

# February 12, 2015

## LOWELL PLAN COMMISSION MEETING FEBRUARY 12, 2015

Vice President Konradi called the meeting to order at 6:35P.M. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Recording Secretary Dianna Cade called the roll. Members answering the roll call were Elias Carras, Matt Felder, Craig Early, Jim Konradi and Don Parker. Rick Kelly and Christopher Salatas arrived at 6:55PM. Also present were Planning Consultant Jim Mandon, Town Attorney Jack Kramer, Building Official Tom Trulley and Public Works Director Greg Shook.

## APPROVAL OF MINUTUES

Mr. Early made a motion to approve the January 15, 2015 regular meeting minutes, seconded by Mr. Carras and carried with five ayes.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Discussion "Goal Setting – Review and Revise Previous List"**

Mr. Mandon stated that over a year ago, there was a joint meeting amongst the Plan Commission, Annexation Committee, Redevelopment Committee and the Town Council. Mr. Mandon stated during that meeting a list of goals were established along with the importance of each goal indicated by a number. Mr. Mandon stated that a few of the Town Council members would like for us to review that list. Mr. Mandon asked the Board members to look at the list supplied and discuss any revisions that need to be done. Mr. Mandon stated some items on the list were completed, and that he and the board could add new ones or change the number level of importance for existing items. Mr. Mandon stated that it is important to keep an active list of what the town's goals are and continue working towards them. Mr. Mandon stated some of these things take a very long time. Mr. Mandon stated that you have to constantly talk about them at least once a year and keep them moving. Mr. Mandon stated he would like to go through the list and see if there are any changes or sequence revisions to be made and he will also present this to the other commissions and eventually forward the list to the council, who would adopt a formal list of goals.

Mr. Mandon stated that the water study (ranked number one on goal list) is being conducted right now and at about seventy percent completion and asked if that is a fair statement to make. Mr. Early replied that it is done. Mr. Shook replied that it is finished. Mr. Mandon stated he delete that off the list.

Mr. Mandon stated that goal number two was to add more commercial property. Mr. Mandon stated that a couple of things that we are trying to do was to have a small commercial center begin on the west side of town. Mr. Mandon stated we anticipated that area growing thru a variety of both current property being developed and some annexation that might take place to the west. Mr. Mandon stated that we have not had any actual results with a building being built but, we have had some annexation on the South side of Route 2. Mr. Mandon stated that there is some anticipation that we are going to continue to do further annexation to the west and have the possibility of developing some prime commercial property and some small industrial parks to the west of town. Mr. Mandon stated that one of the things that prepares the town for that is to get the utilities in shape to support more development in that direction. Mr. Mandon stated that the water study and sanitary sewer study will provide for the town at least a list of projects that need to be put in place and some cost estimates for supporting that area. Discussion followed on where the utilities are located.

Mr. Parker stated that we had talked about a capital improvement plan, and he believes that the sewer study should be put in there, as well as the downtown improvements. Mr. Parker stated that the one thing that we are really lacking is advertising. Mr. Parker stated that you need to promote what you have. Mr. Parker continued stating that we need to advertise in a publication somewhere in the Midwest and do a monthly ad. Discussion followed. Mr. Mandon stated that what potential businesses are going to be looking for is build ready sites. Discussion followed on Plymouth, Indiana and their course of action to attract businesses.

Mr. Parker asked if the Route 2 overlay plan should be included in the capital improvement plan. Discussion followed. Mr. Parker asked the Board if they understood what the Route 2 overlay plan was. Mr. Parker stated that once an overlay is in place on Route 2, the State will help us; we can not take the businesses driveways away from them, but we can make two or three business share a common driveway. Mr. Mandon stated you can also put in the plan center medians that control left turns near intersections. Mr. Mandon stated if you come up with a plan that shows certain limitations on traffic movements near intersections you can make that as a recommendation in your plan and the State hopefully would follow through with that. Discussion followed. Mr. Mandon stated that he has never seen the kind of traffic movement that is on Route 2, in such a small area ,where you are constantly changing lanes. Mr. Mandon stated that the intent is to move a vehicle straight through the community without having to jog lanes. Mr. Mandon stated that is not the case here. Mr. Parker stated that he believes the Route 2 overlay plan is paramount and that should be the number one goal, especially with the potential of the Illiana Toll Road being built. Discussion followed.

Mr. Parker asked if the overlay plan should be part of a capital improvement plan. Mr. Mandon stated one goal would be to come up with a capital improvement plan and within that plan we would need to agree on the obvious projects. Mr. Early stated that there was talk of a joint meeting between the Town Council, Redevelopment Commission and the Plan Commission. Mr. Early stated that he felt this list of goals would be beneficial for the Plan Commission to present at that meeting. Mr. Early stated he agreed with everything that has been said so far and especially including utilities and infrastructure into the existing acreage that we do have annexed, because we have not seen anything happen with the area in the last three years. Mr. Early asked if the South side of Route 2 and Oakley street utilities are in better shape on that side than they are on the North side by Casey's. Mr. Early asked if they would be easier to extend those. Mr. Shook stated that you would have to do something different all together. Mr. Shook stated that it was discussed in the water study what would have to be done to have an adequate water supply to that area. Mr. Shook stated that on the sewer side, the sewer lines on the west side of town are so small that it is not worth extending them. Mr. Shook stated that Mr. Craig Hendricks of SEH Engineering is currently working on a sewer study. Mr. Shook stated that in his conversations with Mr. Hendricks he believed that the study would show a couple of different solutions. Discussion followed on the sewer study. Mr. Shook stated that a draft would be presented to the Town Council on March 9th.

Mr. Mandon stated that during the joint meeting, the annexation committee's request was to annex from Belshaw north to current town limits (south central) or number three on this goal sheet. Mr. Mandon asked is that something that is still a goal of the Town and stated it is pretty high on the list. Mr. Early stated that when that goal was established it was because our utilities were out there, since the legislation changed and we did go ahead and annex that parcel I do not know what the feeling is on that anymore. Mr. Parker stated he believes that the town needs to focus on some commercial and business development. Mr. Parker stated that as part of the water study we are going to see a water rate increase, he believes that we need some businesses to offset that cost. Discussion followed. Mr. Mandon stated that it should be left on the list but knocked down on the importance. Mr. Parker and Mr. Early stated yes.

Mr. Mandon stated that number four( add job centers) is pretty general. Mr. Mandon stated that this is more of a policy than a goal. Mr. Mandon stated you still have an interest in doing this I am assuming. Mr. Early stated yes, and it is very general and fits into a few different categories. Discussion followed.

Mr. Mandon stated that we had discussed number five (relieve traffic congestion SR2) briefly. Mr. Mandon stated that in terms of number five that the discussion that took place at that time was moving through the recommendation that was in the thoroughfare plan of having an alternative route. Mr. Mandon asked if this was something the Commission would still like to pursue. Mr. Konradi stated yes and that Mr. Mandon had covered it in the agenda last year. Mr. Parker stated that the most logical route that we had was 171st to jog at 173rd. Mr. Parker stated that we do have an issue and he spoke with Mr. Salatas and the Town Attorney, which involves a DNR order and that could limit what we can do. Discussion followed on the DNR conservancy district and starting discussions with the railroad. Mr. Early stated that this is something that would have to be in our capital improvement plan. Mr. Early stated that is going to be extremely expensive to begin with. Mr. Early stated that once we include these capital improvements underneath that heading then those need to be prioritized as well. Mr. Mandon stated you have to start with the available funds and allocate them per project. Mr. Mandon stated that it does not make any sense to have twelve projects in the first year and not have the

money to support them. Mr. Mandon stated that is what really helps in a capital improvement plan, you can not out strip your resources you have to decide on what is most important to you. Mr. Mandon asked if number five (relieve traffic congestion SR2) is something that you still want to include. Mr. Parker stated yes.

Mr. Mandon stated that number six (reinvigorate the downtown area) is very general, more of a policy statement than a list of specific goals. Mr. Mandon asked if they would like to have some sub categories of how they want to do that. Mr. Early stated that is a very good question, what else can we do besides what we have done already. Mr. Early stated as far as the TIF district and revitalization district what other mechanisms are there that we can afford them, because that has obviously not done anything. Mr. Early stated that the improvements that we have seen in the last year or so are because of the general improvement in the over all economy. Mr. Parker stated that he is not sure that this belongs in front of the Plan Commission, he is not even sure what the Town Council can do to help, he would refer it to the Redevelopment Commission. Mr. Felder stated that he feels that it will get better as the Town grows with commercial businesses. Discussion followed.

Mr. Parker stated that he thinks we should be pursuing businesses, that we should be on the phone every month calling ShopKo and telling them that we have property available on the west side of town. Mr. Parker stated that once we get a small strip mall on the west side that will produce other opportunities. Mr. Felder stated that he believes that we need to be specific on what kind of businesses we look for. Discussion followed

Mr. Parker stated that he thinks it is the town's job to say what improvements need to be made and enforce that. Mr. Parker stated that some of those buildings should not be occupied and we need to make a stand and ensure that those improvements are made. Discussion followed on improvements to the buildings in the downtown area. Mr. Mandon stated that there are some improvements that the town can make such as, streetscapes and parking. Mr. Mandon stated that in some cases a lot of the owners of these buildings do not live in the town, they do not have a vested interest in the community and in some cases are reluctant to make improvements to the buildings.

Mr. Early asked Mr. Mandon his opinion on having commercial businesses on the lower levels of the buildings downtown and residential on the second floors. Mr. Early stated that this is a constant battle in a very small sense. Mr. Mandon stated that this is very typical, he is not sure what else you would do with the second floor. Mr. Mandon stated that in some cases you try to encourage office development, but that is difficult because of accessibility standards and it is very hard to have a business open on the second floor. Mr. Mandon stated that the more people that you can encourage to live in close proximity to the downtown area the better. Mr. Mandon stated that if resident dwellings cause conflicts with parking, the town can fix that. Mr. Kelly inquired on the ownership/tenants of the upstairs spaces. Discussion followed on how to ensure that the residential portion of the downtown buildings are not above occupancy allowed.

Mr. Trulley stated that it would be beneficial for the town to have business licenses, we need to know who owns the businesses and who are the tenants. Discussion followed on Crown Point's downtown revitalization efforts and how to encourage businesses to move here and the development of the west side of town and funding infrastructure to that area.

Mr. Parker stated that the eighty acres west of town has not been included in our TIF district. Mr. Mandon stated that he thought it was as did Mr. Trulley. Mr. Parker stated that Mr. Reardon said it was not. Mr. Parker stated that it is not a simple process and we need to get that started. Discussion followed and it was decided that it was not included in the TIF district. Mr. Early stated that needs to be on the list. Mr. Mandon stated okay.

Discussion followed on water and sewer rate increases as an investment to help fund further commercial growth by extending our utilities/infrastructure to develop build ready sites. Mr. Parker stated that he is estimating that there is currently \$25,000-\$30,000 in the redevelopment fund that will be going into the TIF.

Mr. Mandon asked if we can eliminate number seven, which is, revisit the pocket annexation areas. Mr. Parker stated yes.

Mr. Carras stated that number eight is completed (complete the Powell Ditch), Mr. Salatas stated yes.

Mr. Parker stated that we have a thoroughfare plan which encompasses number ten (improve access to Freedom Park). Mr. Parker stated that the Town Council has something to say about the roads going in there, but you do have the Freedom Park Board on plan with this. Mr. Mandon stated that it is in the plan but it has not been done yet, it has to stay on the list. Mr. Early stated that when we were talking about these goals I think that the access was more of a pedestrian access and not a road access. Mr. Mandon stated you mean the bike path, sidewalk. Mr. Early stated yes, I think we were referring to pedestrian access not part of the thoroughfare plan. Mr. Carras stated it was sidewalks.

Mr. Mandon asked if number nine (complete plan for Nichols-west property) was completed. Mr. Trully stated yes.

Mr. Parker stated that number fourteen, (consider having town act as property broker buying and selling parcels) with the money that we have, I do not think in the next three or four years you are going to see the town in the position to act as a broker, and asked do you? Mr. Early stated no. Mr. Early stated there are some things down that line as far as marketing our community with the Lake County Economic Alliance that I hope the council is going to be part of. Mr. Early stated that if we have a joint meeting I am going to try and get them down here for a brief presentation. Mr. Early stated that is what they do and being a part of that and on a national registry will help market our community. Mr. Early stated that in speaking with the bigger companies and manufacturers they do not pick up a phone and look up Lowell, Indiana and contact the town hall, they talk to people like the Northwest Forum and the Lake County Indiana Alliance and that would be a good step. Mr. Carras stated that he listened to their presentation at a previous council meeting and he felt they had a lot to offer us.

Mr. Parker asked if we identify eight to ten things this year that are tangible is that realistic? Mr. Mandon stated that you want to have multiple years. Mr. Early stated that some of these things are not going to get done in twelve months. Mr. Mandon stated that from a priority standpoint you can zero in on the first three or four and hope to accomplish those.

Mr. Mandon stated that he would like to revisit acquiring property and having it build ready. Mr. Mandon stated that the process is a two stage effort. The first stage that the town can do is have these sights be served with utilities so there is not a lot of off site work that has to be brought to the property. The next step is that the Redevelopment Commission buys the property, they market it and sell it, they use the proceeds to purchase adjacent property or some other parcels in town. Mr. Early stated that is what should be considered in his opinion for the priority of these things, it should be included on list but financially we are not there. Discussion followed. Mr. Early stated that it should be included on the list under the heading of capital improvement and then prioritized from there.

Mr. Mandon asked what was the intention of number thirteen, improve American Legion site. Mr. Early stated we thought that the site was going to be up for sale. Mr. Mandon asked if the intent was to redevelop the site. Mr. Konradi stated that there was hope to connect with public transit, specifically the railroad and that would have been a good station site. Discussion followed on easements and flood plane on the parcel. Mr. Early stated that maybe it should be taken off the list.

Mr. Mandon stated that number twelve, is to plan and complete pedestrian/bicycle accessibility project. Mr. Mandon stated that is a joint venture the town is going to have to fill in the gaps on some of the developed areas, but a lot of that is going to be the responsibility of the people who develop these various subdivisions, that is the way the plan currently is laid out. Discussion followed. Mr. Early stated that the Complete Streets Program was passed as part of the thoroughfare plan.

Mr. Mandon stated that the last one we have not talked about is the Reiter property (number eleven) and asked if that is a priority. Mr. Early stated probably not, it will fall under the redevelopment. Mr. Early stated that the Lake County Economic Alliance is well aware of the property.

Mr. Mandon stated we have completed the Nichols west property, the pocket annexations, the annexation of Belshaw is so far down the list it is probably off the list, is that accurate? Mr. Parker stated that is accurate. Mr. Mandon stated that those, along with the Powell Ditch, will be removed from the list. Mr. Mandon stated added to the list will be the development of a capital plan. Mr. Mandon stated capital improvement plans are five years plus a program year, each year you re-write the plan. Mr. Parker asked if it will have sub categories. Mr. Mandon stated that it will list all the projects and funding sources that can be used for capital improvements, and it allocates to certain projects so that you do not over spend. Mr. Mandon stated added on the list will also be, place ads and promotional materials to announce build able properties in town. Mr. Mandon stated that the Route 2 overlay plan should be pulled out of the capital improvement program, it needs to be its own goal. Mr. Parker asked how long it would take to get institute an overlay plan. Mr. Mandon stated three or four months to write an overlay plan, get it completed and approved. Mr. Parker stated that the council could direct you to begin this at the next meeting. Mr. Mandon stated yes. Mr. Mandon stated that also to be added to the goal list was, to have the eighty acres added to the TIF list. Mr. Mandon stated do you want to add that to the list or just do it. Mr. Parker stated just do it and add the twenty seven acres also. Mr. Parker stated that should be automatic when a parcel of property is annexed. Mr. Early stated yes as long as it is contiguous. Discussion followed on the TIF district.

Mr. Mandon asked if there anything else to add for goals. Mr. Konradi stated we should add the old Ashland property on the list. Discussion followed.

Mr. Parker stated that he thinks that the town should look into annexing the Misty Glen subdivision. Discussion followed on Misty Glen, Heritage Falls and infrastructure funding; residential versus commercial.

Mr. Parker stated that we should be concentrating on getting utilities along Route 2. Mr. Mandon stated yes. Mr. Parker stated should we be talking to Tri Creek Schools to see if they are interested in partnering to put a water line in. Discussion followed on contacting the school, recapture fees and economic development strategy.

Mr. Mandon stated that he will email a revised list and the Board can prioritize them. Mr. Mandon stated that the top priority might not be the one item that is most important it might be the item that needs to be done first. Mr. Early stated or what our financial resources allow us to do.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further comments or questions Mr. Konradi, made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:50pm, seconded by Mr. Early and carried by a voice vote.

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Richard Kelley, President Elias Carras, Secretary