

Central District Master Plan Project Update



July 1, 2009

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1. Community Open House Recap

More than 65 participants attended the June 24th Open House at the Highland Park Community House. Open House attendees heard Director of Community Development Michael Blue set forth the process the City will follow for the Central District Plan update. Mayor Michael Belsky's remarks focused on the need to keep the Central District Plan current and the issues and opportunities facing Highland Park. Keynote speaker Doug Farr discussed various urban and suburban trends facing our country. Mr. Farr set out a vision of how sustainable communities can be established and gave some guidance to Highland Park on how we can become a more sustainable community. He did note that downtown Highland Park is an excellent example of a wonderfully walkable place and that the City should build on that success. Some of Mr. Farr's comments are summarized in PowerPoint slides that may be viewed at the following website:

<http://www.farrside.com/book/sustainableurbanism.ppt>.

Open House attendees had an opportunity to visit four “stations” which focused on the planning themes developed for the Central District Plan update. A number of questions were posed at each station for participants to give comment on. The questions and summarized comments may be viewed at: <http://tinyurl.com/mbo6c3>.

2. Take the Downtown Survey

To date more than 200 people have taken the survey. If you have not already taken the survey, please use the link below to take the survey. We are very interested in your input. The survey covers a range of topics including how and why you use downtown Highland Park, how you get there, your opinions regarding the existing scale and character of downtown, and the future development character of downtown.

The survey will be open until July 10th. Please take the survey and let your relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues and other associates know about it too.

Click www.surveygizmo.com/s/137530/hpdowntownplan to take the survey.

Please answer each question, as incomplete surveys will not be counted, and YOUR opinion matters!

3. Talk to a Planner

On July 9th, a member of the Department of Community Development Planning Division will be on hand at the Thursday night summer concert at Buhai Square (Port Clinton Plaza) to discuss the downtown planning process and downtown planning issues with you. The planner will be present from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

4. Awareness Walks and Walking Tour

On July 14th and 15th, a City planner will lead an awareness walk around the downtown. These awareness walks will similar to the Walking Tour of the Central District that has been posted to the website. Each awareness walk will start at 7:00 and end around 8:00 p.m. The awareness walks are organized as follows:

- July 14: East side of downtown – meet at the Veterans’ Memorial at St. Johns and Central Avenues at 7:00 p.m.
- July 15: West side of downtown – meet on the steps of Port Clinton Plaza at Central Avenue and Second Street at 7:00 p.m.

This is an opportunity to take a closer look at downtown, to think about what you like and don’t like, to consider what elements of downtown might be ok

to change and what are the best elements of downtown to preserve. To access the walking tour please click the following link:
<http://tinyurl.com/qew6k2>.

5. Roundtable Process

Following up on the Community Open House, the City will convene a roundtable discussion process to more narrowly focus participant discussion by issue areas and get to consensus points that will lead to development of the Vision Statement. Roundtable participants will explore the overarching questions facing the downtown and then explore one of the themes. The roundtable discussions will be facilitated by community leader's appointed by the Mayor and assisted by staff from the Planning Division. Each roundtable may meet a number of times to get to a recommendation, and these recommendations will be forwarded to a Roundtable Advisory Group. The Roundtable Advisory Group will take the disparate recommendations of each roundtable and put these recommendations into a unified vision for the Central District. The number of persons participating in the roundtable process will not be limited.

Structure

Roundtable Advisory Group Chairperson

Mayor Belsky has appointed **Jonathan Plotkin as Chairperson of the Roundtable Advisory Group**. Mr. Plotkin is a former member and Chairperson of the Cultural Arts Commission and is a real estate developer in northern Illinois. Mr. Plotkin's role as Roundtable Advisory Group Chairperson is to work with staff to assure that the roundtable advisory group process is fair, efficient and productive.

Roundtable Chairpersons and Roundtable Participants

The Mayor has appointed a chairperson for three of the four roundtable groups. These appointees will also serve on the Roundtable Advisory Group. Each roundtable group will consist of members of the general public, stakeholder groups, City Commissions and at least one Plan Commissioner. **Plan**

Commissioners will be included in order to provide a level of expertise and working knowledge to assist each group.

Issues to Be Addressed

The following questions can be addressed by the participants in each of the roundtables

Overarching questions

1. How do you use downtown?
2. What is the best feature of downtown?
3. What is working and not working in the downtown?
4. What is missing from downtown?
5. What are the obstacles for achieving the downtown of our dreams?

Roundtable Themes (the following four themes and sub-topics are proposed. There will be four roundtable groups.)

a. Creating a Vibrant Downtown: Chairperson not as yet appointed

- Building Form, Urban Design and Historic Preservation
- Broad range of housing opportunities
- Art and Culture

b. Promoting Commerce and Service: Chairperson - Marla Forbes, Member of Business and Economic Development Commission

- Maintaining/expanding the CBD Market
- Business retention and viability
- Availability of job opportunities
- Parking provision - public (on-street and off-street) private (off-street) and shared parking
- Enhancing the visibility and way finding to the Central District

c. Advancing a Sustainable Downtown - Chairperson, Rebecca Grill, a former member of the Plan Commission and past member and Chairperson of the Environmental Commission

- Pedestrian Life - Walkability and accessibility

- Facilities for bicycling
- Car Sharing
- Preservation vs. New Development
- Open Space
- Greening the CBD
- Coordination with public transit

d. Assuring a Well Functioning Downtown - Chairperson, Cal Bernstein, former member of the Zoning Board of Appeals and current Board Member of the Park District of Highland Park

- Dealing with obsolete buildings
- Transportation and parking hotspots
- Infrastructure - current conditions, maintenance and future capital improvements

After each roundtable completes a recommendation, these recommendations will be shared with the larger Roundtable Advisory Group for discussion. Staff will work with each roundtable group to draft the recommendations of each group as a vision statement to be for considered by the Roundtable Advisory Group.

Once accepted by the Roundtable Advisory Group, the vision statements will be forwarded to the Plan Commission for review and consideration by the City Council. The roundtable vision statements become the jumping off point for the Central District Plan update which will be a set of specific and detailed implementation recommendations.

To participate in one or more roundtables, please email contact@hpdowntownplan.org and tell us which roundtables you want to join. Dates for the roundtables will be forthcoming in the near future.

Every person participating in the roundtables is highly encouraged to take the Downtown Walking Tour and participate in one of the awareness walks around downtown.

6. Email List Growing – Get Involved Now!

More than 225 people have submitted their email addresses so they can continue to get information about the planning process. If you are not on the email list and want to make sure you continue to get important information, email contact@hpdowntownplan.org.

The City of Highland Park hopes that this planning process will provide a variety of opportunities for City residents, property and business owners, employees, and visitors to have meaningful input into the future of downtown Highland Park.

For more information, please visit the website www.hpdowntownplan.org or call 847 432-0867.

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