

*R4C/R2A Advisory Meeting
August 14, 2013, 7:00pm
Basement Level Conference Room, Larcom City Hall*

In Attendance:

Julie Weatherbee, Chair
Sabra Briere
Wendy Carman
Carl Luckenbach
Nancy Leff
Ilene Tyler
Ethel Potts
Ray Detter
Ellen Rambo
Jay Holland

Any Dale is on the committee but will not be attending meetings.

New Charge to Committee

- Potts: The long, drawn out timeline seen from the background information can be explained by how infrequently meetings were held. There were 11 meetings. ORC met 10 times.
- Briere: Council will want to hear that there is support for what we come up with. Our committee reports to the Planning Commission even though we were appointed by City Council.
- Detter: What are we actually supposed to be doing? Bonnie Bona thought this was jeopardizing the entire R4C/R2A reorganizing effort. I told her no, we need to amend the findings but we are not starting over.
- Potts: What happens if Planning Commission still doesn't agree with our findings?
- Weatherbee: We will just have to cross that bridge when we get there.
- Briere: We need to think about why Planning Commission recommendations diverged from your recommendations – you need to be ready and able to reinforce, stand behind, and argue for your findings.
- Holland: Is there a new outcome you want?
- Weatherbee: Ultimate goal is that we produce something that is better than what we have currently, something that is better for everyone – landlords, renters, developers, homeowners.
- Holland: Do the recommendations track the Master Plan?
- Carman: The majority of R4C lots are nonconforming – they were laid upon existing structures. There is an interest to do something about this so that whenever homeowners in those areas want to do anything, they don't have to go through the ZBA. Planning Commission had a different goal so when staff presented our findings, they thought it didn't match their mandate.
- Leff: Our biggest goal, what everyone wanted, is to preserve the physical character of inner city neighborhoods. What it boils down to is protecting the single family unit, not permit their destruction and let them get replaced by big, group home structures. We never wanted to increase density. We want to preserve and protect existing neighborhoods. The infrastructure is already stressed in these areas and making bigger and bigger structures is simply incompatible.

Ground Rules

- Weatherbee: (description of roundtable format, proposed 3 minute speaking limit)
- Tyler: 2 minutes would be better (Potts and Leff second – 2 minutes agreed upon)
- Sabra: We need to establish a quorum. It should be half our total number plus one. (Six members to make quorum agreed upon.)
- Detter: Should planning staff participate? Some of us don't trust them but should they still come so that questions can be answered right away?
- Luckenbach: We owe the ORC and staff an opportunity to explain why they made the changes they did. They should be able to make their case.
- Tyler: Don't ask staff, but a member of ORC should be invited. We just don't want staff to be used as a buffer between us and the ORC. Staff won't even answer the tough questions. They will just say they will have to look it up. We can always ask our questions later or request an ORC member to come to a specific meeting to answer prepared questions. We could also sit in on their meetings. Or, they could present their findings directly to us, without staff filtering it first.
- Detter: In the amount of time we have to meet, the ORC won't have a meeting. They will just be waiting for us to present our findings.
- Tyler: We won't be convinced with filtered information from staff.
- Luckenbach: We should just let an ORC member come and present, without any discussion.
- Briere: This taskforce will be leading up to the Master Plan update. We aren't happy with lot combinations – the Master Plan recommends that staff look at lot combinations but they didn't. It just got lost over the years. Staff says they have nothing to do with it, that people go to the Assessor's office for lot combinations. So, how do we deal with maximum lot size?
- Tyler: This has been a mess since the 1960s.
- Holland: It's always been market driven, that's why.
- Weatherbee: Yes, it has always been market driven, but you can guide and limit the market in more preferable ways.
- Leff: We see now that the market changes so fast. Now it is families, not investors buying these properties. But if the housing is destroyed for big group housing, then the single family housing will never come back.
- Holland: People are converting two-families to single families right now.
- Leff: I am not talking about that. I mean big, group housing structures.
- Tyler: The problem is that the small lots aren't in compliance. They need a variance to make any change or repair, or even rebuild after damage. It is very hard for these homeowners to keep up single family homes in these zoning districts.

Briere Document and ORC "Comparison" Document

- Briere: I put this document together for another, casual meeting to show the similarities of the two reports and to ask why the ORC had made different recommendations than this committee.
- Weatherbee: (Explains that they will be going through the documents to cross off the issues they do not need to discuss and then from there they will prioritize the remaining issues.) There are two issues with parking. The ORC recommendation is different than original advisory committee recommendation – which is actually staff's interpretation of our

recommendation. Lot combinations need discussion. Overlays and massing is a big issue. Conflicting land use buffers was originally just for parking, then for parking and multi-family use, and then Planning Commission wanted it just for parking.

- Tyler: We definitely need to talk about buffers.
- Weatherbee: We only have 4 meetings so we have to prioritize.
- Leff: This will be very hard to address in only 4 meetings.
- Detter: My personal priorities coming into this are: limiting lot size – clearly writing in code that lot combinations are not allowed; and, eliminating designated student housing areas.
- Carman: In planning-terms, the student district issue does not differ from overlays.
- Weatherbee: We can't just think about our personal goals but think in terms of planning because we will be going to the Planning Commission with this.
- Potts: I agree with Ray. None of this will even happen if overlay districts in general are allowed and that process will take at least a year.
- Weatherbee: Send me your rankings (1 through 5) later.
- Briere: I have three related priorities: reinforce student neighborhoods, site design standards, and lot combinations. All three look at creating arbitrary rules that I haven't seen demonstrated well yet. They all require the Planning Commission to develop standards.
- Carman: Number one priority is the new zoning district, then lot combinations, and then parking. What is currently proposed is less parking than what even exists now. All parking recommendations are wrong because they were tied to density calculations. These need to be reconsidered. Lot combinations are a separate issue. I'm not sure we're allowed to have a maximum lot size.
- Luckenbach: What zoning districts allow fraternities and sororities? (Simultaneous conversation – answers were R2B, or that they require a Special Exception Use permit.) Lot combinations and overlay/massing are the priorities.
- Leff: Lot combinations, overlay/massing – all tied to Briere's three priorities. Then parking, and conflicting land use buffers – and buffers should be a simple one because we should just return it to what it was.
- Tyler: Same thing – lot combinations. Planning Commission told someone that maximum lot sizes are not allowed. We need to determine how much of a stand we can make on this topic if staff will just say that it is not legally permissible. We need this question answered and to find precedents. Also, we have to protect parking. We can't take away more and just make things worse.
- Potts: If maximum lot sizes are illegal then we need to find a creative solution. And the ORC didn't say it was illegal but that they wanted to deal with the issue on a case-by-case basis as they do with special exception uses. I would also like a steeper graduation for parking.
- Detter: Lot combinations are central – not eliminating them but setting up parameters. Overlays for student/group housing shouldn't be left up to Planning Commission. We have high rises for students now so we don't need the 1992 idea for having group housing in these areas. We don't need density but character.
- Rambo: Lot combinations, overlays/massing, not interested in student housing how it is written – it is too vague – but would be interested if it were closer to downtown.
- Holland: Seems like lot combinations is the highest priority so I will say that too. Then parking. Also, the University of Michigan is the only one here not regulated and they need to be represented. Who here owns homes in R4C? (Leff, Weatherbee and Detter raise their hands). You knew the zoning when you bought those homes and not you want to change it...

Weatherbee: Both homeowners and rental owners are important here and both interests need to be represented.

Holland: There just needs to be a better balance. It can't just be all homeowners dominating the discussion.

Weatherbee: Lot combinations, parking does have an impact on all others, buffers will also affect these uses. I could go either way on parking. On one hand I see places with no parking and on the other I see homes being torn down for parking. And the phase 2 group housing was surprising. It's not a good idea to create a student ghetto.

Nancy: To respond to Rambo's comment about reduced student housing areas, the shape is arbitrary. One time a person came in and asked if the size could be tweaked and they just pushed it back a couple blocks. One person on staff can just change the size and shape.

Briere: I looked up R2B, and where group housing is allowed, you need a manager, a floor area greater than 5,000, there is a max lot size, and there needs to be a landscape buffer.

Leff: So we already have that zone. Why would we need another?

Holland: Because parking is a problem.

Detter: Setbacks.

Briere: I haven't checked but higher density requires a special exception use permit.

Potts: "Group Housing" is misleading. There is a difference between big structures that house frats and sororities and homes that house several kids living together.

Carman: We will need to ask about that when someone from the ORC comes to speak to us.

Leff: We will need a list of questions for them before the next meeting. So why would we need a new student housing zone if we already have R2B? Anything else would seem to be deceptive.

Next Steps

Weatherbee: We need to figure out what we will do in between now and the next meeting in two weeks.

Potts: (Passes around a document and asks everyone to look at it.) Maybe we could all do the same thing about whatever topic interests us most.

Leff: It seems like if there is any issue we can handle quickly it is the land use buffer.

Tyler: We will need to talk to the ORC about it.

Briere: There was a need to eliminate the 15ft buffer in urban areas because it greatly reduced the amount of buildable space and developers were constantly asking for variances.

Leff: Ok, so we need to discuss it.

Rambo: I will have more questions afterwards so I would prefer to have time with the ORC representative before doing any independent research.

Detter: We don't want *anyone* from the ORC – we need to get the *right* person. I suggest Kirk Westphal or Bonnie Bona, or really Wendy Rampson.

Tyler: But Bonnie will be able to tell us why they made the decisions they did. Wendy won't do that.

Briere: Bonnie has been on that committee for 5 or 6 years and she really knows how these decisions are made. She also really believes in what she is doing so she will be willing to explain the logic behind their decisions.

Weatherbee: We will need to give her the information and questions ahead of time and tell her she will have half an hour to speak. Send your responses to be by the 21st – the next meeting is the 28th.

Public Comments

- Person 1: Can you ask staff to post meeting times and information ahead of time on the R4C website?
- Person 2: I first want to commend you on the meeting format. I am concerned about the lot combinations and the student district. I bought a house in the area in the 1980s when I didn't know anything about zoning or what those numbers and letters meant. When I bought there, half of the homes were owner-occupied and now there are only two. The ORC said that they should just let architects do what they want and come up with creative solutions but that is just a terrible idea.
- Person 3: Is there a minimum/maximum lot size for individual lots as opposed to combined lots? Student housing is more recession proof – these kids have rich parents – so these housing units don't go bankrupt like housing built for other demographics. We need to look at this from a macro level.
- Person 4: We need to also think about what is facing the street. Garages are now facing the street on new developments. Some developments have fake front doors or no front doors at all. This doesn't fit within the character of the neighborhood and needs to be considered by the committee.
- Person 1: Character overlays are not binding?
- Briere: Some character overlays are binding downtown but they are generally more of a recommendation. They can only approve projects based on what is in the zoning. They have more teeth in the Historic Districts because they are backed by a state mandate.
- Leff: If we can't get someone from the ORC, then what is our priority?
- Weatherbee: I will send out our priorities next week.