

A work session of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on June 30, 2005. Mayor Rick Bryan called the meeting to order in Council Chambers at 7:00 PM.

**OPENING CEREMONIES**

Mayor Bryan led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**ROLL CALL**

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

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Marvin Thompson, Solicitor Mark Vander Laan, 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, Assistant Service Director Rich Dole, Economic Development Director Judy Clark, Assistant Community Development Director Dan Johnson, several members of the downtown planning committee, member of the press, and interested citizens

**TOPIC 1: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF DOWNTOWN PLAN UPDATE**

Mayor Bryan gave a brief assessment of recent downtown planning efforts. The goal was to envision where downtown Blue Ash should go in terms of broad concepts -- what do we want to see the downtown district look like? Tonight's discussion will feature an approximate 20-minute presentation by the downtown planning consultant, Menelaos Triantafillou, and approximately 10 minutes for discussion or questions and answers. Continued thought should continue over the coming summer months, and a future early fall work session, perhaps in September, will follow.

Mr. Triantafillou explained the formation of the downtown planning committee, which members consist of representatives of Council, the Administration, citizens, developers, and others with downtown interests. Three charette style meetings were held with discussion of downtown in general, as well as specific locations. In addition to these meetings, one-on-one discussions were had between the planner and others who had vested downtown interests.

Highlights from Mr. Triantafillou's presentation to Council included:

- ?? Brief discussion of successful Cincinnati area "downtown" development projects, such as Mariemont, Hyde Park Square, and Clifton. Examples of similarities of these successful projects include:
  - ?? All had multi-family clusters around a retail core, offices located at the edge of the retail core, single-family development within the periphery, and presence of parks or open space near the retail core.
  - ?? Most of the dwellings were located within a five-minute walk of the center (within about 1,500 feet).
  - ?? The streets within the area are a connected network, dispersing traffic by a variety of pedestrian and vehicular routes.
  - ?? Buildings are placed close to the street.
- ?? Other areas in the country, representing successful downtown redevelopments, were also looked at (including those visited by Council earlier this year in the Chicago area). Overall, examples of mixed-use development keys to success include:

- ?? Project identity – to reflect the character and history of the place (a distinct image).
- ?? Articulation of elements – projects are an integrated collection of individual places – they are memorable and navigable.
- ?? Street focus – projects have street identity with windows and entrances designed on a pedestrian scale that connect to and enhance the existing streetscape.
- ?? Public Places – places to meet and to be seen.
- ?? Links – bridges, walkways, etc. that connect the project to others.
- ?? Access – making it user friendly.
- ?? The Plan envisions the existing downtown area as the City's center, the community's focus, and a unique place to do business with a long-term competitive retail viability. The plan would make the downtown area:
  - ?? Easy to use and functional.
  - ?? An established “niche” position in the region for visitors/users and residents.
  - ?? A unique vibrant urban experience.
- ?? The Plan could include uses such as office, housing, niche grocery store, entertainment/performing arts, retail, services, amenities, and civic type uses.
- ?? Mr. Triantafillou showed several concept plans, utilizing examples of mixed-use ideas superimposed on aerial photography, as well as three-dimensional scale type drawings from various views. He stressed that these ideas are for discussion only, with any “fine tuning” to be determined in time.

In addressing questions from Council, the following was clarified:

- ?? Proposed office buildings off the Ronald Reagan Highway access ramps to Blue Ash/Kenwood Road were shown on the exhibits as being eight stories.
- ?? About 1,700 residential units would be possible within the downtown area.

**TOPIC 2: HUNT HOUSE**

Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk introduced Jim Fearing of Fearing & Hagenauer Architects, Inc. Mr. Funk explained recent efforts of the Administration and Council to view other historical homes within the southwest Ohio region (including in Cincinnati, Kettering, etc.). Mr. Fearing has much experience with work associated with restoration of historical structures and has been in Cincinnati approximately 28 years. He commented that the Hunt House is truly unique in that he has not seen many homes of this age that are almost entirely intact. He described the home as a “treasure” and commented that it has been maintained extremely well by the Hunt Family. Highlights of Mr. Fearing's presentation are noted below:

- ?? The Hunt House in architectural style is a mixture of Greek Revival (the formal entry in the “front” [narrow end]) and Federal (the side, long end, elevation).
- ?? The original 1860s plan for the first floor included a parlor, hall, sitting or work room, sitting or family room, dining room, pantry, kitchen, and summer kitchen.

- ?? The parlor has painted softwood floors, which is typical of Greek Revival where floors were to “receive” carpet. The Parlor and hall are unique as they are in original condition.
- ?? 1857 era hardware was found throughout the home, including doorknobs, signed hinges, etc.
- ?? Other aspects of Greek Revival type architecture can be found in the window insert detail (though more typical of urban setting), as well as the molding details.
- ?? The two sitting rooms on the first floor feature oak floors.
- ?? There was a pantry located off the kitchen (though it since has been changed to a bathroom).
- ?? The kitchen and dining areas had a wood stove and no water in the kitchen in the 1860s.
- ?? A stoop and summer kitchen area was located towards the back (narrow end) of the home, with cellar steps between.
- ?? In the 1860s, the second floor featured an upper landing and functional window, a master bedroom (one door only), three bedrooms for the children (each with a small “box stove” wood heat element, and a storage loft.
- ?? In the 1890s, some changes were made, including opening up the work room, a new fireplace with art tile hearth in the sitting/family room, a Victorian style porch (replacing the Greek Revival style stoop) off the side (long), a hand water pump and ice box were added in the kitchen, and the combination of the stoop and summer kitchen off the rear (a “bridge” added over the cellar steps).
- ?? Three windows on the side (long) of the home appear to have closed shutters (one at the top floor, and two on the ground level). The upper window does appear to have existed at one time as there were shutter hinges found. The two lower-level windows never existed as they were fakes from the house’s construction (Hunt family tradition is that they were built this way to maintain the symmetry of the home).

Suggestions regarding proposed current day “changes” were discussed as highlighted below:

- ?? In the first floor, little needs to be done to the front (narrow), including the parlor and the hall.
- ?? Reinstall the Victorian curtain between the work/family rooms, re-open the fireplace in the family/sitting room, restore the kitchen to its 1890 state, and restore the summer porch and stoop along the back.
- ?? Perhaps a future change could be the addition of a wheelchair access to the north (rear), and the summer kitchen could become a concealed addition with restrooms.
- ?? On the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, restore the upper hall with window and restore the “master’s chamber,” closing one added door and making the other credible.
- ?? Remove the restroom and kitchen and re-create the 1860’s bedrooms on the second floor.
- ?? Recreate the kitchen loft and open the stair.
- ?? A 1930’s survey showed the home and some outbuildings, including a chicken house, garage and barn, and tool shed. The original barn (about 50’ x 50’) was not shown on this survey. The old barn is shown close to the original, with an addition that is missing.

- ?? The original Hunt Barn (no longer on the site) was considered an architectural “hybrid” with this hybrid developed in Eastern Pennsylvania in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, later becoming known as the Pennsylvania Bank Barn (uniquely American). The upper level is an adaptation of a Saxon Thresher Barn (three bays for threshing of grain and storage of hay and straw). The Thresher Barn sat above an adaptation of an English Stable Barn.
- ?? The barn was about 50’ x 50’, was added to at some point, and would have been large enough for about 10 horse stalls. This makes sense, as there is documentation that supports the fact that the Home was the victim of Morgan’s Raiders, confederate forces that stole ten horses from the Hunt Family. This implies the barn and its addition predated 1863.
- ?? If the City desired to “re-create” the barn, such a 50’ x 50’ building would probably be three stories tall with three 10-foot floors. Overall, it could be about 7,500 square feet and could accommodate gatherings for lecture or dining of about 100 on one level. The side yard (currently grass) could accommodate about 50 cars and leave more than half the land as park/green space.

In addressing questions from Council:

- ?? Mr. Fearing commented that the current barn on the site is in very poor condition and would be very difficult to restore. Structurally it is in serious disrepair and very few pieces could be restored.
- ?? Some discussion was had regarding cost, and Mr. Fearing estimated that the suggested changes (which he suggests be done in phases) would be in the \$300,000 range (to bring it back to the 1890 era). The parlor and hall could be brought back very quickly as little would need to be done.
- ?? It is Mr. Fearing’s opinion that to have the House listed on the National Registry would be of benefit. He explained that years ago, having a home on this Registry was much more restrictive; however, currently the regulations are much looser, allowing owners more flexibility while maintaining historical integrity.
- ?? Regarding the possibility of holding meetings/gatherings on the second floor, Mr. Fearing estimated that perhaps 20 people might be the maximum. This would make the upper level less usable than may have first been contemplated during early discussions of the project.
- ?? The HVAC system could be brought up to standard fairly easy (for use as a museum).
- ?? It was suggested that the shutters be replaced, as they could be duplicated/reconstructed relatively easily.
- ?? Regarding the potential of an elevator, Mr. Fearing explained that since the second floor loads wouldn’t support commercial loadings, the City would probably not want to add an elevator (though it could be done).
- ?? There are grants available for such restoration projects through the “Save America’s Treasures” program. This is targeted for building such as this; however, Mr. Fearing explained that because the home is in such good condition, it may be difficult to be awarded such a grant (usually in the \$100,00 to \$200,000 range). Mr. Fearing’s office does not do grant administration, however, he could suggest other entities that could assist if so desired.

- ?? Regarding ADA compliance, current requirements for historical structures should not be too difficult in which to comply. Oftentimes, the openings in the homes are not wide enough; however, in this case, they are. If the City were to decide to re-create the barn on the site (to be completely handicap accessible), this would especially make any ADA related changes to the house less necessary.
- ?? Though Mr. Fearing is not an expert on the potential of a historical preservation easement, it is Mr. Fearing's opinion that listing the home on the National Registry may be enough to assure its future historical integrity. Mr. Sumner suggested strongly that the City take an extra step to assure that a future Council or Administration not change the historical integrity of the land and home and asked that Dinsmore & Shohl's office look into this more fully.

Councilman Sumner asked fellow Councilmember's opinions on the idea of appointing a volunteer group to help guide this project. He suggested this group serve only in an advisory capacity and that it operate similar to the Special Events Committee. Such a group could include representatives from Council, grounds maintenance and other City staff, the Historical Society, other citizens, and the Hunt Family. They could serve to assist in creating exhibits, etc. After some discussion, it seemed the consensus of Council to spend time thinking about this concept and possibly to consider other approaches (such as was done in Indian Hill with the Green Acres project).

Some discussion followed regarding overall use of the site. Councilman Sumner believes fervently that the home should maintain its original historical integrity and that the success of the project should not be judged upon the volumes of people that see it. Councilman Weber commented that he believes there should be some compromise in that preservation can be attained, at the same time encouraging more people to enjoy and experience it. It was several Councilmembers' opinions that several hundreds of thousands of dollars should not be invested into a project that will be seen by relatively few. It seemed the consensus of Council that the project include other uses (other than just a museum); however, such features can be added over time. A potential future re-creation of the barn able to support other events seemed a realistic possibility in the future (but not likely possible this year given current budgetary funding). Another idea to encourage increased usage was to create additional gardens throughout the property.

After some discussion, Mr. Fearing was asked to develop a suggested timeline for potential restoration and improvements (on a room-by-room basis), including estimated costs for each stage. Mr. Thompson commented that this information should be available to Council at the August meeting.

### ***MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION***

Some discussion was had regarding the development efforts currently happening for the area south of the Ronald Reagan Highway and west of Plainfield Road (a proposed future development featuring a Target store and smaller stores). Target has made effort to acquire area properties (including area Sycamore Township/Dillonvale residents, and the Hartzell United Methodist Church, which has agreed to be relocated by the developer on the western portion of the site). After some discussion, it was agreed that when this item was brought up by the Administration earlier this spring that six of the six Councilmembers present at that meeting (Councilman Sumner was absent) directed the Administration clearly that if the developer would satisfactorily address issues of Blue Ash such as traffic concerns, buffering, etc., that the City would not object to such a development at that location. It was with that information, relayed by the Administration to the developer, that the developer has since moved forward and talked with property owners.

Some discussion was had regarding the overall retail base within the City and it was determined that this could be the next work session topic scheduled for Monday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, at 7:00PM. A fall work session topic could include further discussion of potential Golf Course Clubhouse and Recreation Center expansion projects, which appeared to be relatively high priority of Council based upon the results of the CIP survey. (Another copy of those results will be mailed to Council in the near future.)

***ADJOURNMENT***

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Mayor Bryan moved, Councilman Stacey seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:55 PM.

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Rick Bryan, Mayor

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Jamie K. Eifert, Clerk of Council

MINUTES WRITTEN BY:

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Susan K. Bennett, Deputy Clerk of Council