

VILLAGE OF HOMEWOOD



MEETING MINUTES

DATE OF MEETING:

April 11, 2024

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

7:00 pm

Village Hall Board Room
2020 Chestnut Street
Homewood, IL 60430

CALL TO ORDER:

Chair Sierzega called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

In attendance were Members Alfonso, Bransky, Cap, O'Brien, Johnson and Castaneda, and Chair Sierzega. Present from the Village was Director of Economic and Community Development Angela Mesaros (serving as Staff Liaison) and Assistant Director of Economic & Community Development Noah Schumerth. There were six people in the audience. The public was able to watch and listen to the meeting via Zoom webinar. There was one attendee on the Zoom webinar recording.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Chair Sierzega asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes of March 14, 2024. No edits were made by the Planning and Zoning Commission members present. Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the following previous changes had been made to the minutes:

Replace language:

"O'Brien also cited concrete walls and wrought iron fences along 183rd Street near the train viaduct as creating visibility challenges for cyclists, especially near the intersection of Park Avenue and 183rd."

With the following language:

*"O'Brien also cited concrete walls and wrought iron fences along 183rd Street near the train viaduct as creating visibility **and safety** challenges for cyclists, especially near the intersection of Park Avenue and 183rd."*

Member O'Brien made a motion to approve the minutes as amended; seconded by Member Cap.

AYES: Members Bransky, Cap, O'Brien, Johnson

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: Members Alfonso, Castaneda, Chair Sierzega

ABSENT: None

Chair Sierzega asked if there were any changes or corrections to the minutes of March 28, 2024. No edits were made by the Planning and Zoning Commission members present.

Member Alfonso made a motion to approve the minutes as amended; seconded by Member Cap.

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AYES: Members Alfonso, Bransky, Cap, Castaneda, Chair Sierzega

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: Members O'Brien, Johnson,

ABSENT: None

REGULAR BUSINESS:

CASE 24-07: Upham Subdivision, 3043-3055 Ridge Road

Chair Sierzega introduced the case and called the applicant, George Arnold, forward to the podium. Chair Sierzega called for public comments on the agenda item from the audience. No comments were provided by members of the audience. Chair Sierzega swore the applicant in prior to testimony.

Member Cap noted concerns about the lack of additional development plans provided with the proposed final plat, and thus would not support the final plat.

Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that the property is still owned by the Village and is being subdivided for sale to private developers. The plans cannot be prepared and provided with the plat formally without a purchase or the creation of a purchase and sale agreement in place in partnership between the Village government and a private developer. Member Cap disagreed with the statement.

Assistant Director Schumerth noted that the individual parcels will have development plans created which will go through the Site Plan Review process. Schumerth stated that the Planning and Zoning Commission will review development plans for each parcel separately through the Site Plan Review process. Schumerth also said that the resubdivision has been proposed by the Village in a manner which is conducive for likely future development scenarios which have been discussed with private developers.

Member Cap expressed concerns about the placement of the private sanitary sewer easement located in the center of Lot 3, noting that the easement may restrict development outcomes and that development plans provided with a plat could alleviate those concerns. Member Cap noted that the plat drawings seem to be rushed for development, and that there are problems having a lot bisected by an easement which could be moved.

Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that the sanitary sewer easement is an existing private easement and there are no plans to move this easement. Mesaros noted that there have been preliminary drawings given to staff which indicate buildings may be realistically placed without the vacation of the easement.

Chair Sierzega asked if the case was solely focused on the approval of the proposed division of land. Mesaros affirmed that the case only pertaining to the resubdivision of the property.

Member Johnson made a motion to recommend the final plat to the Village Board for approval; seconded by Member Alfonso.

AYES: Members Alfonso, Bransky, Johnson, Castaneda, Chair Sierzega.

NAYS: Member Cap

ABSTENTIONS: Member O'Brien

ABSENT: None

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CASE 24-04: Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan

Chair Sierzega introduced the consulting team who were scheduled to present the details of the proposed Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan. The members of the consulting team included Fiona Kennedy and Kelsey Zlevor of Muse Community Design, and Alex Waltz of the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). Chair Sierzega swore in the members of the consulting team.

The applicants provided an overview of the Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan, detailing the structure of the plan and key recommendations included in the plan. The consulting team thanked residents of the Village of Homewood for participation in the planning process, along with members of Village staff who assisted in the development of the plan. The consulting team noted that the purpose of this hearing was to listen to members of the public and recommend the plan for approval by the Village Board.

Chair Sierzega opened the agenda item for public comment. The following comments were provided on the agenda item:

1. Jack Hrymak: As Chair of the Appearance Commission for the Village of Homewood, Hrymak noted that there is a strong need for emphasizing maintenance and upkeep of streets and storefronts in Village planning documents. Hrymak wanted to see a greater emphasis on the streetscaping elements of the plan. Hrymak also noted that “parking is at a premium” in the Village, but also expressed that there are large numbers of public parking spaces available. Hrymak suggested signage and additional programs to assist the public in finding new public parking areas available near local business. Hrymak also expressed that the Village needs to be more aggressive in acquiring parking areas which are currently private, whether through easement or outright purchase of the property. Hrymak stated support for the proposed 183rd Street road diet as a method for reducing speeding and increasing safety on the major thoroughfare. Hrymak noted support for the plan.

2. Brian Moss: Moss noted that he lives on the opposite side of the train tracks from downtown, and that his primary method of commute is by bicycle. Moss noted that the viaducts are in very poor condition for cyclists, especially the 183rd Street viaduct. Moss expressed a desire to see protection for cyclists taken more seriously on 183rd and Dixie Highway. Moss noted that bicycle lanes with only paint or road striping increase visibility, but do not create significant safety improvements. Moss appreciates the improvements proposed but would like to see longer-term fixes which provide greater protection for cyclists. Moss noted he would also like to see more work done to improve the Dixie Highway viaduct.

3. Kwame Amuh: Amuh noted that the plan is a good start for the Village of Homewood, and that he is encouraged about the change in conversation around transit-oriented development in Homewood. Amuh expressed a desire to see a greater emphasis on improving visibility and awareness of Pace Bus services available for residents of the Village of Homewood. Amuh noted that the 356 route is fairly frequent through 9pm, while the 353 route is less frequent but still provides a useful service. Amuh noted that more signage and visibility for Pace facilities could be very helpful, and expressed a desire to see the plan add plans for better signage indicating route destinations, bus times and other information.

Following the public comment period, Member Castadena noted that the plan is a great start and selected Homewood as an urban-suburban hybrid. Member Castaneda noted a desire to see more opportunities to be outdoors and enjoying the community, and expressed support for developing a strong downtown core. Castaneda noted a need to increase the ambition in the plan.

Member Johnson expressed concerns about traffic along 183rd Street from Halsted to Cicero, especially during peak morning hours. Member Johnson noted that something must be done, but the 183rd Street road diet may cause significant delays and congestion. Johnson noted that he wished to know more about the comments provided by police and fire departments. The consulting team noted that the police department cited needs for better tools for parking enforcement in the downtown area, and a need to provide source information for a study claiming that high visibility sidewalks improve public safety outcomes.

Member O'Brien noted that the plan is well-designed, organized and detailed. Member O'Brien stated that the Village will benefit from the plan document. O'Brien expressed concerns about the road diet proposed on 183rd Street, particularly around visibility for cyclists near the 183rd Street viaduct and other safety conflicts with the proposed bicycle facilities at and west of the intersection at Harwood Avenue and 183rd Street. O'Brien also noted that there are few refuge points or escape areas for cyclists when interacting closely with traffic within the viaduct. O'Brien cited increasing traffic caused by Wind Creek Casino and Hotel and asked how the presence of the casino may increase traffic and cause further pressures on local roads, especially along 183rd Street if the road diet is implemented.

Member O'Brien noted that a large number of stakeholders were engaged in the planning process, which makes the plan a strong "basis plan" for the community. O'Brien asked who will be responsible for coordinating plan implementation. One of the members of the consulting team, Fiona Kennedy, noted that the Village of Homewood staff, especially the Economic and Community Development staff, will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the plan.

Member O'Brien noted that surrounding suburbs do not have similar planning initiatives, and residents of neighboring communities may be confused by the bicycle infrastructure being installed in the Village. O'Brien asked how awareness of new bicycle infrastructure will be raised. One of the members of the consulting team, Fiona Kennedy, pointed to examples of past efforts in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to provide signage and create a marketing campaign to raise awareness for bicycle boxes near intersections in the city; Kennedy noted that this type of solution could be followed by the Village of Homewood with limited cost. Kennedy also stated that similar types of infrastructure will be implemented in surrounding communities in the next several years.

Member O'Brien expressed concerns about issues with people not knowing how to approach the newly designed intersection at 183rd Street and Harwood Avenue. Consulting team member Kelsey Zlevor noted that the Village can do social media campaigns and other

Member Cap complimented the consulting team on the organization and ambition of the plan. Member Cap asked if there were other transit-oriented development plans in communities with commuter rail. Consulting team member Kelsey Zlevor noted that this was the first transit-oriented development plan of this type completed with RTA, but that Muse Community Design had worked with the RTA on numerous other past planning projects in the Chicagoland area.

Member Cap asked what ensured that this plan was tailored to Homewood's downtown as a unique place. Consulting team member and RTA representative Alex Waltz noted that Homewood's downtown is unique because it has a base of existing development interest and economic activity, which is different than many south suburban communities in Chicago, and that there was a unique opportunity to build off of these elements to create a successful transit-oriented development. Waltz also noted that the focus areas can change because of the existing success of the downtown, including maximizing existing parking resources for new uses, increasing development opportunities, and taking advantage of unique transit access opportunities.

Member Cap asked if there was an existing checklist that development plans need to follow when being created through the technical assistance and funding program through which this plan was developed. Consulting team member Alex Waltz noted that it is an application-based program with a limited set of applicants each year, and Homewood was selected based on a range of different factors, including the existing success of the downtown area. Waltz mentioned that there are a set of goals which RTA and other agencies look to follow, including improving pedestrian and bicycle access to local transit stations and improving the number of activities placed near transit stations which can benefit from the increased accessibility. Waltz noted that there isn't a set of outcomes which all plans in the program must follow, but that there are "common threads" which run through most transit-oriented developments which RTA assesses funding applications against. Consulting team member Zlevor noted that the consulting group does not come in with an existing checklist, and work closely with local staff to ensure the plan is calibrated to local needs.

Member Cap asked for clarification about whether decorative crosswalks would be required at hazardous locations for pedestrians. Consulting team member Zlevor noted that there is a safety benefit from painted crosswalks, and that the recommendation in the Homewood plan was developed based on a strategy used by the City of Milwaukee, which allows residents to identify the most important areas to implement pedestrian improvements such as painted crosswalks.

Member Alfonso asked how painted crosswalks improve pedestrian safety. Consulting team member Kennedy noted that painted crosswalks increase the visibility of areas where pedestrians and vehicles will conflict. Kennedy noted that traditional crosswalks often lack clear visibility for pedestrians, and do not clearly affirm that pedestrians will be present within the crosswalk.

Member Cap asked for clarification about the author of the study referenced in the plan which cites an increase in pedestrian visibility and safety. The consulting team members noted that the study was completed in 2022 by Sam Schwartz Consulting.

Member Cap asked the consulting team for clarification about the parking consolidation zones. Consulting team member Kennedy noted that the goal of these zones is to reduce the number of parking lots which are dedicated solely to one private business. Kennedy stated that the Village can take the zones and use them to guide shared use agreements for currently private parking lots within a certain radius.

Member Cap asked if there was a minimum parking lot size to participate in the parking consolidation zone program. Kennedy stated that there would not be a minimum size of parking lot for this program.

Member Cap referenced Naperville, Illinois' downtown development and asked if there are plans to construct additional public parking areas. Member Cap expressed concern that the addition of new parking supply was not included in the plan. Staff Liaison Mesaros stated that the Village is often looking for opportunities to improve public parking access by acquiring or development agreements with existing private parking lots. Mesaros noted that the willingness of private owners to participate in the increase of public parking supply varies greatly. Mesaros also stated that the two parking lots nearest to the Metra station on either side of the railroad are now owned by the Village.

Member Bransky noted that education about the implementation steps of a plan will be critical to the success of the proposed master plan. Bransky said that the public has an interest in this plan and need to know how they can participate to help advance various goals in the plan.

Member Bransky also noted the need for advancing a better parking strategy, especially using new signage and social media campaigns to increase the visibility of public parking downtown. Bransky also noted that while he was initially averse to paid parking in downtown Homewood, but increasingly supports paid parking with a phone app as an opportunity to improve parking conditions downtown. Member Bransky noted that there needs to be greater concern for parking for seniors and other vulnerable members of the community.

Member Bransky asked how the public can best know what actions will follow the approval of the plan. Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that it would be a good thing to have a public process to determine how to best implement some of the recommendations in the plan. Mesaros also mentioned that implementation is already starting to address common concerns that Homewood residents have expressed, including the construction of public parking signage.

Member Alfonso expressed support for the plan and stated that there are opportunities remaining to further enhance the visibility and usefulness of local transit services. Alfonso mentioned she looks forward to participating in the implementation of the plan.

Chair Sierzega noted the lack of signage in downtown Homewood. Sierzega noted the lack of signage guiding visitors of downtown Homewood to public parking. Sierzega also noted the lack of parking available near several new businesses near Ridge Road and Martin Avenue, and expressed concerns about the lack of ADA accessible parking near these businesses. Staff Liaison Mesaros said that parking improvements around these businesses were already being worked on as of the time of the hearing.

Chair Sierzega noted the need to clarify parking rules for the Village Hall parking lot, which allows public parking outside of business hours. Member Johnson also noted that clarity needs to be provided from businesses regarding where parking is located near their businesses. Member Bransky affirmed Member Johnson's concern and noted that businesses could have signs which show the location of nearby parking. Assistant Director Schumerth said that the ideas being mentioned are already being reviewed by Village staff for implementation.

Chair Sierzega stated that the Village Hall parking lot could be converted into a public parking garage to encourage visitors in the downtown. Sierzega mentioned concerns that the Village is creating places to go but nowhere to park to access the new destinations.

Chair Sierzega stated that implementing paid parking would be the “worst thing anyone could do” to support Village businesses. Sierzega also stated that Homewood Brewing, along with other private businesses with parking lots, have a responsibility to place signage to help visitors find their parking.

Chair Sierzega also referenced the Savoia’s site as an important redevelopment site. Sierzega also mentioned that Independence Park is underutilized and should be gifted to the Village as a downtown open space. Staff Liaison Mesaros noted that the park is already owned by the Village. Sierzega noted that the Village could improve open space on the Independence Park site or add public parking on the site. Sierzega noted that Martin Avenue is blocked off for events in the summer, which further restricts parking at peak times in the downtown. Sierzega mentioned that the events should be supported by either opening up hotel parking near Martin Square to support the events, or moving events into private parking lots and preserving parking along Martin Avenue.

Chair Sierzega affirmed the plan and stated that it is an encouraging set of public changes, and the plan will be helpful for the community.

A member of the public, Lori Tozer, stated that residents in downtown Homewood will need to be considered in final parking plans for downtown. Tozer mentioned that many residents in older apartments in the downtown area struggle to find consistent parking near their homes.

Kwame Amuh noted that the Village needs to support increased walking traffic to support local businesses and increase safety.

Jack Hrymak asked about the full extent of the 183rd Street road diet, and whether it would stop at Dixie Highway or continue onward past Harwood Avenue.

Member Bransky noted that there is a reverse component to transit-oriented development, providing opportunities for those coming out from the city to enjoy Homewood businesses. These users don’t have a car, but are entering into the city without a vehicle where the suburban environment has generally required a car. Bransky mentioned that this creates a “double-edged sword,” stating that what might be best for transit-oriented development may not be what is best for drivers.

A member of the public, Yoka Ward, supported bicycling improvements such as bike boxes at Harwood. Ward mentioned Groningen as an award-winning city for bicycle planning, and noted that any space which is shared with bicycles is colored in maroon and signals to all road users that bicycles are expected. Ward noted that there is a “mindset shift” which comes from this which the Village must embrace. Ward also identified that she cannot walk to the Calumet Metra station from her home due to safety concerns, and that many do not walk or bicycle because they would be unsafe when doing these activities in Homewood. Ward mentioned that the plan’s involvement with the public makes this a good plan. Ward emphasized equal concern between walking and bicycling and vehicle parking.

Member O’Brien noted that the end of the fiscal year is on April 30, and asked if any elements of this plan will be implemented in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. Staff Liaison Mesaros stated that parking signage is included in this budget year. Other projects will require “steps,” including budgeting over multiple years and grant applications.

Member O'Brien asked about vehicle lifts to increase parking capacity in Homewood, citing their use in the Loop neighborhood of Chicago. Consulting member Zvelor noted that it is too specific of a recommendation and was not implemented in this plan, though it was considered during the planning process. Member O'Brien noted that the average cost per space for a parking garage is approximately \$25,000, and that parking lifts are a far cheaper option. O'Brien cited that lifts needed to be regulated and considered in the new Village Zoning Ordinance.

Member O'Brien made a motion to recommend approval of the Downtown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan to the Village Board of Trustees; seconded by Member Bransky.

AYES: Members Alfonso, Bransky, Cap, O'Brien, Johnson, Castaneda, Chair Sierzega

NAYS: None

ABSTENTIONS: None

ABSENT: None

OLD BUSINESS:

None

NEW BUSINESS:

None

ADJOURN:

Member Castaneda moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Member O'Brien; all members voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Noah Schumerth

Assistant Director of Economic and Community Development