



ACME TOWNSHIP
NEW URBANISM CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Monday, January 23, 2005, 1:00 p.m.
Acme Township Hall
6042 Acme Road, Williamsburg MI 49690

Meeting called to Order at 1:06 p.m.

Members present: M. Krakow, L. Craig (Co-Chairs), D. Krause, D. Rohn, N. Veliquette
Ex-Officio Members present: A. Andres Jr., A. Andres Sr., J. Goss, L. Grant, M. Spaniolo
Staff present: S. Corpe, Township Manager/Recording Secretary

The purpose of today's meeting was to interview the RTKL planning firm that is a candidate for the New Urbanist Mixed Use Town Center design project. Dave Walker and Keith Campbell were present from RTKL. Mr. Walker said he is from Peoria, IL, a small town. He has lived in Chicago for 10 years and holds Masters Degrees in Architecture and Urban Planning. Mr. Campbell is a partner in the firm who grew up in Ann Arbor and has worked his entire career based from Chicago. He spends quite a bit of time in the area, so his interest in the project has a personal aspect. He lives about a mile east of Wrigley Field in what he calls an "old urbanism area" in within which he primarily walks to do his daily business.

Messrs. Walker and Campbell began with a PowerPoint presentation demonstrating RTKL projects. The firm was founded in 1946 and they are particularly recognized for their ability to address the economic needs that make a New Urbanist development thrive. Their firm was tapped to rebuild the Pentagon after 09/11/01. Their mission statement is: "Create great places that enhance the human experience."

Mr. Campbell stressed that his firm works hard to understand the needs of the retail components of projects and is well known by the commercial community. They work to understand how market forces drive land use changes over time.

Mr. Walker displayed slides of places that seem to his firm to be very uniform and lacking in sense of place, and age poorly over time. They see their role as bringing ideas of what works in terms of the modern marketplace as well as community desires for feel and function to the community and incorporating the elements the public chooses into a proposed plan. The process would involve approximately four public meetings geared towards collaboration and building consensus on a mutually satisfactory design.

Relative to the proposed project area, they feel there is opportunity to maximize the key road intersections in the area and recognize natural features conservation as important. They understand that there are traffic concerns and have read that the community seems to value Suttons Bay and Elk Rapids in terms of a character to replicate. Future residential growth, tourism and small town character are also factors to consider.

The presentation turned toward examples of prior RTKL projects. Mr. Campbell stated that no two are precisely alike, as each project and community is seeking a different solution to a different need. The projects displayed were chosen for both economic and urban design success. They stressed that they want to help create places that people want to come to and hang out at whether they live, work and/or shop there or not that have highly functional internal pedestrian and vehicular linkages from

area to area within the site. Maintaining identity is also key, while implementing a market strategy that will work now and be adaptable to future changing needs. Implementation is also critical to RTKL; they want to ensure that design is followed by actual construction. Understanding how all the individual components of the mixed use development work is key. Mr. Campbell stated that they know what retailers will and won't accept in terms of design and how to work with these parameters with a community. Collaborating with all the various entities to reach consensus is how it would be accomplished.

Mr. Walker displayed project materials from Sun Prairie, WI to demonstrate the steps RTKL generally employs in the public input process.

The design process can take varying amounts of time. Some are done in 4 months, some longer. RTKL has proposed a 6-month process for the township, but this can be adjusted and accelerated according to the community's needs.

It was requested that the part of the presentation relating to Sun Prairie be provided to the township for public display; Mr. Walker will check but this seems likely. This part of the presentation represented the middle portion of the process. The first part of the process prior to public input and design involves a lot of research to understand the land and the community.

There are likely no projects out there that are identical to what is needed in Acme Township, but RTKL can draw from both their previous work and the work of others, on an international scale, to demonstrate design elements that might be compatible with the community. The goal is to look at what works and what doesn't in the larger world and apply it locally.

Krause asked about designs that involve rear entrances to retail. His impression is that larger stores are more likely to be willing to accommodate this than small stores. Mr. Campbell agreed, stating that rear or dual entrances do tend to generate needs for additional employees and concerns with loss prevention management. In design they provide for pedestrian pass-throughs from rear parking areas to storefront areas by ensuring that the design is so desirable that people want to make the brief walk. The pass-throughs can also include store fronts along them. Mr. Walker stressed that they are seeking to come to the community as experts in how to design what the community wants rather than telling the community what it should want.

Veliquette asked how RTKL designs an urban environment that can respond flexibly to marketplace evolution. Mr. Campbell stated that developing block and street dimensions that are appropriate to the average retailer but could also accommodate residential uses, internal parking or other uses is key. One block design should be able to accommodate a number of different uses or configurations.

Grant did not see anything in the presentation that addressed levels of economic return to the landowner/developer and asked how this is addressed along with community desires. Mr. Campbell replied that 1) various design alternatives presented must contain the same proposed mixes of uses and 2) RTKL feels very confident in its understanding of what is required to make the retail component of the development a success. Grant asked what happens when needs and desired expressed by various community elements are very different. Mr. Walker replied that the process involves a comprehensive search for common denominators between differing viewpoints. His discussions with various people associated with the project so far lead him to feel that everyone is headed towards the same general goal but needs help getting there together.

Andres Jr. asked how the design firm approaches the question of appropriate density for the project. Mr. Walker responded that they have to help the community tell them what their goals in this regard are. The program will determine whether the outcome will be a regional or more local scale project. The regional vs. local debate in the community will be a central question.

Krakov asked how the township and public are incorporated into a process that may largely be a partnership between the design firm and landowners. Mr. Campbell feels that sit-down meetings between the parties are critical. If viewpoints are largely polarized there is no substitute to sitting down to review options for what will and will not work to develop at least a basic meeting of the minds. Mr. Walker stated that Chicago can be very contentious and “brutal” when it comes to debates over land issues. They are used to defusing the political situations and avoiding closed-door side meetings, bringing all the issues out in the public and resolving them through meetings and graphics. Krakow asked if the township comes into the process early on, or if they come in later on after there is basic understanding of the landowners desires. Mr. Walker believes that all parties must be involved from the very start in building a consensus. He believes the township should be involved up front. Mr. Campbell stated that “as much transparency as possible” is the way to go. Everybody wants what’s best for Acme Township, whichever side they are on. Different sides have different ideas about what that means, but everyone needs to realize that all participants are entering the process with good intentions for the community within the context of their own point of view.

Grant mentioned concerns that have been raised about the potential for creating something that is good for Acme Township but might have a detrimental effect on the regional community. How can the township work to complement the existing retail centers in Traverse City and Garfield Township. Grant feels that much of the discussion to date has been largely emotional rather than factual. Mr. Campbell stated that he would be seeking to help provide a solution that is positive for both the local and regional interests. They would have to do more local research to discover what this means in our particular circumstance. He went briefly down Front Street this morning and perceived that for the most part it is made up of local rather than national retailers.

Krause feels that it has been difficult for community leaders to convey to the community at large that buildout of the scale of project discussed over the past few years is not going to occur overnight. He feels it is important for our consultant to educate the community in this regard. Mr. Walker concurred, indicating that creating a phasing plan and creating a phasing animation for community meetings is a valuable tool.

Grant asked if RTKL works for any big-box retailer to assist them with fitting into new Urbanist developments. Mr. Campbell stated that they don’t work with any particular retailer as their consultant on a national basis, but works with various large retailers on a local project basis to help them fit in. Grant asked if any of the work on this project would be farmed out to overseas locations; the gentlemen stated that for the most part the work would be done out of the Chicago office.

(listen to tape – took phone call)

Krakov asked, based on their limited knowledge so far, what RTKL believes would be the biggest challenge in working with Acme Township. Mr. Campbell believes that the first hurdle is developing a more detailed understanding of the differing viewpoints and issues by “hearing them directly from the horses’ mouths.” Mr. Walker believes one of the biggest challenges throughout the process is always building consensus so that everyone feels they are part of the creation of the plan.

Grant asked a question about the reimbursables policy set forth in the proposal. An estimate of what the reimbursable expenses would be was provided; did it include CAD services and addition of the township as an “additional insured” should the township so desire? Mr. Campbell stated that CAD services would be included; he would have to check with management regarding insurance issues.

Veliquette asked what would happen if the general community vision is to maintain a generally low-density development, and how RTKL would avoid over-gentrification (lack of affordable space) and

how pedestrian and vehicular linkages and community spaces come into play. How can they help the community understand that high density and affordable housing can be desirable elements when there may be a bias towards lower density being perceived as safer? Mr. Campbell stated that they are not in a position to tell us that a certain development should contain a certain level of luxury-priced space and a certain level of lower-priced space. They can tell us that having a range adds to the vibrancy of a project and can provide examples of affordable spaces that are not generally perceived as objectionable by the community at large. By showing the community good examples of what is possible the firm can understand better what the community values, and the community can come to better understand that some of the land uses they may fear can come in palatable forms. Mr. Campbell stated that security can be enhanced by creating a “24/7” environment. If people live above the retail shops or offices, activity is round-the-clock in those areas which tends to make them safer.

Interview adjourned at 2:25 p.m.