

May 10, 2007

Chester Township Trustees
Ms. Judy Caputo
Mr. Ron Cotman
Mr. Charlie Stevens
12701 Chillicothe Road
Chesterland, Ohio 44026

re: Comprehensive Community Planning – Implementation Plan

I believe that we deserve a healthy community. A healthy community can improve the social, economic and physical well being of the residents, places and natural environment. This can be acquired through careful planning. Our current zoning is long outdated and has regulated a physical form for our town that is not walkable, sustainable or human scaled. We do not have diversity or balance in our housing, work, recreation or transportation choices. Our town also lacks an identifiable center or edge, which in turn, weakens the identity of the community.

Today our lifestyles revolve around our cars in lieu of community, walking, and socializing. The phrase “going out” to us currently means to get in our cars and drive to another town for social and cultural stimulation. Along the way we are wasting time, money and the environment. Why can’t going out mean to walk to our very own downtown to have dinner, watch a movie, meet a friend, window shop, or to simply read a book on a quiet bench along one of our mixed use pedestrian scaled streets while occasionally looking up to watch others enjoying their day in ‘our’ town.

Our zoning code was based on the early codes that sought to separate uses to protect property values. In those days, industry was a bad neighbor as it produced substantial pollution. In addition, the code promotes sprawl that is supported by the widespread ownership of automobiles. Today, we have discovered that the separation has caused us to lose touch with each other. We are preventing, by design, the social interaction that we as humans crave so much. The built environment provides the places for social interaction. We need to determine, as a community, what these places should look like.

The goal of comprehensive planning should be the evaluation of all aspects of the physical Chesterland Community. This will lead us to investigate many issues such as zoning, traffic, utilities, architecture, recreation, and financing to name a few. The process must be community based and open to all. The only way for the planning process to result in a product that is attainable is for it to be developed by the community, local business and property owners and the government body. This process will ensure diverse input and a broad based ownership of the final plan.

The Big Picture

Step 1: Research, Prepare, Educate

Step 2: Community Visioning and Charette process. Plan development

Step 3: Plan implementation. Codes, Government issues addressed.

Step 4: Proposed development review to ensure compliance with plan. Code updates.

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The Committee

Due to the expansive nature of study for this project, I would propose that there is one main Steering Committee that reports to the Trustees and community and then several ad hoc committees to study special issues. I have identified eleven sub committees that will really be the engines that drive of the project. Each of these will vary in number of participants from one to possibly as many as five. The task will be to investigate the details of a particular issue and report back to the steering committee.

If we take transportation as an example, the committee would meet ODOT, the County, Geauga transit, RTA and other organizations that may influence traffic and transportation in our town. In addition, study and analysis of national publications such as "Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities" would be a task. Field trips and case studies of how other communities have dealt with traffic would allow us to implement what will work best for our town rather than what is standard for the State as a whole.

Ad Hoc Committees:

1. Transportation: ODOT, County, Geauga transit, RTA, Laketrans, NOACA, National standards and case studies. (2 people)
2. Utilities: Water, Sewer, Storm, Power, Communications (2 people)
3. Government Liaison: State Representative, Senator, County Officials; coordination and support. (1 person)
4. Zoning, Codes, Legal: Form based code, zoning code modifications, overlay districts, public/ private ventures. (2-3 people)
5. Senior Citizen & Youth Liaison: Issues particular to these two demographic groups. (1)
6. Architecture, Planning, Landscape: New Urbanism, case studies, planning consultant coordination. (3-5)
7. Recreation, Parks: Green space, Geauga Park District, recreation facilities, pools, etc. (1-2)
8. Civic Facilities, Township departments Liaison: Investigation and coordination of the needs, short and long term, of the civic buildings, service departments and facilities. (1-2)
9. Municipality vs. Township: Investigation of options, needs, benefits, etc. (2-3)
10. Sustainability, Environment: Preservation and improvement of natural environment, built environment goals/ issues. (2)
11. Financial, Funding: Grants and loans for the planning effort, long term financial analysis of the items listed above. (2)

Steering Committee:

7 Members from:

1. Chamber of Commerce
2. Rotary
3. Kiwanis Club
4. Lions Club
5. Township Trustee
6. Citizen Architect
7. Citizen

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Task list for Steering Committee:

1. Identify community physical form issues to be studied.
2. Develop timeline, order of importance, relationship issues.
3. Recommend sub committee members to Trustees.
4. Develop system for progress reports.
5. Develop sub committee task lists.
6. Lead community information gathering process.
7. Conduct community discussions, meetings, and education and information dissemination.
8. Prepare and issue consultant RFP for various planning efforts.
9. Implementation strategies
10. Zoning and Form based Code development as final product.
11. Likely 100 other tasks to be determined!

The committee participants above are intended to be volunteer. There will be a need for consultants from many disciplines as the process evolves. In particular, planning and zoning consultants will require a substantial capital expenditure. There will be a need for secretarial help along the way to keep things moving and allow the volunteers to focus their energy. One consideration for the future would be a new township planning employee that could bridge the gap between planning, zoning and architecture. The timeframe for this process will vary based on the number of dedicated volunteers and the capital available for consultant work effort. I would like to see the process begin this summer with the community visioning. This fall would be a great time for the charettes and plan development. The code work could then begin the first quarter of 2008. Maybe July 4th of 2008 could be our Independence day where we are free of the burden of sprawl development.

Respectfully,

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