



ACME TOWNSHIP
NEW URBANISM CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Friday, January 6, 2006, 1:00 p.m.
Acme Township Hall
6042 Acme Road, Williamsburg MI 49690

Meeting called to order at 1:08 p.m.

Members present:

M. Krakow & L. Craig (Co-Chairs), D. Krause, D. Rohn (by phone), N. Veliquette

Ex-Officio Members present:

A. Andres Jr., L. Bussa, J. Goss, S. Corpe

Members excused:

A. Andres, Sr., P. Brink, J. Collins, T. Gokey, L. Grant, R. Reinhold

Krakow stated that he had a conversation with Gokey. He expressed concerns about the past history of issues related to town center/mixed use development and whether that history might repeat itself, but he did express interest in the process. He is unable to make the time commitment to attend advisory meetings, but he does stop by the township hall from time to time for updates. If the project proceeds successfully to development of a coordinated plan for multiple properties, and if he finds the general direction the plan takes to be suitable, he is willing to have his 58 acres included in the plan. However, if things seem to him to proceed in a way similar to that which he found concerning in the past, he might not ultimately be willing to have his property participate.

Krakow asked for discussion about Gokey's position. He expressed concern as to whether or not it is reasonable to proceed without having a firmer concept of whether the Gokey property is in or out, and asked if it might be a good idea to write to Gokey to ask him for a more definite response. Andres echoed these concerns, as did Veliquette. Veliquette in particular thought something in writing from Gokey would be good to have in hand for the eventual planner working on the project, whereas Krause observed that none of the landowners have been asked to or have given any kind of commitment in writing. Krause also noted that none of the candidates have requested an initial retainer deposit; initial project meetings with them can allow some room for discussion. There was some discussion about potential for the project area to eventually "spill" onto properties neighboring the 5 on which focus is currently placed. Andres suggested that all property owners surrounding the key 5 be invited to initial meetings with the project consultant so they can understand the potential interaction between their properties and project design. He thinks a letter should go out to property owners such as Lewis Griffith, Dennis & Audrey Ritter and the Weatherholt family right now to make sure that they are fully aware of the project and are specifically invited to meetings about it, so there is no possibility of unpleasant surprises. Veliquette likened this idea to the fact that when a special use permit or variance hearing is being held, all landowners within 300' of the area under consideration receive mailed notice of the issue.

Krakow stated that it is easy for members of the community to get copies of minutes and materials relative to the advisory's work. However, sometimes ideas or comments filter through to members of the community without full context surrounding them. People can become immediately but possibly needlessly concerned. He feels it might be good to have discussions with other landowners in the project area about why boundary lines for the study are drawn where they are, and whether they are in the right place.

Bussa stated that the advisory can't count on any specific level of involvement from any of the landowners beyond being at the table to discuss the idea at this time. He said that the idea was originally Kurtz' brainchild, presented at an informal meeting with himself and representatives of the Village at Grand Traverse LLC and Meijer, Inc. Bussa sensed then and now a level of interest but skepticism as to the ultimate outcome of the situation. Goss echoed these comments, stating that his

group feels that there are some major outstanding political issues. Perhaps Kurtz needs to “market the idea” better if he’s going to achieve success. Goss feels that all of the landowners are good people. He knows, for instance, that a Taco Bell would like to locate within Acme Township. How does a process work to decide which landowner benefits from a given piece of development? Goss feels that the group has done an excellent job of arriving at the point where a planner can be chosen to design a project, but has this been a case of placing the “cart before the horse?” Without first knowing how to satisfy landowner concerns about reasonable and balanced economic return, how can the planning proceed?

Krakov stated that the advisory is seeking to harness the expertise of a New Urbanist designer who can not only design a project that can satisfy and benefit the community at large, but can also sell the landowners and community on the benefit of the project.

Bussa stated that he felt that RTKL really nailed the statement of the problem on the head in their proposal. In particular, they specifically embrace the idea that the Meijer store will be part of the development landscape. If they had the opportunity to see the “intimate sideplay” between the key landowners, he suspects that their firm has the ability to understand the nuances of the situation and come up with a plan that all of the landowners can be persuaded is in their best interests.

Andres feels he has been saying many times and in various situations that there are issues that need to be resolved between the landowners alone before work with a designer can begin. Goss agreed, based on past experience with the VGT proposals, that consideration of how a project design leaves room for integration with other landowners becomes a factor for them. Developers also need to have a feel for whether needed infrastructure such as sewer capacity will be available. Craig observed that the advisory needs to work with the landowners both as a group and as individuals. Andres felt that all issues about what is desired out of a development should be resolved between the landowners so that the consultant knows how to proceed with design. Corpe felt that this would be to eliminate the crucial first part of the process; that a key element of the consultant’s work would be to help all parties work through all the issues and concerns to a mutually agreeable conclusion. She also felt that Andres should have included the community and their needs at the discussion table. Had the landowners and community been able to work through those issues to a mutually-satisfactory conclusion, the need for this advisory would not exist today. An independent moderator to explore these issues seems critical to her. Goss disagreed. The discussion became somewhat heated, with Goss ultimately shouting that he doesn’t really care what the community wants for his property and Corpe responding in similar tone that many members of the community have told her that this attitude has been clearly perceived despite statements by VGT representatives that they “want to create a development that is good for the community” and may be one of the key reasons why the community has resisted their project so firmly.

Krause observed that there has been “rumor” about the question of who is going to fund this process if it moves forward. The funding in itself might become a stumbling block.

Krakov passed out a series of e-mail between himself and Senen Antonio from DPZ regarding how and when Mr. Antonio would be able to provide the DPZ proposal. It appears that receipt can be expected on Tuesday, January 10. The advisory members would pick up their hard copies as soon as available and meet to discuss on Wednesday, January 11 at 1:00 p.m.

The advisory is still on track to present a recommendation for a planner to the Board on February 7. Krause and Veliquette will prepare and deliver the presentation.

Discussion turned to analysis of the 3 proposals received to date:

UDA

Bussa felt they were qualified and would like to interview them. Krause agreed and liked the idea of bringing the media into the mix at the outset, but feels that four days is too long for a charrette. Craig agreed with Bussa, but did sense that they might be somewhat inflexible about their proposed process. Rohn agreed that a four-day charrette process might be “overkill,” and asked if Bussa could expand his commentary somewhat. Bussa felt that UDA seemed to have a more “administrative” than “visionary” bent on paper, but he’d like to see what they are like in person. Krause felt that UDA’s past project descriptions demonstrated more breadth beyond commercial uses than the others. Andres was impressed by the outlines of several of their past projects from a design point of view. Goss feels that the firm is very qualified. The Mason Run and Easton Village developments seem to be residential components of larger developments, but he is aware that Easton also has a commercial town square development. He has visited that project, which is part of Washington D.C. They have also worked on Celebration in Florida, which demonstrates the ability to handle a large-scale development. Krause liked the offer of a design handbook at the completion of the process, although he felt their cost for it was out of line. Veliquette was also surprised by the proposed cost for that phase of the project. He felt that the presentation was somewhat succinct, but that the firm is well-qualified. Corpe appreciated the suggestion that the township contract with a residential/commercial market analyst to determine the appropriate scale and makeup for the project. Craig felt they were qualified. Rohn commented that they seemed able to tailor to the needs of the community. Corpe will make the contact with them for the visit.

RTKL

Veliquette thought the proposal was very well done. Craig liked seeing the range of cost. Goss also thought they were very qualified. Corpe like them. This firm is by far her favorite. Krause commented they were primarily an architectural firm but have branched out to this new design. He thought they were very qualified. Rohn was very impressed. Krakow also thought they were very qualified.

WADE TRIM

Goss is not that familiar with their projects. He is going to remain neutral. Krause commented that this is an engineering firm. He doesn’t believe they have the depth of profits as in the other firms. Krause said if we were to limit our search to only Michigan Wade Trim would probably come in in the top2 or 3 places but when compared to the experience of the other firms they fall short. Rohn’s comments were if out of respect for Lee Grant we invited them for an interview that would be fine. She sees this firm as operating like a broker with them contracting the work out to other firms. Krakow shared the same views. Craig said that Wade Trim was involved in the last township project. She said they were a diverse firm. Veliquette didn’t feel they had enough experience in New Urbanist projects. Krakow appreciated the opinions that have been expressed. It was decided not to extend an invitation to this firm.

Noelle Knopf, 5795 US 31 North, asked what the length of time is from start to finish on this. Krakow thought 4-6 months. She also asked about the township ordinance. We currently don’t have one. She asked what the timeframe would be for putting that in place. Corpe thought 2-3 months beyond the project.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 3:15 p.m.