

**2016 City of Summit – Master Plan Re-Examination  
Land Use Subcommittee  
May 25, 2016 – MINUTES**

The Land Use Subcommittee of the 2016 Master Plan Re-Examination met on May 25, 2016, at Summit City Hall, Whitman Room, 512 Springfield Avenue, Summit, New Jersey, 07901. The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

**Present:** Bill Anderson, Subcommittee Chair; John Zucker; Jennifer Balson Alvarez; Diane Klaif; Karen Khalaf; Kevin McGoey; Phyllis Sank; and Ken Stevenson.

Krzysztof Sadlej and Phil Abramson from Topology

**Absent:** Eric Mendelsohn

**Observers:** Mayor Nora Radest; Jeff Wagenbach, Chairman of the Planning Board; John Kieser, Class I Member of the Planning Board; and Rick Matias, Department of Community Services

**Agenda**

1. Review Data from Prior Committee Meeting
  - a. Missing Objectives
2. Scenario Development for Public Meeting
3. Team Assignments

Mr. Anderson introduced new member, Ken Stevenson, to the Subcommittee.

A copy of the Steering Committee Engagement Data from the first set of workshops was distributed to the Subcommittee.

Topology will launch an interactive platform for the Master Plan Re-Examination two days prior to the June 1, 2016, public meeting. Topology will populate the platform but encouraged Subcommittee members to log in prior to the public meeting to drop pins. Six questions will be presented to the public at the meeting one of which will be what kind of activities residents would like to see in the Village Green. The public will be able to text answers to the questions. The questions are based on six elements that must be included in the Master Plan. A sign will also be posted in the Village Green so people can text their responses. Advertising for the public meeting has been posted at the Summit train station and YMCA and also on social media.

**Review Data from Prior Committee Meeting**

The Subcommittee did not complete the mapping exercise at the first workshop for lack of time. Topology thought it would more productive at this point for the Subcommittee to review the priority objectives identified at Workshop 1 and to identify missing objectives rather than complete the mapping exercise. The Subcommittee also focused on determining if it still wants to pursue these objectives.

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***To fully utilize the upper floor spaces in the CBRD to provide much needed housing and to prevent building deterioration while protecting retail trade (2000 Master Plan)***

Discussion: The Subcommittee questioned whether this objective was accomplished. Burgis Planning did a downtown study but it's missing the retail linkage. Second-floor space is predominately walk-up and there's no parking. How much second-floor space is available and what is the vacancy rate? Rent for retail space averages \$35 to \$40 per square foot which is significantly higher than in Chatham or Madison. The bigger challenge may be the retail space and longevity of tenants. The Subcommittee discussed getting the pulse on retail space and the occupancy cost of dollars made versus what is paid and an insight on sales; however, because of disparate business owners it is hard to gather this information. Mr. Sadlej suggested that retail owners may be able to help in getting this information. Some building owners were out of touch with rent during the financial crisis in 2009 and continued to raise rents. There are building owners that would rather rent at a lower rate so that the space is occupied but this is not the case in general. The vacancies may be because the rents are so high. One Subcommittee believes the vacancies may be the result of the building owner rather than the high rents. Retail space in Summit has to compete with the Mall at Short Hills. Another challenge for retail space is not having a liquor license.

This is still a valid objective and ties to the objective that follows.

**To incorporate upper story residential uses where practical to promote the vibrancy of the downtown (2015 Downtown Improvement Plan)**

Discussion: Most second-floor space is office space. The Planning Board has an application to add second-floor residential units to a building on Summit Avenue. Mr. Anderson believes the need for residential space exceeds the supply. Topology has statistics from Zillow but it doesn't differentiate between downtown residential space and residential areas. The Building Department may have information on downtown residential units because a Certificate of Occupancy is required when occupancy changes. Mr. McGoey questioned if Summit needs more residential units downtown. Mr. Stevenson noted that home ownership at 63% is at its lowest level and may create need for residential use downtown.

Mr. Zucker expressed concern about the upcoming affordable housing mandate presently in the courts. Depending on the outcome, Mr. Zucker stated that Summit could be assessed for hundreds of units which raised the question of where these can be accommodated. The city needs to stay ahead of this so that it doesn't lose control over what gets built. Any development has to put aside space for affordable housing. This discussion was tabled as affordable housing can't be addressed in the Master Plan because it is in the courts.

This is still a valid objective and ties to the objective that follows.

**Ensure that new residential infill is appropriate in terms of scale and character with the surrounding neighborhood (2006 Master Plan Re-Examination)**

Discussion: Mr. Abramson started the discussion stating that planning is incremental. It's up to the Subcommittee to decide what is needed. Is there a demand for housing? A housing market study could

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be one of the recommendations in the Master Plan Re-Examination. If the city wants to see a certain type of growth, it's important to determine if such growth is possible and if there are feasible opportunities for people to invest in the city. Growth needs to be feasible and predictable.

Ms. Klaif believes there is a need for housing downtown. It's virtually impossible to find a place that's within walking distance to the train station. The rental units are old and dingy. The new residential units in town are beautiful but are not affordable. There are more residential units in the downtown area than before but the 2006 Master Plan Re-Examination goal hasn't been achieved. There are few residential opportunities downtown. Ms. Klaif added that there are options for houses but not so much for apartments. Is this because it isn't feasible? Mr. Abramson responded that ordinance changes after 2006 allow multi-family units. There are opportunities in the Gateway II/Franklin Place area.

Ms. Sank, who served on the 2000 Master Plans and 2006 Master Plan Re-Examination committee, stated that both of those plans recognized that Summit is a fully developed town not a village and change, therefore, has to be an adaptive re-use. If Summit wants to provide more housing downtown, it's going to get more density. She is not opposed to growth but if Summit wants to grow, it's going to have to take something and re-use it. There are under-utilized properties.

Mr. Anderson noted that Floor Area Ratio (FAR) has to work if land is expensive. The city needs to decide the intensity that will be allowed for development and not everyone in Summit wants development. The policies created and zoning effectuated need to be in balance. There has to be a balance between under-zoning which can create wild speculation and over-zoning. Feasibility and predictability are critical for development to occur. Transportation can also affect the feasibility of development. Does the city want to lead development or set design guidelines of what a developer can do? Development can start slowly with improvement of existing properties. Development must not only attract new residents but keep residents here. The city can take a targeted approach to development with a few units here and there rather than construction of a six- or seven-story building.

This is still a valid objective.

### **To increase housing opportunities for senior citizens (2000 Master Plan)**

Discussion: The senior housing complex is federally funded so it is not limited to Summit residents. If the housing is affordable, it must be advertised and the units are apportioned by lottery. The Master Plan Re-Examination needs to expand on this objective. Senior housing needs to be examined in terms of supply and cost in Summit. The Housing Subcommittee will also be looking at this objective.

The Subcommittee discussed possible strategies to increase housing opportunities for senior citizens including establishing a percentage of development that must be reserved for people 55 years or older as a way to keep people in town. Limiting development to two bedrooms could also be used to keep downsizers in town and reduce the competition for housing between downsizers and families. The Subcommittee also discussed a property tax revaluation which hasn't been done in quite a while. Mayor Radest believes this is coming.

This is still a valid objective.

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**Address overdevelopment concerns (2006 Master Plan Re-Examination)**

Discussion: This objective originated from Gateway I and the concerns it raised about overdevelopment. An attempt to get green space there was a real battle. This objective needs to address the risk of overdevelopment. Mr. Abramson asked the Subcommittee to consider what overdevelopment is: Is it traffic, visual impact, congestion? Development must be balanced with the capacity of the roadways. Good public outreach with development scenarios that people can visualize and comment on would be useful in defining what residents consider appropriate development versus overdevelopment, i.e. which development is in keeping with the character of the town. Public feedback on development scenarios especially for Gateway II (Salerno Duane strip plus properties to the north and south), which does not pose a threat to anyone because of the location, would be valuable. All development has to be consistent with the Master Plan. Design guidelines could be very helpful. Getting a feel for what people want could help shape the design guidelines. This discussion ties to the objective (below) of encouraging development improvements in the Broad Street Corridor.

**Encourage development improvements in the Broad Street Corridor (2015 Broad Street Master Plan)**

Discussion: The Planning Board introduced the 2015 Broad Street Master plan last year but it has not been formally approved. A copy of the plan is available online.

This is still a valid objective.

**To incorporate more entertainment uses within the CRBD to provide more vitality and variety in the downtown (2015 Downtown Improvement Plan)**

Discussion: Parents say that there's nothing for children to do in town after school. This is especially true now that the movie theater has closed. It would be good to have entertainment uses in town that kids can't do at home such as a movie theater or bowling alley. It's important to create an experience that draws people back to town. Westfield has a second-floor ping pong facility. Perhaps Summit could have an arcade. Attracting entertainment uses in town, similar to attracting retail uses, however, is an issue of feasibility. Some towns use recruiters and pay to get businesses to come to town. Mr. Abramson identified several other tools to attract a developer including tax incentives, density and zoning. Additional liquor licenses might also be helpful as they generate more vitality in a town but these are based on population (one per 3,000 residents), and Summit already has the maximum number of liquor licenses allowed. Topology is going to hold a session at the High School to get input from the students.

There is a role for the city to play in this objective. Summit has fairly robust recreation facilities and opportunities that could be leveraged.

The Subcommittee discussed possible recreation facilities in town. The Village Green has a bocce court. Other recreation facilities could include outdoor ping pong tables and exercise equipment.

This is still a valid objective.

**Workshop 1 - "What goes on a two-acre lot downtown?"**

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This question was asked of Subcommittee members at Workshop 1. Housing was not the only response. Other responses included a theater and performing arts center. The Subcommittee noted that Summit already has several performing art theaters. Mr. Sadlej stated that it is easy to attract an operator for a musical venue if the space is available.

Summit offers many different recreation programs. The Department of Community Programs coordinates recreation and other related programs at the recreation center and maintains several parks including the municipal golf course and family aquatic center. It also coordinates programs in the Village Green. Summit Downtown Inc. (SDI) coordinates the farmers' market, street fair and Girls' Night Out. There are lots of activities in town between these two groups.

One Subcommittee suggested promoting the municipal golf course with a walkway that would make it more accessible. This led to a discussion about accessibility and walkability. Ms. Sank stated that a big obstacle, as identified in the 2000 Master plan, to integrating east Summit to town is the railroad crossing on Springfield Avenue. The roadway under the railroad bridge is narrow and doesn't have a sidewalk so there is no safe way to walk into town which effectively, although not intentionally, segregates the town. More sidewalks in Summit would be good; however, it's hard to get people to agree to install a sidewalk because they have to maintain it. Ms. Balson Alvarez suggested requiring homeowners to install a sidewalk as a condition of sale of their house. Mr. Sadlej noted that sidewalks and pedestrian access/safety have come up in every Subcommittee discussion.

### **Team Assignments**

#### **Task 0: Develop scenario precedents for public meeting**

Compile and send examples of developments that Subcommittee members like and can envision in Summit especially in the Gateway II area. This can be for commercial/office development, cultural institutions, park or plaza or variety of residential types with a focus on size, scale, architecture, bulk and context. Topology will have photos for the public meeting on June 1<sup>st</sup> but would like to have photos from Subcommittee members prior to the public meeting. If photos aren't available, Subcommittee members can provide Topology with the names of cities or places they like. Subcommittee members can also provide photographs of development that they don't like and wouldn't want to see in Summit.

Assigned to: All Subcommittee members

Deadline: End of day, Saturday, May 28, 2016

#### **Task 1: Second story use utilization in CRBD**

Priority: To fully utilize the upper floor spaces in the CBRD to provide much needed housing and to prevent building deterioration while protecting retail trade

Determine if second-story use utilization in the CRBD is an issue by contacting property owners or broker(s) to ascertain vacancy of second-story spaces. Record the locations of empty or underutilized second-story space. Collect rental information and size of spaces. Ask brokers what they perceive the challenges of leasing second story space to be.

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Assigned to: Kevin McGoey

Deadline: By the next Land Use Subcommittee meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>

**Task 2: Senior housing need**

Priority: Increase senior housing opportunities

Contact senior housing managers in Summit to ascertain the level of senior housing shortage/need in Summit. Is there a waiting list and how long is the wait? What is the current cost? Is it affordable? How many units are available in the building?

Assigned to: Diane Klaif

Deadline: By the next Land Use Subcommittee meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>

**Task 3: Oversize homes**

Priority: Preserve existing residential neighborhoods from the construction of oversize homes

Photograph homes that are oversized or out of scale with the neighborhood.

The Subcommittee believes that the construction of oversize homes seems to have slowed; however, this may be an issue when lots are consolidated.

Assigned to: All Subcommittee members

Deadline: By the next Land Use Subcommittee meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>

**Task 4: Broad Street opportunity identification**

Priority: Encourage development improvements in the Broad Street Corridor

Walk the corridor to identify opportunity areas. Identify business improvement areas and photograph areas where there are pedestrian safety/comfort issues, vacant storefronts, underutilized parcels and environmental hazards.

Assigned to: Bill Anderson, Jennifer Balson Alvarez and John Zucker

Deadline: By the next Land Use Subcommittee meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>

**Task 5: Existing development patterns review**

Priority: Encourage residential development in locations and at densities which are compatible with existing development patterns and which public roadways and utilities can serve

Identify distinct districts where patterns exist and their boundaries and characteristics. Use Google Map to identify and confirm by driving/walking that the boundaries are consistent. Look for scale, building type, neighborhood character and pedestrian infrastructure. Take photos of examples of existing scale

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and development in districts as well as photos of examples where development is out of sync with the development patterns in the neighborhood. Take photos of potential development sites or where there is the potential for additional development.

Assigned to: Karen Khalaf

Deadline: By the next Land Use Subcommittee meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>

#### **Task 6: Parking utilization**

Priority: Emphasis on a balanced, unbiased approach to parking

Identify key surface parking lots and number of parking spaces in those lots. Visit those lots at the same time for two weeks to verify utilization/availability of parking.

The Parking Authority should have some of this data. Topology is happy with opinions regarding parking e.g., location of parking, are visitors unaware of parking opportunities, perceptions of full lots, are the gates at the parking lots good or bad? This task also ties into Task 1 (identify second-story use). Do renters of second-story space have parking; where do they park; do they have to move their cars; and, are there “in and out” timeframes for parking?

Assigned to: All Subcommittee members

Deadline: By the next Land Use Subcommittee meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>

#### **Next steps**

- Completion of Task 0 by end-of-day, Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup>
- Public Workshop on June 1<sup>st</sup>
- Completion of Tasks 1 - 6 prior to June 15<sup>th</sup> meeting
- Subcommittee meeting on June 15<sup>th</sup>

#### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.