

**COMMON COUNCIL JOINT MEETING WITH
CITY OF NOBLESVILLE PLAN COMMISSION
APRIL 30, 2024**

The Common Council of the City of Noblesville held a joint meeting with the City of Noblesville Plan Commission on Tuesday, April 30, 2024 in rooms A213 and A214 at City Hall. Darren Peterson called the meeting to order pursuant to public notice at 5:03 p.m. with the following members present: Mark Boice, Mike Davis, Evan Elliott, Dave Johnson, Pete Schwartz, Aaron Smith, Todd Thurston, and Megan Wiles. Scott Smith called the Plan Commission meeting to order with the following members present: Mike Davis, Adriann Young, and Assistant City Engineer Jim Hellmann. Gretchen Hanes arrived at 5:10 p.m. Steve Cooke attended electronically via Microsoft Teams.

Also present were City Clerk Evelyn Lees, Deputy Mayor Matt Light, Community Development Director Sarah Reed, Public Safety Director Chad Knecht, Community Relations Manager Lexie Rock, Project Manager Jayme Thompson, Economic Development Assistant Director Chuck Haberman, Planning Director Caleb Gutshall, Development Services Manager Joyceann Yelton, Principal Planner Denise Aschleman, Senior Planner Amy Steffen, Associate Planner Rina Neely, MKSK Studios principal Andy Knight, and MKSK Studios planner Bryan Conner. City Attorney Jonathan Hughes arrived at 5:30 p.m. City Engineer Alison Krupski and Chief Financial Officer and Controller Jeff Spalding arrived at 6:00 p.m. An interested citizen arrived at 6:55 p.m.

Ms. Reed stated the purpose of the meeting is to present information on the West Gateway Master Plan and introduce the East Gateway Master Plan. She stated there is a working group comprised of staff and stakeholders for the projects as well.

Mr. Conner displayed a PowerPoint presentation on the West Gateway Master Plan. Mr. Knight stated the master plan still is in the initial stages of data collection. He stated an online survey will end on Friday. He stated the purpose of this meeting is to provide a status update. He stated the master plan is a community-driven process. Mr. Knight referred to a map showing the west and east gateway planning areas. He stated the two areas are linked by Downtown. He stated the west gateway area is bounded by the White River on the east and includes Federal Hill, the Riverview Health campus, and the Nexus apartments and north to State Road 38. He stated the east gateway area also includes the old Firestone property. He stated the two studies will be staggered at the beginning of the process, but they will be completed at the same time. He stated the focus of tonight's presentation will be the west gateway, and an update on the east gateway will follow in one or two months.

Mr. Knight reviewed the project orientation and overview. He stated their goal is to identify emerging opportunities, themes, and goals. He reviewed eight objectives of the project. He stated the first three objectives concern making the gateway vibrant, walkable, and unique; identifying redevelopment sites; and activating and connecting to the White River and the riverwalk. He stated objectives four through six focus on infrastructure improvements. He stated the last two objectives concern policies and financial analysis. He stated Policy Analytics, LLC will be involved in the financial analysis and funding. He stated the east gateway objectives are similar with the exception of connecting to Downtown instead of the White River. He reviewed the timeline for the studies.

Mr. Conner reviewed the previous studies that will be used to inform the gateway master plans. He stated they will use the 2020 Comprehensive Plan; the 2018 Downtown Streetscape Master Plan; the 2020 Noblesville Alternative Transportation (NAT) Plan; the 2020 Parks and Recreation Master Plan; the 2019 White River Master Plan; the 2016 Housing Study; and the 2022 Hamilton County Housing Study. He reviewed an engagement summary and listed the in-person and online methods of gaining information. He stated a QR (quick response) code will be sent to the meeting attendees. Ms. Aschleman reviewed the participants in the stakeholder meetings and the interdepartmental staff advisory committee. She stated many staff are also on the development team. Ms. Reed explained the development team is made up of staff from the Planning, Engineering, and Economic Development Departments, as well as staff from the Mayor's Office.

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Mr. Knight reviewed stakeholder feedback. He stated a significant percentage of respondents would drive to the district, but a majority of respondents would walk or bike within the district. Mr. Thurston asked if there had been input regarding electric bicycles or scooters. Mr. Knight replied no, they were not mentioned. Mr. Thurston stated he saw many this past weekend. Mr. Knight replied it is an issue to consider, because of their speed. He stated the stakeholders envisioned restaurants overlooking the White River within walking or biking distance. He stated respondents want safer pedestrian crossings and slower vehicular speeds within the district.

Mr. Conner reviewed their analysis findings for identifying redevelopment sites and compatible land uses; activating the White River and the Riverwalk; improving roadways and trails; and drafting design and development policies. They displayed a flood map of the district. Ms. Aschleman stated the map is relatively accurate. Mr. Knight stated they plan to work with the 500-year floodplain. He explained how they intend to account for flooding on and near the river. He stated when Pleasant Street is completed, it will affect the district. He stated more sidewalks are needed to make the district more walkable. He stated design and development policies would help modernize and simplify zoning in the area.

Mr. Hughes joined the meeting.

Mr. Knight reviewed the demographics of Noblesville residents. He stated Policy Analytics provided research as a part of the process. He stated much of the research was focused on Hamilton County, but they intend to be more specific to Noblesville and find what makes Noblesville different from neighboring communities. He stated the housing studies showed that more variety in housing is needed.

Mr. Knight stated three things that set Noblesville apart are the White River, the historic Downtown, and the historic neighborhoods and fabric of those communities. He asked those present for their opinions. Mr. Smith stated the City is trying to strike a balance between new development and the historic parts of the city. He stated it is helpful to look at similar county seats such as Franklin, Tennessee. Mr. Peterson stated Noblesville has an authentic Downtown. He stated the development at Federal Hill was intended to extend Downtown west of the river. Mr. Johnson agreed. He stated new development needs to incorporate a sense of community with Downtown. Mr. Smith stated there is an opportunity to reroute State Road 19 north of Westfield Road. He stated the road is a significant barrier to Federal Hill feeling like Downtown. Ms. Reed stated staff is working to make Logan Street west of the river more pedestrian-friendly. Mr. Elliott stated it is important to find what respondents find exciting. He stated various parts of the City need to have a sense of place and “wow” factor. He stated different areas and neighborhoods should have their own distinct identities.

Ms. Young asked what is possible for the river. She stated she lives on the river, and she would like to know how it can be activated. Mr. Knight stated the White River can be several things. He stated it can be a seam, a spine, or a necklace, and it can be all of those things at once. He stated Buffalo Bayou in Houston, Texas is an example of river activation. Mr. Conner stated Moline, Illinois is a good example of how to mitigate flooding. Mr. Peterson stated there are obstacles to accessing the river, because much of the shoreline is owned by Hamilton County through Downtown. Ms. Reed stated the White River activation master plan includes pockets of activation that address those obstacles. Mr. Schwartz asked if the Pleasant Street project will provide river access. Ms. Reed replied it does not now, but the Midland Trace Trail will run along Pleasant Street and connect to the Riverwalk. Ms. Aschleman stated the City owns two parcels on the river. Mr. Johnson stated the river is a seasonal resource, and thought should be given to activating the river during the other six months. Mr. Conner replied there will be sub-study areas within the larger district.

Mr. Thurston stated the City has many things to offer besides just Downtown. He stated it has a lake, greenspace, and trails too. Mr. Haberman stated Noblesville has rich traditions that are many decades old and a long history. He stated Carmel, Fishers, and Westfield do not have them to near the same extent. Mr. Johnson stated authenticity is key.

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Ms. Krupski and Mr. Spalding joined the meeting.

Mr. Elliott asked what the City should focus on first. Ms. Reed stated it would make sense to amend the Comprehensive Master Plan and the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which has been discussed for years. She stated she hopes they will be amended in the next year. Ms. Aschleman stated the last time they were amended together was 1996. She stated it will be key to identify redevelopment opportunities for developers from outside the community, since they are not aware of what is available. Ms. Reed stated redevelopment should be the highest and best use of the property. She stated the City can afford to be selective. Mr. Knight asked if the City has a goal for workforce housing. Ms. Reed replied there is a goal of ten percent per new multi-family project, but there is not a goal for the City as a whole. Mr. Knight stated they plan to talk to developers about perceived roadblocks. Mr. Peterson stated clarification is needed by the Plan Commission. He stated the Hyde Park master plan pointed out problems with the UDO. He stated similar action is needed to make development Downtown easier to approve. Mr. Smith stated there is an opportunity Downtown for owner-occupied townhomes or condominiums. Ms. Reed agreed. She stated there is a goal to make more housing in Downtown owner-occupied.

Mr. Conner asked what barriers to marketing the area exist. Mr. Peterson stated there is walkable healthcare in Downtown, but pedestrians find it difficult to cross Westfield Road. Ms. Reed stated pedestrian access on the Conner Street Bridge over White River also needs to be improved, but the bridge is a county asset. Mr. Conner asked if Pleasant Street needs to be addressed. Mr. Peterson replied Pleasant Street has been called a bypass, but it is not a bypass; it is an economic development driver. Ms. Reed stated it will reduce traffic and noise through Downtown, which will be great. Mr. Smith stated Pleasant Street has the potential to expand Downtown to the south. Mr. Peterson stated Pleasant Street will have a built-in trail, but it needs to be extended over State Road 37. Mr. Conner asked if trails need to be addressed. Mr. Peterson replied yes, many trails have gaps that need to be connected, particularly in the eastern part of the City. Mr. Knecht stated Noblesville is ready to do what Indianapolis has done. He stated there used to be several disconnected neighborhoods, but now they are connected and very vibrant. Mr. Peterson stated Forest Park really is a part of Downtown, but it hasn't been connected. He stated a trail connecting Federal Hill and Forest Park will be built later this year.

Ms. Aschleman stated she will send a copy of the PowerPoint presentation and a link to the online survey to all of the meeting attendees. Mr. Conner stated approximately 600 people have visited the website to date.

Mr. Peterson adjourned the Council meeting. Mr. Scott adjourned the Plan Commission meeting.

DARREN PETERSON, PRESIDENT

ATTEST:

EVELYN L. LEES, CLERK