

2016 City of Summit – Master Plan Re-Examination
Economic Development Subcommittee - Workshop # 2
July 6, 2016 – MINUTES

Workshop # 2 of the Economic Development Subcommittee of the 2016 Master Plan Re-Examination was held on July 6, 2016, at Summit City Hall, Whitman Room, 512 Springfield Avenue, Summit, New Jersey, 07901. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.

Present: Jeff Wagenbach, Subcommittee Chair; Jessica Hobson; [REDACTED] Beth Welsh; Reagan Burkholder; Timothy Erday; Annette Dwyer; John Coughlan; Ginny Jordan; and Tom Conway

Krzysztof Sadlej from Topology

Agenda

- Review Schedule
- Top Goals from Prior Meeting
- Public Meeting Feedback
 - Does it align with goals?

Review Schedule

The 2016 Master Plan is on schedule to be delivered to the Planning Board for consideration in September. The next public meeting to vet the recommendations in the Master Plan has been rescheduled from the end of August to September 13, 2016. Workshop #3 is scheduled for the week of August 22nd. Members would like to see the recommendations prior to the workshop so that they can provide feedback if they are unable to attend.

The city has worked with coUrbanize on an online housing demand survey designed to quantify the needs and wants for housing including the demand to own versus rent. Response to the survey has been excellent. The survey is available on the Summit website and signs for the survey have been placed strategically around town. Mr. Sadlej will send a link to the survey to the Subcommittee. A second online survey to identify retail/entertainment demand will be launched later this summer. This survey should be helpful to SDI (Summit Downtown Inc.). Subcommittee members suggested posting a link to the retail/entertainment survey in empty retail spaces.

Feedback from Workshop #1 is that the goals from previous plans were not defined or too vague and there was no follow through. This workshop is an opportunity to discuss goals and how to present them in the Master Plan. Mr. Sadlej would like to reduce the number of goals to ten by the end of the month - and possibly even further- as well as mix the plan up and move away from the silo structure of the existing plan so that this Master Plan is more useable. Each goal would be supported by strategies for achieving the goal and specific action steps for each strategy. Some of the strategies may apply to several goals. Strategies and action steps will enable success because they are measurable. It's up to the Planning Board to decide if it wants benchmarks. It may be necessary to change ordinances to make the goals implementable.

Public Meeting Feedback

The public workshop was very successful with over 120 people attending and 1,500 Post-it® notes of input from the public as to what should be included in the Master Plan. Responses to the housing and retail/entertainment surveys were also strong.

2016 City of Summit – Master Plan Re-Examination
Economic Development Subcommittee - Workshop # 2
July 6, 2016 – MINUTES

Mr. Burkholder commented that lower income households are under-represented in the housing survey responses from the public workshop. The Subcommittee discussed ways to reach out to this community. Topology has already met with several organizations including the Interfaith Council and CHAT for Summit and students at the Summit High School to get broader input for the Master Plan. Mr. Sadlej would like to do street surveys at the end of the summer and is also looking at scheduling individual focus group meetings. Also discussed was holding the public workshop on a weekend rather than a week night to capture broader input/feedback.

Mr. Burkholder distributed a handout showing income cohorts in Summit in 2013 in \$50K increments and commented that the map on the handout shows how much more economically diverse Summit is compared to its neighbors especially those to the northeast. The Subcommittee asked about the correlation between households making less than 50K and rental properties. A map from the public workshop shows the location of renters versus owners that can be overlaid on the income cohort map to correlate income levels with renters and homeowners. Ms. Dwyer stated that renters who don't have to carry the infrastructure costs of home ownership may have more disposable income. Given that everyone has some disposal income, is Summit encouraging shops/activities/places for diverse demographics?

Based on feedback from the public workshop, residents would like to have a grocery store in town such as a Trader Joe's or Whole Foods. The Subcommittee discussed previous markets that didn't survive. The Meat House has some groceries and produce but that is not its specialty. Mr. Burkholder believes the opportunity for a grocery store seems to be in east Summit because Shop Rite is not walkable.

Discussion of Goals

Promoting Connectivity - Promoting connectivity is a recurring theme in the Subcommittee discussions. Strategies supporting this goal include promoting mixed use development on Broad Street, promoting active uses on the Village Green and encouraging multi-modal transportation. Expanding the CRBD has been identified as an action step in support of this strategy. Mr. Burkholder believes the railroad tracks not the Village Green are the issue and it would be great to bridge the tracks citing the bridge in Millennium Park in Chicago as an example of making something exciting so people will use it. The Village Green has some benches. An architectural firm has done a plan for the Village Green with seating that invites people to "come sit" here. The proposed parklets promote sitting although there has been some opposition to them because of the loss of parking spaces. Ms. Dwyer cited Rhinebeck, NY as an inviting, "sittable" town.

Create a World-Class Downtown - How does Summit attract Rhinebeck-type businesses? It's not clear that retail businesses will come until they see that people will spend. Banks will locate in towns because they can spread the rental costs for retail space across their other businesses and can afford to have less-traveled space. The Subcommittee would like to see an economically vibrant, walkable community. Mr. Sadlej noted that communities get what they build for: Focusing on cars will get cars and traffic. The Subcommittee discussed using disposal income and spending potential data to determine the demand for retail prior to developing a retail strategy acknowledging that online retail shopping makes this harder now. Mr. Sadlej stated that one way to attract businesses is to start with a retail demand study and then contact investors with information about vacant lots and provide tours of those lots. Topology used this strategy in Rockaway, NY. It took time and money but Topology was successful in getting five stores in a corridor. Putting one retailer in a building can have an economic impact on a whole corridor leading to a more vibrant downtown.

2016 City of Summit – Master Plan Re-Examination
Economic Development Subcommittee - Workshop # 2
July 6, 2016 – MINUTES

Mr. Sadlej stated that permitted uses can be used as a draw for businesses. Also, revising businesses codes is a good idea to attract businesses as many of them are old and outdated. Summit needs to find things that aren't available on the internet. Hair and nail salons attract regular repeat customers to town. Instructional uses are also good because children attend on a regular basis and parents have time to shop or eat while they wait for their children although this may be a better use on a second floor. Ms. Dwyer would like to see more transaction-oriented businesses.

Risk is the biggest constraint in attracting businesses. Property owners want businesses that are safe. Incentives can be used to get property owners to attract more risky businesses. Mr. Wagenbach responded that incentives at the city level, other than permitted uses, are not available as tax payers do not want to fund the cost of them. Mr. Conway believes there's a need to attract the Creative Class. The openness of a community is indicative of attracting the Creative Class.

Summit can't compete with the Mall at Short Hills so consumer engagement is critical in attracting people to town. New Providence and Berkeley Heights also hurt Summit: Summit is not doing anything to encourage residents from other towns to come to Summit. Attracting out-of-town residents should be added to the Master Plan as a strategy. Ms. Dwyer believes that Summit needs to focus beyond those who come to town to run an errand and should have more "want" goods than "need" goods. It needs aesthetically pleasing shops that attract people. If customers have a positive experience they'll come back.

Mr. Coughlan expressed concern about focusing on economic development only in downtown with "quirky" shops that are more risky businesses and asked if the purpose of economic downtown is for retailers to thrive or for developers to thrive. The "quirky" businesses may not be the ones that will sign a ten-year lease and may not be the type of businesses property owners want and instead may prefer more stable tenants. Ms. Dwyer believes property owners sometimes have to make a micro economic bad decision for the greater good and fears that if Summit doesn't save downtown and keep it alive, people will not want to live/buy here. Ms. Welsh noted that "quirky" businesses are on a budget and may not be able to afford full architecturals or the lengthy processing time to get permits. Brokers go to towns where they know they can close a deal easily. The permitting process takes much too long so that businesses sometimes have to pay rent much before they are able to open their businesses. The Subcommittee discussed fast tracking permits for small businesses. Mr. Wagenbach thinks this could be implemented and asked if SDI would be willing to contribute funds to implement fast tracking for small businesses.

More business partnerships are needed. The summer farmer's market is okay because it's on Sunday when businesses are closed but there's opposition to a winter farmer's market because of competition.

Parking - Parking is an issue because people want to park right in front of the business they plan to patronize. In addition, the ordinances have increased permitted density but nothing has been done about parking. Mr. Coughlan suggested that the Master Plan take the approach that parking is what it is rather than focus on parking lots and decks.

Next steps

Mr. Sadlej is creating a Google document will create a Google document with goals so that Subcommittee members can add strategies and actions.

2016 City of Summit – Master Plan Re-Examination
Economic Development Subcommittee - Workshop # 2
July 6, 2016 – MINUTES

The Subcommittee will meet again the week of August 8 – the exact date to be determined. At this meeting, the Subcommittee will focus on the big picture of economic development downtown and elsewhere as well as jobs.

The public meeting to vet the Master Plan recommendations prior to submission to the Planning Board has been rescheduled to September 13, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. at The Connection.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Submitted by Margaret Koontz.