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CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES

NOVEMBER 3, 2022

5:00 p.m.

I. Opening

A. Call to Order

Chair Hood called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

B. Roll Call

Director Todd, CPC Staff, called the Roll. A quorum was present.

Present: Commissioners: Esparza, Harrison, Hood, Lewis, Russell, Smith, Andrews (late), and Markowicz (late)

Excused: Commissioners: Daniels

CPC Staff: Marcell Todd, CPC Director

P&DD Staff: Antoine Bryant

C. Amendments to and approval of the Agenda

The motion was made by Commissioner Smith to adopt the Agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Russell and passed unanimously.

II. Meeting Minutes (No minutes were presented for consideration)

III. Public Hearings, Discussions and Presentations

A. 5:10 PM PRESENTATION – Director Antoine Bryant, Planning and Development Department (PDD), providing informational presentations on the following:

1. I-375 Conversion
2. Vibrant Blocks for Business Design Guide
3. Mainstreet Design Guide

1. *The I-375 Project*

The State of Michigan Department of Transportation is leading the I-375 project. The City of Detroit's Planning and Development Department, Department of Public Works, and other departments and agencies provided support. These entities collaborated to reconnect neighborhoods to the downtown corridor and the Eastern Market.

The Michigan Department of Transportation developed the criteria to understand the reason for the I-375 project. The need and the purpose of the project are to address several conditions: the conditions of the infrastructure, outdated geometric conditions, such as ramp design, lack of vehicle and pedestrian connections to the east Riverfront, poor connectivity, and access to the Gratiot Avenue connector, congestion, and safety issues along Jefferson Avenue corridor.

In 2014, WSP and the Smith Group conducted a Pell Study. The team developed six iterations to understand what could happen to improve the I-375 corridor: 1) reconstructing the freeway to the same configuration; 2) a riverfront connection; 3) a Larned surface upgrade; 4) an east edge boundary; 5) a west edge Boulevard; and 6) one-way streets with greenway in the center. In 2017, MDOT chose as its starting point configuration number five.

The estimated funding between fiscal years 2022 through 2027 is \$330 million in terms of what is budgeted and the monies coming into the project. Thirty million dollars would be devoted to planning and design, an effort to begin in 2022, and \$300 million for the construction that will end in 2027.

The State of Michigan received \$105 million from the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America Grant (INFRA). Also, the State is applying for a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RISE) and a Mega Grant (National Infrastructure Project Assistance Program.) The City is seeking a \$180 million Multi-modal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) that could help fund the project.

This project did not start in 2014; it has been discussed in Detroit for decades, beginning with the 1949 National Housing Act program of clearing out Black Bottom and Paradise Valley to 2022 by launching the I-375 Boulevard Design and Framework.

While the framework will be able to study the limits of potential development on the developable parcels resulting from the Boulevard design, it cannot address the disposition of land as part of the framework. The federal government owns the land as part of the Interstate Highway System. The State of Michigan and the City of Detroit will work with the federal government to determine land transfer guidelines.

The City of Detroit works with the State of Michigan, the Planning Department, and the Department of Neighborhoods. They will oversee the community engagement, the land use framework, and the urban design.

The framework has three distinct priorities: 1) urban design, 2) Boulevard design, and 3) diversity, equity, and inclusion. At the time of the study, over 30 years, this area could receive \$3.87 billion in investment. The City will seek to develop a local advisory committee that includes residents, businesses, nonprofit organizations, entertainment districts, churches, schools, and any entity that would be generally affected or potentially affected by the design and the subsequent construction.

A government advisory council will advise local government officials, the City of Detroit's congressional delegation, the Lansing delegation, and the local advisory committee. Part of the overall framework will seek a developable forum that understands the potential value within this area and what is feasible regarding future development.

Part of this project is understanding why and the historical narratives that go into this overall study. An estimated 100,000 people over time of the highway project were displaced.

The overall objective is to develop that model of opportunity from engagement with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion that connects our City, but also making sure we honor our past.

A question-and-answer session took place.

2. *Vibrant Blocks for Business Design Guide, Russell Baltimore, Lead Designer, Planning and Development Department*

Russell Baltimore, Lead Designer, Planning and Development Department; Scott Page and Ashley DiCaro, Interface Studio, gave a presentation about Vibrant Blocks for Business Development; and Mainstreet Design Guide.

Approximately eight months ago, the Planning and Development Department (PDD) embarked on a journey to develop design guidelines to help improve how the City's corridors look. The Planning and Development Department brought on consultants Interface Studio and Sidewalk Detroit to assist with this endeavor.

The overall task was to look at the conditions of the corridors today, strategize how the City can make improvements for the future, find ways of streamlining the zoning process, and come up with aspirational designs that the City and consultants would like to happen in the corridors.

Aspirational design means design guidelines. Design guidelines are things to look for, such as: 1) desired scale, style, and quality of the buildings that are going to be on the corridors; 2) architectural details that highlight the buildings and make for vibrant and active areas; 3) what the buildings are made of; 4) the streetscapes and lighting, and signage, and so forth. Then, think of ways to explain the design guidelines that are more friendly than going to the *exact zoning ordinance* and trying to build a building or adapt a building to the commercial corridors based on zoning information.

The design guidelines will create clear, easily usable guidance for future development in the corridors. The guidelines will have illustrations and much text to explain the elements desired in the streets. Also, there will be supplements to the design guidelines drawn up by the Staff and consultants. The aspirational guidelines are to be a general guide for all corridors.

The guidelines will focus on matters such as the City's responsibility along the corridors versus what the property owner is responsible for. The design guidelines will speak to the current ordinance, which is planned to be a new one coming out of the design guidelines.

Community residents and groups were engaged in the design guidelines process.

3. *Mainstreet Design Guide, Ashley DiCaro, Interface Studio*

Interface Studio partnered with Sidewalk Detroit, a local firm; Sidewalk Detroit designed the process.

Interface Studio and Sidewalk Detroit interviewed Stakeholders and district focus group meetings to learn what might be plaguing commercial corridors in geographic specific areas across the City. Project updates were made available via Zoom so that the information would be open to all. Three corridor tours took place that Sidewalk Detroit curated. The team met with local businesses and walked around. During the tour, dialogue with local business owners and residents took place.

Five focus groups were assembled, thus engaging community leaders and residents. Members of the focus groups also participated as corridor tourists. Through that process, standard and specific elements were identified, such as business owners facing different challenges regardless of the location within the City, and many of the corridors need to reflect what the community would like to see.

According to interviews, much bureaucracy and red tape discourage business owners from implementing improvements, and there is an actual financial cost tied to that bureaucracy. The Design team realizes that it is their responsibility to look at the development processes and to make the standards easy to read and understand to improve the timelines and the associated costs.

Some businesses, particularly minority and immigrant businesses, feel alone and without advocates to help them understand the process. Therefore, this strategy aims to make the Design Guide as user-friendly and easy to use as possible. The guidelines must establish a baseline; for example, the corridors must be clean and safe. The guidelines must emphasize the importance of first impressions and create a welcoming and inviting customer experience and space for innovation.

Emphasis is placed on flexible guidelines in that designers and communities can apply them in different ways across different corridors across the City. The guidelines will include recommendations on capital improvements, such as lighting fixtures, awnings, and various types of materials.

The City hired Interface Studios to create design guidelines. What businesses and residents want to know is how to get things done. How do I get through the process quicker, i.e., how do I hang up the sign I want on my building?

Consequently, Interface Studio has been trying to unpack a typical design guidelines process and add these elements to make this as helpful of a document as possible to those who need it and want to open a business or rehab in a corridor. The guidelines are more geared for small business owners and small developers. *The guidelines are for someone who needs to learn how the process works and how to get things done.*

The team spent much time working towards framing the guiding principles for this work and setting that baseline. The recommendations include that the commercial corridors be safe and comfortable, that the property be well lit, that maintenance of the corridors are kept up, that the district design serves the people, that the corridor be lively, and that a strong identity exist. The guiding principles are inclusive and diverse. The intent is that this document provides clarity and a framework in terms of navigating the process. Unpacking the development review process, the things one needs to understand, and the potential timeline. Interface Studio is working with Smith Group, which has done this work before in the City, to clarify the nuances, the different permits that one needs to pull, and the various review levels, a requirement, depending upon the construction or project.

The team plans to create a standalone document that speaks about all the different things across the corridor that one might need to pay attention to. So, business and community organizations will receive a standalone checklist.

Many properties in commercial corridors are private. There are residential properties and open spaces. Interface Studio is trying to understand technology forensic commercial corridors and design considerations related to those technologies.

The process is projecting that the period is 12 to 18 months. Currently, the project is in the development of the document phase.

Questions and Answers regarding the above presentation ensued.

- B. 6:45 PM PUBLIC HEARING (CONTINUED FROM October 6, 2022)** To consider the request of petitioner Shane Overbey to amend Article 17, Section 50-17-30 District Map No. 28 of the Detroit City Code, Chapter 50, Zoning, to show a B4 (General Business District) zoning classification where an R2 (Two-Family Residential) zoning classification is currently demonstrated at 4630 Crane Street - generally located on the east side of Crane Street between East Forest Avenue to the north and Yates Street to the south. **(EF)** **45 mins**

Mr. Fazzini gave a PowerPoint presentation. He showed aerial and ground views of the subject area from all compass points. The area consists of vacant commercial and industrial buildings, (B4) vacant land, (R2) and residential neighborhoods, (R2). The location of the subject area is at the east end of City Council District 5. It is in the Gratiot-Woods neighborhood.

At the October 6, 2022, meeting, there was a discussion about the occupancy and ownership status of five homes in the subject area. According to the Department of Neighborhoods, three houses are occupied, and two are being renovated and will be occupied in the future. Also, a discussion ensued at the meeting about vacating the alleys in the subject area for development. However, according to the presenter, it is unlikely that DPW would approve such a plan. DPW is the authority on vacating alleys.

The specific land use for the applicant is trade services, general. In the Staff's review, the B4 would be appropriate for all the uses that the applicant is proposing. Staff found that the proposal is consistent with the master plan due to the site's small size. The proposal is like the historic use of the building as a dry cleaning and laundering use, and the proposal will not change the overall character of the neighborhood. Also, the development would provide needed commercial activity in this area and permit the reuse of the long-vacant building. This sentiment was also echoed at the November 1, 2022, community meeting, where applicants expressed the desire for the entire block, not just this building, to be redeveloped and occupied.

The applicant was able to present a proposal to the community and had a constructive discussion. Staff attended that meeting, with approximately 30 attendees, including two Crane Street Block Clubs. The attendees were in favor of the applicant's investment. The Staff has provided a summary of that discussion in the staff report. Also, Eastside Community Network conducted its independent outreach on October 29th to make area residents aware of the proposal.

Mr. Shane Overbey was allowed to speak about his proposal. He talked about his vision for improving and occupying the site. No one was present to speak for or against the project.

A questions and answers period regarding the above ensued.

The Staff has found this matter consistent with the applicable rezoning criteria and recommends approval of the requested rezoning. Commissioner Russell **motioned** that the Commission approve the petitioner's request. The **motion** was **seconded** by Commissioner Andrews and passed **unanimously**.

IV. Unfinished Business

- A. Consideration of the request of NP Conner Avenue Industrial, LLC and the City Planning Commission to amend Article XVII, Section 50-17-27, District Map No. 25 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, Chapter 50, Zoning, to show M2 (Restricted Industrial District) and PR (Parks and Recreation District) zoning classifications where M3 (General Industrial District) and M4 (Intensive Industrial District) zoning classifications are currently shown on approximately 63 acres generally bounded by Gratiot Ave. to the northwest, Conner St. to the east, and Harper Ave. to the south, and also known by the addresses, 10600 Gratiot, 9501 Conner St., and 9700 Conner St.

(RA)

20 Mins.

Present: CPC Staff, Roland Amarteifio, Director Todd; Parks and Recreation Department Representative, and NorthPoint Representative.

NorthPoint Industrial and the City Planning Commission propose down zone 63 acres from M3 and M4 to M2 and PR. The site's location is along the border of City Council District 3 and City Council District 4. I-94 is to the South, Connor Street runs east of this site, and Gratiot runs north.

NorthPoint Development held four community meetings before and during the construction. They discussed site and landscaping plans and listened to many of the community's concerns, for example, truck traffic, access points, landscaping, and screening. The community responded and expressed their concerns. Consequently, the team followed up and addressed the concerns of the residents.

On October 20, 2022, the City Planning Commission held its first public hearing on this proposed map amendment. Two public members spoke, and both spoke in favor of the project.

Staff believes the proposed rezoning is consistent with the criteria in section 50-30-70 of the Detroit Zoning Ordinance.

Discussion, questions, and answers regarding the above ensued.

Commissioner Russell **moved** to accept the Staff recommendations to approve the petitioner's request. The **motion** was seconded by Commissioner Smith. Without objection, the **motion** passed **unanimously**.

V. New Business

None

VI. Committee Reports

None

VII. Staff Report

Mr. Gulock reported on the Community Development Block Grant.

Director Todd reported on the Commission's schedule for next year; he gave a status report relative to the Budget and a brief history of CPC.

VIII. Member Report

None

IX. Communications

None

X. Public Comment

Ms. Bosch thanked the commissioners for approving the downzoning on the Cadillac Stamping Plant property and adjacent parcels. She stated that it was most important that the City upheld the PR designation for the Conner Playfield. Also, when the agenda item includes the Knodell properties proposed by Detroit Dirt to become a recycling center, please remember the presence of Gethsemane Cemetery.

Adjournment

Chairperson Hood adjourned the meeting at 8:48 p.m.