



**City of Cedar Rapids
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES
City Hall Training Room
Wednesday, October 15, 2014
4:00PM**

The meeting was brought to order at 4:00 p.m.

Present: Council members Vernon (Chair), Weinacht, and Shey. Staff members present: Jennifer Pratt, Community Development Director; Paula Mitchel, Community Development Grant Programs Manager; Caleb Mason, Community Development Housing Redevelopment Analyst; Jeff Hintz, Community Development Planner; Seth Gunnerson, Community Development Planner; Lynda Bolin, interim Community Development Administrative Assistant.

Council Chair Vernon called for a motion to approve the minutes from September 24, 2014. Council member Weinacht made a motion to approve the minutes and Council member Shey seconded this motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

Presentations:

1. Greene Square Renovations

Daniel Gibbins, Parks and Recreation, gave opening remarks as to the historic value of the Greene Square area. Greene Square was plotted in 1843 for the use as a park/plaza for the City of Cedar Rapids. Two years ago the stakeholders group was formed, looking at Greene Square for its historical value to the City. With this in mind, the stakeholders investigated and looked at ideas to renovate Greene Square to make it “the core of downtown to the residential neighborhood”. Stakeholders meet every two weeks.

Bradd Brown, OPN Architects, presented the design and what Greene Square means to the community with input by the city, stakeholders, and public.

The integrity of the park will be maintained incorporating in the design the old trees that have been there, some over 100 years. There are five areas of outreach, 1) water feature, 2) flowers and trees, 3) seating areas, 4) interactive and playful, and 5) to make this a vibrant and useful area by the community.

Areas of concern that are being address are the need for better lighting, more seating, year around usage, open areas for activities, and keeping the historical value.

Mr. Brown presented slides of the Holiday Tree and how the water features could be covered for the winter using decorative balls that can be colored and lit by using the LED lights that would also light and color the water features. This would have two folds, 1) it would have an appealing look to the park and 2) this would also provide more light within the park offering the ability for more evening use. New seating areas in and around the park will offer gathering areas or a quiet area to relax and an open space to have group activities. Greene Square is also a connecting point bringing together the core of downtown to the residential neighborhood by keeping the historical diagonal walkway. It is also the center point for the library and museum.

This is a public/private funded project of \$1.95 million budget. To date there is \$1.75million with fundraisers to continue. Linn County is interested in sponsoring the sculptures for Greene Square. This shows the wonderful support of the community and the city government.

City Manager, Jeff Pomeranz arrived at 4:28 p.m.

Council was pleased with the design understanding this is phase one.
Mr. Brown will contact contractors to get bids for spring construction.

Ms. Pratt stated the City is working on an Iowa Great Places Grant, she will keep council updated

Council member Weinacht made a motion to move forward. Council member Shey seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

Recommendation Items:

1. Interim Zoning Amendments

Seth Gunnerson, Community Development Planner, stated there are three areas that would work with the existing zoning ordinance more into alignment with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. They are, 1) Eliminate front yard setbacks in commercial districts, 2) expand core area parking standards, and 3) set site design expectations to guide development prior to full update of the zoning code.

- Recommendations are to eliminate the 25' front yard building setback requirement in all Commercial Districts and to recommend allowing buildings which provide a public entrance to the sidewalk to encroach into required front yard landscaping. Developer feedback is positive.
- Expand Core Area Parking standards by establishing parking maximums and allowing for reduction of minimum parking by 1) expand establishing parking maximums, 2) allowing reductions in minimum parking requirements, and 3) allow approval of tandem parking for existing one and two-family homes. Developer feedback is positive.
- Site Design Expectations would be to adopt a language which would emphasize the desire of the community for new development to be oriented towards the street with

pedestrian access and which minimizes the visual appearance of parking. Developer feedback is positive.

Council member Shey stated he would like to see more use of bus subsidizing for employees vs. creating more parking. Council member Vernon asked about a code requiring trees when a parking lot was of a certain size or if you do some building or rebuilding you would have to insert trees into the parking area. Ms. Pratt will look into the code and the requirements.

Council member Shey made a motion for recommendation. Council member Weinacht seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with none opposed.

Informational Items:

1. Review of LIHTC Project

Paula Mitchell, Community Development Housing and Redevelopment Manager, stated there were initially three applications for Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Projects asking for financial assistance from the City. However, two of those requests were subsequently withdrawn due to financing and site control issues. Therefore, there is only one applicant moving forward this year.

Ms. Mitchell stated the remaining proposed project is requesting a resolution of support and City financial participation for “Sonoma Square Senior Living” located on land owned by the City at Ellis Boulevard and J Avenue NW. The project proposes new construction of a 50-unit multi-family senior housing development in the Ellis Boulevard Viable Business Corridor. Units will be primarily one and two-bedroom, with a small number of four-bedroom units. Rents range from \$520 to \$925 for affordable units. The total project costs are \$7.8 million and the developer is seeking City-owned land and financial participation of \$453,500. This project did receive City support in the previous year’s LIHTC round, but was not allocated tax credits by the Iowa Finance Authority.

Ms. Mitchell stated the potential sources of funding may be available include City land, Workforce Housing Credits, Urban Revitalization Tax Exemption, Tax Increment Financing, and low interest loans. The staff will make recommendations for the financial request at the November 19, 2014, meeting.

Council member Vernon expressed interest to ensure that the design of the building meets the City’s Overlay District standards and is requesting they look at a design that would best enhance the neighborhood. Ms. Pratt suggested talking with the Developer and the Neighborhood Association asking for their input on the design of the building as well. Ms. Mitchell noted that this is a preview of the project and that staff will return with specific recommendations in November, after working with the Developer and neighborhood stakeholders.

2. Indian Creek Nature Center

Caleb Mason, Community Development Redevelopment Analyst, stated the City has received a request for the Indian Creek Nature Center (ICNC) to purchase approximately 78 acres of City property that they are currently leasing located north of Otis Road SE and west of Bertram Road SE. The Nature Center has managed the property since their establishment in 1973. In 2001, the City and the Nature Center renewed a lease agreement for an additional 50year term at \$1.00 yearly rent. The lease can be terminated by material breach of the terms of the lease or intention to terminate four (4) years after written notice.

Mr. Mason stated the Nature Center can only use the property for environmental education, non-obtrusive recreation, preservation, restoration, protection and enhancement of the land in its natural scenic, historical, agricultural, and/or open space condition. Habitat manipulations such as: prescribed burns, managing walking/hiking trails, energy and resource conservation demonstrations. The City is to approve any plans for the construction of any facilities on the site. ICNC is to maintain the property.

Mr. Mason stated the Nature Center began discussion in summer 2014 regarding plans to expand operations through the construction of facilities and improvements through a project known as "Amazing Space". The \$5.9 million project involves the construction of a 12,000 square foot facility. To-date they have raised in excess of \$5 million of the project through a capital campaign and intend to break ground on the project in the spring of 2015.

Mr. Mason stated there were still several variables that needed to be looked into such as the circumstances surrounding the City's acquisition of the property and potential limitations on the reuse of the property. ICNC wants to purchase this land not only to build on but to protect their investment. This presentation is preliminary so the committee can start thinking about the sale and usage of this property to ICNC.

The committee would be interested in further discussion; the Nature Center has been a really good partner with the City for many years.

Committee members questioned where the current barn is located and where the new building(s) will be built. Committee member Vernon is requesting a site plan to help the committee better visualize where the buildings, parking lots, and trails would be located. Also request is a breakdown of what the city has put into that piece of land and what ICNC has put in as far as investment to make this proposal fair for everyone.

The meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda Bolin, Interim Administrative Assistant II
Community Development