

# *City Planning Commission*

*Erie, Pennsylvania*

*April 19, 2016*

## *-Minutes-*

### **MEMBERS OF THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION:**

The regular meeting of the City Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, April 19, 2016 at **1:00 pm** in Room 500, Municipal Building, 626 State Street.

1. *Roll Call*

**Members Present:** Gary Antalek, Thomas Dworzanski, Don Marinelli  
and Richard Speicher

**Members Absent:** Mark Kloecker

2. On a motion by **Mr. Antalek**, seconded by **Mr. Speicher**, the March 15, 2016, meeting minutes were approved unanimously as received.

3. *The Commission reviewed a request for an alley closing made by BPRex Closure Systems, LLC. The alley is located on the 300 block of West 16<sup>th</sup> Street between Myrtle and Hickory Streets. The alley is 10' by 90'. The Secretary has notified all utilities and public entities of the proposal.*

With no issues from the notified utilities and on a motion by **Mr. Marinelli**, and seconded by **Mr. Speicher**, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 to recommend closing the alley.

4. *The Commission reviewed and made recommendations regarding the proposed Erie City Comprehensive Plan. Pursuant to Section 302(a) of Act 247 of 1968, as amended, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, the planning agency shall hold at least one public meeting before forwarding the proposed comprehensive plan to the governing body.*

Kim Green, Director of Economic and Community Development for the City of Erie, presented the planning process and plan to the Planning Commission. Ms. Green stated that the consultant for the comprehensive plan, czb LLC, began working on the plan back in March of 2015 with the final draft being completed in March 2016. The consultant first examined local data followed by a comprehensive examination of the residential housing stock, which was the beginning of the discussion. All residential properties were scored from one to five, with one being houses in the worst conditions to five being houses in great condition.

Furthermore, Ms. Green said, the current population of the City of Erie is at 100,000 not the 138,000 the City is built to sustain. With less people, there is excessive infrastructure, which has created a weak market for real estate in the City. Groups, including developers, realtors, the chamber of commerce, non-profit groups, have given their input on the plan. Two public meetings were also held to receive input from the citizens of the City. The main focus of the plan is to be used as a decision making guide for the next five to ten years. The plan is also consistent with the Emerge 2040 plan (the regional plan). The Erie City comprehensive plan took a neighborhood level planning approach by dividing the community into seventeen different districts, each with their own strategies and recommendations.

Mr. Antalek asked about the necessity of amending the plan as needed. Ms. Green replied that amending the document is a responsibility of the Planning Commission. The four goals of the plan are: core strength of downtown, connection to the bay, strengthen the lower east/west side neighborhoods, and stabilize the middle market. Amendments to the plan should be made as priorities shift to reflect the goals. Mr. Antalek also showed some concern with the notion of shrinking the tax base by demolishing properties. Ms. Green stated that the focus would be on vacant/abandoned properties, which may not be paying taxes as is. The goal is to remove blight from stable neighborhoods.

Mr. Speicher expressed that he was originally concerned that the plan would gloss over the situation in the City of Erie. However, he believes that the plan calls attention to blight in the City. Mr. Dworzanski further added that he believes that the plan is well thought out. His concern was in regards to who would administer the plan. Ms. Green replied that the community should want to look at the plan before making any decisions.

Kathy Wyrosdick, Director of the Erie County Department of Planning, stated that she has been a community planner for over twenty years and her professional opinion of the plan is that there are very achievable goals and the plan is also implementable. Furthermore, the plan is readable for the public. Once adopted, Ms. Wyrosdick said, an action plan needs to be created and reviewed annually to give the comprehensive plan enforcement power.

Several citizens were present in to make comment regarding the comprehensive plan. C. James Vendetti, a resident of the Mercantile building, believes that the condos in that area should be marketed more towards retired people. Michelle Griffith-Aresco, owner of Lovell Place and several other properties in downtown Erie as well as a member of the steering committee for the comprehensive plan, said that this plan is our plan and not what other cities did. Erie must do this on our own but we can do it.

A resident of the 1300 block of West 9<sup>th</sup> Street stated that her neighborhood is nice but that there are two houses and stray animals that need addressed. John McGranor, a resident of Millcreek Township, said that the City of Erie is the urban core of the area. Success or failure affects the whole region. Another resident of the City said that accountability is the key to the plan but asked if there was a timeline. Ms. Green replied that the consultant laid the groundwork for the beginning steps of implementing the plan, including landbank, housing court, and code enforcement.

A resident of the City asked where the ‘teeth’ come from for enforcing the plan. Mr. Speicher replied that the City needs to create an implementation plan. He further added that the plan is the start of a journey and not the end. The plan will require public participation at City Council when there are issues that are not consistent with the plan.

Ben Pratt, Executive Director of the Growth Partnership, stated the Growth Partnership is in support of the plan. Anna Frantz, Executive Director of Emerge 2040, said that the Erie City comprehensive plan is consistent with the Emerge 2040 plan. She further stated that community organizations should determine what is important in each neighborhood.

Chuck Scalise, President and CEO of Housing and Neighborhood Development Service, asked what are the obstacles to getting the plan out to the community. Ms. Green replied the cost to implement the plan. Mr. Speicher stated that it is costing the tax payers to do nothing as well. Ms. Green added that there is not enough funds to go around and that priorities and hard decisions will need to be made.

Being no further comments, Mr. Dworzanski asked for a motion to forward the plan to Council for adoption. Mr. Marinelli made the motion.

A motion was made by **Mr. Speicher**, and seconded by **Mr. Marinelli**, to amend the motion to recommend that Council create an implementation plan for the comprehensive plan as suggested by the consultant and to be managed by the Erie City Department of Community and Economic Development.

On a motion by **Mr. Marinelli**, and seconded by **Mr. Antalek**, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 to forward the comprehensive plan to the governing body with the recommendation that an implementation plan for the comprehensive plan be created and managed by the Erie City Department of Community and Economic Development.

5. *With all business completed, the Commission adjourned at 1:50 PM.*