

MINUTES

I. *The City of Buchanan Planning Commission, in compliance with Michigan’s Open Meetings Act, hereby gives notice of a Planning Commission meeting to be held in the Chamber of City Hall.*

II. ** Comments may also be submitted in writing at least 4 hours in advance to the Community Development Director Richard Murphy at rmurphy@cityofbuchanan.com*

** Buchanan City will provide necessary and reasonable auxiliary aide and services to those individuals with disabilities who wish to attend the public meeting upon receiving at least one (1) week’s prior notice. Any such individual requiring such aids or services should contact the city in writing or by telephoning: Buchanan City Clerk; 302 North Redbud Trail, Buchanan, MI 49107, 269-695-3844.*

III. Regular Meeting - Call to Order

Meeting called to order by Chairman Lietz at 7:00 P.M.

IV. Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Lietz led in the pledge of allegiance.

V. Roll Call

Present: Chairman Jason Lietz, Kevin Barker, Ralph McDonald, Sean Denison, and Richard Martin

City Staff: Director of Community Development, Rich Murphy; City Clerk, Kalla Langston

VI. Approve Agenda

Motion made by Martin, supported by Barker to adopt the agenda as presented. Voice vote carries unanimously.

VII. Public Comments - Agenda Items

None

VIII. Approve Minutes

A. Consider approving Special Meeting Minutes from August 8, 2022.

Motion made by Martin, supported by Denison to adopt the Special Meeting Minutes from August 8, 2022. Voice vote carries unanimously.

IX. Old Business

None

X. New Business

A. Trails update by Jerry Flenar

Put up signs along the trail for safety, beginning at the Common and continuing every 10th of a mile. Placed four new memorial benches along the trail, all donated. All four are in the Commons area. Planted four American Chestnut trees, also donated. Their maintenance will be undertaken by the Cole Martin family. They have four more plantings planned for this fall.

They had two Eagle scout projects – a stair step that goes down to the trail and others that connect the full circuit of the trail in the E.B. Clark woods. The Trail also brought in the Berrien Jail

Trustees three times for seven days total. Worked with DPW to supply equipment, and then they helped trim areas along the creek.

Honor Credit Union and Redbud Roots took over some maintenance in Veteran's Memorial Park and the area to the side of the Commons, mostly weeding, mulching, and planting. Sheila Daly passed, and there is a monument for her at the Bainton Mill site. They cooked a few meals for the DPW a thank you.

They've established a new route for Trek or Treat and are working with Clark labs, the Boy Scouts, the National Honor Society, the football team, and the police department. Last year they had 2000 kids and adults in an hour and a half. This year it will be Saturday, October 29th, 12:30pm-2pm. They're now working on getting candy donation bins set out around town. Flenar has been reaching out to local groups for donations to offset the higher price of candy. Last year they spent around \$1600 on candy but still needed to buy more day of. The event sees wide reaching attendance, with as many Indiana plates in the parking lot as Michigan ones, so they're not planning on aggressively marketing the event.

The Trail also has a new brochure, which includes the trail expansion. They're hoping to begin the Trail expansion in the spring with completion later that year. They anticipate receiving the \$339,000 grant for the extension in November. The Friends of the Trail were able to raise \$200,00 in matching funds, far exceeding their goal of \$106,000.

The Planning Commission asked what the future plans for going west were. Flenar responded that they'd originally intended to go east before west, but due to the reconstruction on the Walton St bridge, the county agreed to make the bridge ADA compliant, a \$90,000 cost they would pay for. They do have hopes to go further west, but the permits required will be a 3-5 year process.

Flenar shared a video and concluded his report.

B. Community Development Director Report- Rich Murphy

a) Update on Buchanan Downtown Reconstruction Project

The big issue is a very common one – average cities across America have old infrastructure that's expensive to repair. Buchanan is being proactive and did a three-year assessment that confirmed the state of our infrastructure.

The City took advantage of historic low interest rates to borrow about \$15 million, plus grant money of about \$3 million. The City has hosted a public engagement session to introduce the project to the public and seek opinions and ideas. There was excellent attendance for the presentation, with 40 minutes of Q&A. The engineers were well prepared and there was generally positive feedback.

A major priority is that residents understand that downtown will be heavily impacted. This is a major project that will take a long time. Most of the work is full reconstruction – water/sewer, facades, roads, sidewalks, and so on. The Planning Commission wanted to make sure downtown business owners were given generous notice of expenses they'd be expected to incur, and Murphy agreed and reiterated that it was important to not sugarcoat the extent and inconvenience of the project.

The idea for downtown is influenced by A Vision for Buchanan, which doesn't seek to dramatically alter downtown, only make it better through things like improved pedestrian safety, access, and parking design.

The Planning Commission wanted to know if stormwater was addressed. Murphy responded that it will be, though he wasn't aware of it drastically altering anything and that downtown would still be a flood zone. The Commission also wanted to know if the McCoy Creek culvert had been inspected for structural problems as it is very old. Murphy said it wouldn't be touched as part of this project but that he'd check in.

There are a lot of moving parts to this project, especially with supply chain issues, but they will begin to nail down a cost and timeline. The Commission wanted to know how the Trail that goes through downtown will be affected in terms of location and ADA compliance. Murphy responded that there was debate on its location – some think it goes to the intersection, other say it follows the path of the creek under the street. They want to prioritize strong pedestrian connections as they continue to debate.

The Commission asked if the project was water infrastructure only, and Murphy let them know it was water, sewer, and everything on top. The Commission also asked if there was a set timeline or number of businesses without a rear entrance, and Murphy responded that both those answers were still being discussed. It will in part be a decision of whether to prioritize getting the project done faster or easing the way for downtown businesses.

It was noted that Mill Alley wasn't a part of the project, despite being a focal point of development for a number of years. This is because there isn't water there and didn't match the scope of the project. The USDA loan is for water/sewer improvement and putting things back where they were.

There is also discussion of closing the Rynearson and Redbud intersection. A resident in the audience who lives on Rynearson objected to the idea and mentioned that the Moose Lodge, also at that intersection, opposed the idea. Murphy reiterated that they were aware they couldn't please everyone and would make sure to have the discussion with everyone involved so no one was blindsided.

Barker mentioned the road alongside Lehman's that leads to Building 324 would make an excellent pedestrian walkway. The Commission asked if the project factored in the downtown businesses that had paid for heated sidewalks during the last downtown redesign, about 15 years ago. Murphy said the engineers were aware.

b) Next steps on Buchanan Zoning Ordinance Project

The City of Buchanan has engaged Placemakers to work on the new Zoning Ordinance. They met with downtown stakeholders, the Northside neighborhood group, the Preservation Society, and City department heads. The team is reviewing the first draft which should be available in about a month.

XI. Subcommittee Reports (if any)

The Tree Friends is looking at securing a grant for a watering trailer, around \$3500. They also received a \$3500 grant from the Michigan Community Gateway Foundation for tree planting this year. They were hoping to meet with business owners in the industrial park for planting up there.

There was discussion about compliance with approved zoning permits and businesses that weren't following through with what they'd presented to the Commission. They wondered if the Zoning Administrator or the Building Inspector could be involved in enforcement.

XII. Public Comment - Non-Agenda Items Only

None.

XIII. Community Development Director Comments

Murphy spoke about Berrien County purchasing the AEP Building for use, among other things, as a 911 dispatch. It may involve action from the city, and once Murphy has a path from the City attorney, he will update the commission. The Planning Commission asked if that would take the building off the tax rolls. Since City Hall will also be moving into the building, yes – though they believe there will be multiple uses of the large building that will bring money in, in addition to new jobs in Buchanan.

XIV. Commissioner Comments

McDonald thanks Jerry Flenar for his presentation and all the Trail does. He also observed that the Planning Commission page on the website had out of date information and asked Murphy to update it.

Barker thanked Flenar as well and remarked on his impressive fundraising ability.

Martin – none.

Denison – none.

Lietz – none.

XV. Adjournment

Motion made by Barker, supported by Denison to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 P.M. Voice vote carries unanimously.