and street trees? Mayor Paris stated that he wouldn't be against softening up the language of the document itself. He stated that the City has just finished assessing roads and sidewalks and need of repair. \$75,000 has been moved into sidewalk repair this year. He stated that we now have a Tree Board in place now with 2 certified arborists. The City is applying for a study grant for drainage on Yandes Street and Hurricane Street. He stated that the City is planning on funding that project internally without getting into government funds. Mr. Paris stated that his is talking to the people at Atterbury to discuss restoring the bricks on Yandes Street. Once the study is done, there will be a meeting with the people that live in that area to figure out how to improve drainage and the brick street.

It was asked what incentives there are for landlords to improve their properties. Mayor Paris stated that we need to walk before we run. He stated that the first round of financing from the FDC is based on income. The second round could be based on other things. As the property values go up, the landlords will want to sell.

Ms. Linke stated that there is a green questionnaire the staff would like everyone to fill out. She requested that comments and questions be written in as the staff wants to make the public as involved in the proposed Downtown Overlay Zoning District as possible and thanked them for coming.