

A work session of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on February 23, 2006. Mayor Robert J. Buckman, Jr. called the meeting to order in Council Chambers at 7:00 PM.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Buckman led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councilman Rick Bryan, Mayor Robert Buckman, Councilman Lee Czerwonka, Councilman Henry Stacey, Councilwoman Stephanie Stoller, and Vice Mayor Mark Weber

MEMBER ABSENT: Councilman James Sumner

Mayor Buckman moved, Councilman Bryan seconded to excuse Councilman Sumner from the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. Motion carried.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Marvin Thompson, Deputy Solicitor Bryan Pacheco, Clerk of Council Jamie Eifert, Deputy Clerk of Council Sue Bennett, Assistant City Manager David Waltz, Treasurer/Administrative Services Director James Pfeffer, Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk, Service Director Dennis Albrinck, Economic Development Director Judy Clark, Assistant Community Development Director Dan Johnson, members of the press, and interested citizens

WORK SESSION TOPIC 1: OVERVIEW OF MAJOR CHANGES PLANNED FOR THE BLUE ASH CODE AND AN OVERVIEW OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE UPDATED DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

Code Changes Discussion

Assistant City Manager David Waltz explained that most of the Code changes proposed are “housekeeping” type issues, or items intended for clarification. For example, the proposed changes include:

- ?? More defined regulation of transient and portable structures (POD’s) – to be used as temporary only.
- ?? Specific regulation of “big box” retail, essentially limiting it to the C-2 Planned Commercial district only.
- ?? Clarification of sign regulations, particularly in the Downtown District.
- ?? Addition of a nonconforming provision that specifically deals with nonconforming buildings.
- ?? Addition of regulations related to residential infill construction to help maintain an established neighborhood’s character.

Mr. Waltz explained that related to the latter item noted above, Section 1181.02 is affected, and the proposed changes show the addition of four sections to try to address the recent issue of newly constructed homes in existing neighborhoods. These four additional sections essentially address two major concerns for new residential construction: (1) setback issues; and (2) first floor elevation. Regarding setback, the proposed changes now establish setbacks based upon an average of the existing homes in the neighborhood. The desire here is to limit the sharp differences between new and existing home setbacks. Regarding the changes associated with elevation, the proposed changes would require the first floor of new homes to be constructed within one foot of the elevation of the previously existing home. This will prevent newly constructed homes from being built on higher elevations, which could cause water problems for neighboring properties.

In addressing a question from Councilman Bryan regarding the setback average concept, Mr. Waltz commented that the goal would be to have setbacks within a 20-foot average (front or back).

In addressing a question from Councilman Stacey, Mr. Waltz commented that panhandle lots would still be allowed as long as they comply with the Code. Councilman Bryan commented that with the proposed changes, it appears such panhandle developments could be effectively stopped, as it would be difficult to do this with the new regulations. Councilman Bryan also suggested that the City limit the granting of variances as well.

Councilwoman Stoller commented that she believes the proposed changes to the Code will address the concerns residents have expressed with regards to construction of new homes in established neighborhoods.

In addressing a question from Councilman Bryan, Mr. Waltz and City Manager Thompson commented that the City's existing larger C-2 Planned Commercial areas are essentially located in the Plainfield/Hunt area (at K-Mart), off Pfeiffer Road near Bob Evans/Office Depot, and in the Kenwood/Cornell Road area.

In addressing a comment from Councilman Bryan regarding the proposed 90-foot height for buildings in downtown (Section 1159.06), Mr. Waltz commented that perhaps that section would be better addressed within the Downtown design standards work which will be completed within the next few months. Mr. Thompson commented that the height was changed from 90 to 50 feet in 2003 with the update to the Comprehensive Plan.

Downtown Plan Discussion

Mr. Waltz commented that the Downtown Concept Plan currently being considered is somewhat different from the proposed Code changes discussed above. It is a concept redevelopment plan – more of a framework, as compared to design standards. The Administration will soon work with a consultant on the development of those revised downtown design standards in the coming weeks. Expected cost for this consultant is less than \$5,000. These design standards will address specific issues such as architectural appearance, scale, and form.

Planning Commission will review the proposed Downtown Concept Plan at its meeting on March 2nd. Council is expected to set a public hearing for April 27th, with a second reading and formal vote expected May 11th.

Some discussion was had on the conceptual nature of the Downtown Concept Plan – it is a concept of what the City sees downtown could be in the future. It was also commented that one of the concepts within this plan is a sensitivity to existing residential neighborhoods.

Some discussion was had regarding the ambitious changes wanted for downtown in the future since the visuals as shown in the plan, and the concepts for development, are quite different from what exists in downtown today. Some discussion was also had regarding the investment that will be required in order to make such changes reality. Mr. Thompson commented that when the first Downtown Master Plan was discussed in 1981, and eventually passed in 1982, similar comments were made regarding it being an extremely ambitious plan. However, about 80% of the intended improvements have actually occurred, and significant public investment was required. He estimated that in today's dollars, including all of the streetscaping and other public improvements, about \$25 to \$30 million of public investment has taken place. In his opinion, it is better to have a plan that is ambitious – if you aim high, you will end up higher. Creativity will be needed to be able to reach the goals intended for the next phase of downtown.

WORK SESSION TOPIC 2: BLUE ASH AIRPORT

City Manager Thompson commented that the Airport has been discussed for over the past 20 years. Blue Ash does not know what Cincinnati will do, and he suggested that perhaps Cincinnati does not know as well at this point. Recent discussion has suggested a Cincinnati desire to sell the airport. He explained that eventually Cincinnati would have to do something, as airport maintenance will be a major factor. He estimated that they would have to come to a decision within the next 12 to 18 months as that is probably when runway/taxiway improvements will need to be planned. Blue Ash's long-standing official position (that Blue Ash would like for the airport to remain on reduced acreage and the remaining acreage to be released for appropriate development) was most recently restated in the 2003 Comprehensive Plan.

In addressing a question from Councilman Czerwonka, Mr. Thompson commented that if Cincinnati accepted federal grant monies to improve the airport, they would have to keep the airport in operation for another 20 years, similar to what happened in 1983 when improvements were made using federal monies and the airport was required to remain in operation until at least 2003.

Mr. Thompson commented that Blue Ash has had extensive meetings with the City of Cincinnati over recent years. In those meetings, Mr. Thompson stressed that he believed Cincinnati could get at least 80% of the funding required to make improvements at the airport from the FAA. The City of Cincinnati has since approached the FAA at least three times, and in fact they were told they could get 100% of the funding (even more than what Mr. Thompson had previously estimated). Mr. Thompson commented that in his opinion, the bottom line is that Cincinnati is not interested in doing that. They seem most interested in increasing air traffic at Lunken Airport. Overall, there have been many meetings since 2003/2004, and most recently, the Administration has also talked with Cincinnati's new Mayor, Mark Mallory, at least two times. Mr. Waltz commented that he believes once the new Cincinnati Mayor gets more established in his new office, Cincinnati would resume conversation with Blue Ash – perhaps in the next few months.

Councilman Stacey commented that one reason he wanted to discuss the Airport this evening, being a newer member of Council, was to clarify this current Council's position on the airport. After a brief discussion, it was the unanimous consensus of the six Council members present that all believe in the City's official position, most recently restated in the 2003 Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Waltz commented that an additional concern of Cincinnati's, though Blue Ash does not agree, is that if some of the property were to be released for development, some existing Cincinnati businesses will relocate to Blue Ash. He added that he believes perhaps more progress, at least in the form of discussions to revisit the airport issue, will be made with the new Cincinnati Mayor.

Mr. Thompson commented about recent efforts at the State level to assist with assuring the airport remains in operation. It is his opinion that the State will have no power over the issue. This opinion is based upon a scenario Blue Ash experienced many years ago when Blue Ash tried to challenge the airport operations and federal authorities essentially told us that it was none of our business.

Mr. Thompson commented that in his opinion, discussions with the new Cincinnati Mayor, even before he was elected Mayor, indicated that he was a proponent of "regionalism." Mr. Thompson did not believe their long-term intention was to keep the Blue Ash Airport as an operational airport.

Councilman Bryan also commented that he thinks it wise to publicly state that there is no way the City of Blue Ash can buy the Airport, and Mr. Thompson agreed. There is no revenue stream that would allow such a public expenditure to be paid off in a reasonable period. This is true especially given the fact that Cincinnati has already turned down an offer of \$30 million for the Airport property. Mr. Thompson commented that approximately 20 developers have made it known that they would be interested in such a

redevelopment, and about 12 have submitted detailed concept plans. It is clear that this property is considered a lucrative investment. It is unfortunate that it appears there is no real champion within the Cincinnati administration who would like to keep the airport open. It is Mr. Thompson's opinion that the direction for the next several months appears to be headed towards another "nobody can agree" outcome.

Councilman Bryan summarized his thoughts on this discussion tonight:

- ?? That Blue Ash would like to see the approximate 100-acre airport remain an operating airport.
- ?? That Blue Ash is willing to work with the City of Cincinnati and resume discussions.
- ?? That it would be financially impossible for Blue Ash to buy the airport on its own.

Mr. Thompson commented that if the airport would close, though we would not want that to happen, Blue Ash is in a good position in respect to zoning and planning.

ADJOURNMENT

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Mayor Buckman moved, Councilwoman Stoller seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:07 PM.

Robert J. Buckman, Jr., Mayor

Jamie K. Eifert, Clerk of Council

MINUTES WRITTEN BY:

Susan K. Bennett, Deputy Clerk of Council