

Des Moines City Council Retreat

Des Moines Beach Park
Founders Lodge
22030 Cliff Avenue South
Des Moines, 98198

MINUTES

September 27, 2008

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Sheckler at 9:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL Present: Mayor Bob Sheckler, Mayor Pro Tem Dan Sherman, Councilmembers Dave Kaplan, Ed Pina, Carmen Scott, Scott Thomasson and Susan White. Also in attendance were City Manager Tony Piasecki, Parks and Recreation Services Director Patrice Thorell, Police Commander Kevin Tucker, and Public Works Director Grant Fredricks.

The Mayor welcomed the audience and stated that this meeting is an open forum to discuss the issues concerning Downtown Des Moines, parking, zoning, etc.

ITEMS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Diane Jacobson gave Councilmembers a letter from Mr. Hicks, owner of All Points Yarn who was unable to attend. Ms. Jacobson has been a business owner in Des Moines for nine years. In the section of town where her business is located, the building owners take care of the buildings, but that is not the case throughout downtown. Signage for businesses is often difficult to get approved through the City. Making the permit process consistent throughout the city would help business owners understand what is acceptable. Pedestrian crossing is also a concern and there is a need for more crossings to aide shoppers in getting to the businesses in the downtown area.

City Manager Piasecki requested from Ms. Jacobson the things she feels contributes to or detracts from her store's success.

Ms. Jacobson replied that store front presence makes a huge difference. Signage people can see from the street is very important. People are more likely to go into a store when it looks like the owners care about the store and the building. A business must invite people to come in to make sales. People hesitate to start relationship with new business owners so it takes perseverance to keep a business going.

Councilmember White observed that businesses that have gone out of business make the neighborhood look uninviting to customers. City should figure out how to make those former owners take the signs down which would make downtown more appealing.

City Manager Piasecki opined that curb appeal and owners knowledge of their businesses are keys to successful business. Having complementary businesses in the same area also helps grow all surrounding businesses.

Scott Andrews is owner of the China Sea Restaurant. Dr. Andrews owns a number of buildings in Downtown Des Moines and along Marine View Drive. A lot of time and money is invested in this real estate, improving the look of the buildings. When remodeling the Butler, the City's permit process would not allow the 600 sq. ft. of floor space to expand the business due to the extra parking required for buildings over 2,000 sq. ft. On the China Sea Restaurant project, the plan was to knock the floor down and give it higher ceilings, again the City building codes said there would be 36 parking spots required

which would mean building an underground parking garage and that is cost prohibitive. There has never been a parking problem there before, even though the place is always packed at night.

Councilmember Pina inquired if the City built a parking garage, would that solve the parking issue.

Dr. Andrew feels there is no real parking problem as far as he can tell. During the day there is always open street parking and at night there is even more.

Mayor Sheckler restating the testimony heard thus far is that the code is restrictive because there are too many requirements for parking spaces when you try to put a business in here. Parking is not necessarily an issue because there is plenty of parking on the street, according to what has been said to this point.

Dr. Andrews stated that when he purchased the China Sea, he did not feel parking would be an issue since it as always been a restaurant and that was not going to change. The chain restaurants have more money to spend for parking, but the restrictions imposed by the City make it very difficult for small businesses to build.

BJ Bjerneby talked about the problem with sign space in Des Moines. The South West King County Chamber of Commerce does economic development with businesses in this area. One of the Chamber's major focuses is on business retention. Networking helps businesses refer to other businesses to help each other grow. There is a Chamber in Des Moines, however not enough business people are involved in it. Mayor Sheckler inquired as to how the Council as a government body, could get businesses to join the chamber? Mr. Bjerneby recommended that the City become full members of the South West King County Chamber. The Chamber also helps business owners learn new skill sets to help them grow their businesses.

Laura Straight owns the Marine View Florist on Marine View Drive. This is a new location for her and when she moved to this location, it took 2 months to get the signs erected; however, once this happened business increased substantially. Ms. Straight would like to see more Arts brought into downtown. The City could develop a plan to woo the businesses that residents need. She encouraged the Council to look at the historic structure of downtown and develop a vision true to what we have not what is wished for. She feels that property owners should be made to pull their weight in a small shopping community and suggested that maybe new standard may need to be drafted and enforced to maintain the buildings.

Councilmember White stated that where Ms. Straight's business was before she relocated, was in the QFC Shopping Center, which used to be more appealing, what is the contributing factor to its downturn?

Ms. Straight's opinion is that building neglect has contributed to the feeling of disrepair in that area. The shopping experience for the consumer is different than it was 20 years ago, mostly due to the big box stores and the malls.

Mike Colello spoke as a business owner with a business in a state of flux. His restaurant wanted to include family dining, however, the liquor board had restrictions. Those requirements have now been met and family dining will now be offered. Another element of his business is keeping people in the restaurant, but after dining, there is nothing to keep them there such as a pool table or dart board. There is an opportunity to expand into the next door area. The City's parking requirement is preventing that expansion due the gross floor area statement in the code. He suggested changing that to "*net usable public space*" to offset the unusable spaces such as the kitchen and storage areas. Perhaps implementing a valet service would satisfy the parking requirement. He has not had any complaints from customers

about an inability to find reasonable parking. Another possibility is to expand to code from the current 2,000 sq. ft. to 3,000 sq. ft.

City Manager Piasecki stated that the code allows for onsite parking or off site if the offsite parking area is within a certain distance and connected somehow provided that the property is not included in its own parking needs. There would be no credit given for valet parking in the code. Mr. Colello stated that there is plenty of street parking for everyone and parking really isn't an issue.

Councilmember Sherman observed that what is being said in his opinion is that the business owners would like the parking requirements reduced in some way. If developers want the same thing, parking will become very scarce and then there will be a parking issue. Mr. Colello summed up by stating that it may be better to encourage a parking problem rather than trying to prevent one that does not exist and that is preventing businesses from coming to Des Moines.

A comment from the audience stated the shared parking requires a deeded easement that is recorded and is valid forever which encumbers the property. This causes a financial loss to the owner when selling the property later.

Jack Kniskern expressed that this meeting was a good way for the business owners to air their concerns to the Council and move forward with a shared vision. Teamwork should be developed for this City by having a rejuvenated Chamber of Commerce and community betterment as opposed to economic development. The most appealing and visionary project is the Des Moines Elementary School site. In developing this site the objective should be to celebrate the City's past and also focus attention on visions for the future. Cooperative team work with the city could be an aide to progress instead of an obstacle.

Arlene Knight suggested that perhaps some the spots in front of stores on Marine View Drive be designated for those business. During special events there is no parking. So perhaps those spots could be signed for certain days or hours to be for those stores.

Mayor Sheckler thanked the audience for their comments, suggestions, and concerns.

The Mayor Sheckler recessed the meeting at 10:39 a.m. At this time Police Commander Tucker and Ms. Thorell left the meeting. The Mayor reconvened the meeting at 10:55 a.m.

Mayor Sheckler felt that after listening to the business owners, there was a shared thought. The Mayor made a proposal to the Council to do away with existing parking requirements downtown for everything non residential, so the market place can grow, letting the market place correct and handle itself. Councilmember Scott observed that most of the main streets are 60 to 80 feet which allows ample room for parking and sidewalks and agrees with the Mayor's proposal.

The Mayor restated his proposal to the Council to eliminate all parking requirements for businesses that are non-residential.

City Manager Piasecki stated this would mean any uses downtown would not be required to provide parking except for residential uses. For example, a mixed use building with three residential units in it, by the current code it would require two parking spots per unit for a total of six spots and that's all of the on-site parking that would be required.

Councilmember White feels that maybe the parking problem is not really a problem at all. Let the businesses grow. She favors elimination of the parking requirements. The City should be looking for parcels of land that could be paved for parking in the future.

Councilmember Sherman feels it is irresponsible not to require parking and disagrees completely with doing away with parking requirements. Perhaps other options could be to reduce the requirements or loosen up the shared parking agreements. The code is too harsh on the shared parking issue. There needs to be equity because of businesses that are already here and provided the required parking. The City could buy a parking lot and sell spots as requirements to the businesses. It is the Council's job to be forward thinking on this issue.

Councilmember Pina suggested as an alternative use parking based on how the customers use the parking space. The code could change when the business sells and is used in a different manner.

Councilmember White would like to have Mr. Fredricks and his staff put together a report on how many people could be in a building at one time to see the impact on the parking. It would be helpful to have an analysis of capacity versus inventory of available parking. This would give the Council more knowledge with which to make the best decision. The City should see how much can be accomplished with all ready owned land to develop public parking.

Councilmember Thomasson asked what the roll of government in this issue is. Does the government let the problem happen then try to fix it? The problem the City has is with older buildings that were built without the requirement to provide parking. Some older buildings that were residential changed into retail without the required parking. Changes cannot be ignored and releasing all the requirements and letting people do whatever they choose is not smart. Government built the parking spaces in the downtown when the improvements were done. There are parking wars that have been going on for years and if nothing is done, more wars will happen. The old buildings and the businesses in them have not yet caused crisis, but they will eventually and planning ahead will prevent this from happening.

For a vacant lot, to say there are no parking requirements is irresponsible. The issues for the old buildings may need to be addressed. Parking requirements for new vacant land is essential. Parking goes with the buildings, not with the business. The rules that the City has could be made better and can look at things like uses and deal with the older buildings that are already there.

Councilmember Kaplan feels the parking issue is driven by other decisions. The first issue that needs to be looked at is what should the downtown look like and this should drive the parking issue. The requirements will be different depending upon what gets built. The vision of downtown is what should drive parking and based on that vision, the parking code should reflect those needs. Angled parking on 6th & 7th could be added for additional parking because those easements are already there and not being utilized.

Councilmember Scott queried about a parking mitigation fee that could be charged in lieu of providing some parking and that money could be used to develop more downtown parking. She did research on what it takes to start a new business and the rules that they have to follow. The key for the parking is the vision of downtown. For example take a small clothing business; they would need to sell 248 units at \$47 each per month in order to be successful. This impacts the parking because of the number of customers that would need to go through that shop daily to maintain that level of sales. The current parking requirements would prohibit such a business in downtown.

City Manager Piasecki stated that as part of the downtown comp plan, a parking analysis was planned and has already started. Mr. Fredricks will give the research all ready completed to the Council to review. Some restriping could be done to allow some parallel parking that is not available now. Some streets could have some angled parking.

Mayor Sheckler recessed for lunch at 11:45 a.m. and reconvened the meeting at 12:20 p.m. Councilmember White left the meeting during the lunch break.

City Manager Piasecki requested direction from Council as to what they envision for the downtown. Each Councilmember was encouraged to give his or her personal vision of how they see the area. This will give staff a better understanding when revising the current draft of the proposed vision statement for Council review. Each Councilmember's key idea was written down to see if some common themes would emerge.

Councilmember Scott would like to see:

- The Beach Park become as historically and recreationally valuable as possible
- The Marina be redeveloped with the walking paths with Historic markers and other points of interest
- That businesses downtown be a mixture of services for the local community and shops that attract tourists
- A kiosk on each end of town with walking maps perhaps visitor information booths
- Sees Des Moines as a charming town with character. Does not want to see things downtown that makes the city look like any other city, keep the uniqueness

Councilmember Sherman would like to see:

- A more pedestrian friendly downtown and Marina
- Keep the charming atmosphere
- Scaled as a small town
- Boutique, restaurants and local businesses that cater to the people who live here
- Easy to find parking without having to walk everywhere
- Downtown should be sensitive to the historic community to the east
- The Marina and the Beach Park as a central amenities beach park
- Construction to stay scaled to downtown to maintain what is here
- Do not try to be something we are not
- Would like to have a community survey to make sure what the citizen really want in their downtown

Councilmember Kaplan vision includes:

- Agrees with a community survey to get the citizens input
- A charming downtown, which is in agreement with others
- The human scale that draws people to the downtown area
- Having businesses that to cater to the needs of the locals citizens
- Balancing out what business needs are city wide
- The historic nature of downtown needs to be promoted
- Circulate people through downtown with a tie in to the marina and the beach park
- Parking needs will be driven by what kinds of businesses that are there
- Parking should be shared between city and the businesses
- Pedestrian access between the streets to allow a flow of foot traffic

- Alleyways impact what can be built and there needs to be some discussion about that
- Offer incentives to property owners to make upgrades and maintain the properties
- More art because it draws people's interest
- Strong supporter of fountains as it encourages people to just sit and take in the beauty of the city

Des Moines Elementary School property could be a very interesting facility if developed properly. The city needs to find out what the district has planned for that parcel. Could be developed into a public plaza with steps leading up from Marine View Drive and some pedestrian way between blocks and then a walk way to connect with the Des Moines Creek Trail and goes down to the Marina. There are a lot of possibilities that the Store Front Studio pointed out, things that would be interesting. Another conclusion that came from the Store Front Studio is the downtown is too big. There are essentially two downtowns and there needs to be a way to make both elements focal points for downtown.

Councilmember Pina would like to see:

- A community survey with focused questions as to what kind of businesses the citizens need and want in downtown and expand to nearby communities as well
- Attracting people to a downtown requires good quality restaurants;
- Having businesses that people can walk to shop for clothing, art, accessories, etc.
- Build a sidewalk on the Marina
- Have a hotel built in downtown close to the waterfront which would help support the businesses downtown

City needs to attract people to eat here, shop here and draw people from other communities.

Councilmember Thomasson vision of downtown is:

- That he does not envision Des Moines as a destination resort
- The city is part of South King County Suburban
- Make the most of the assets we have and highlight them to the best of their ability
- More restaurant are needed
- Services and shops to meet needs of the residents that live and work here
- More focus on history of Des Moines, people find that interesting, though it may not cause them to shop
- Need to be a suburban community that meets the needs of the community

Councilmember Scott noted that there is a building that looks like a warehouse on the marina that has retail spaces available and the landlord is looking for more tenants. Currently there are no retail tenants in that building and some the tenants want more signs on 7th Avenue to let people know they are open. If 7th could be designated in some way as a useful street to people entering Des Moines that may help open up some opportunities for more development on surrounding streets as well as on 7th.

Most of the east side of Marine View Drive has slopes and it is a state highway so there can only be cuts at specified distances and the lots are very short in depth. If the City could take away the hindrances on 7th Avenue and use better signage, it would be a very good alternative to using Marine View Drive and thus provide more area to developing retail stores.

Councilmember Pina opined that access to 7th Avenue has to be made easier. Right now it's a two turn jog to get there.

Councilmember Sherman noted that the right hand turn lane on east bound 227th needs to be better signed to make it clear the far right hand turn lane is for Marine View Drive only and the other is for Kent /Des Moines road. This is a very dangerous intersection and something needs done to be immediately as it is unsafe for pedestrians.

Mayor Sheckler asked for input from the Council concerning building heights in downtown.

In the downtown area, buildings are measured from sidewalk grade. It changes on the east side versus west side because of the difference in grade. Building heights do not take into account building mechanicals on top of the roof; those are not counted as building height. Views are worth money, so if a building has blocking structures on top that are not controlled by code, that is basically taking the view away from properties behind the building which affects property values. There is no guarantee on preserving views. All that can be done is to try to accommodate everything that is there now. Council could consider reducing heights in downtown to help preserve the small town feel. There should be some consideration to buffering between residential and industrial areas of downtown.

Councilmember Pina noted that when property is sold, it has certain rights. If the property does not have a restriction on height, then people can lose views if the building that is built blocks the view.

Councilmember Scott stated that it would be foolish to try to take away height that people have already purchased the right to build to.

Councilmember Kaplan is more concerned with the vision of downtown and if building heights should be lowered then that is something to consider. Building heights is a policy discussion.

Councilmember Thomasson observed that a good Council study session could be to go through the code with one of the newer site plans and see how much of the building meets code. This would be helpful in determining if the codes make sense or if they are too restrictive and hampering development.

Mayor Scheckler's vision for the downtown area would include:

- A nice, clean downtown
- More pedestrian friendly with more crosswalks
- Designate a true Marina district with professional signage
- More Art with perhaps Whalen Art Gallery
- Des Moines Elementary could become a major asset if planned out properly
- More places for legitimate evening entertainment locations such as a theatre with live plays, evening music, comedy clubs, etc.
- More quality restaurants
- Better food stores with some specialty food stores also

City Manager Piasecki summed up that the key words seem to be charming, pedestrian friendly, a mix of businesses that service residents and visitors and no overdevelopment and stay in a human scale.

Councilmember Thomasson stated that the vision is currently written in planner language but it should be written in conversational English so that it is easily understood by most of the citizens.

City Manager Piasecki will take what was heard here back to staff and they will put together a vision statement for the downtown element of the comp plan that incorporates all of these ideas. Also each

Councilmember could write their own vision statement taking in to account what was heard in this meeting, route it through the City Manager's office and it can be distributed to the Council.

Councilmember Pina offered that perhaps Councilmember Scott could put together a working draft of what was discussed in this meeting for the Councilmembers.

Councilmember Thomasson inquired as to when was a marina district designated.

Councilmember Kaplan felt using that term was a verbal devise to connect the downtown with the Marina and the Council should formally adopt it as such if we are going to continue using that.

Mayor Sheckler stated that the Marina district will be delineated, defined and brought before Council for approval. Staff still needs to know where we are heading with the parking issue.

Mr. Fredricks stated that staff has developed an initial parking assessment. There are 585 parking spaces on the street and the onsite parking is about equal to the requirements to the zoning code. The conclusion is there is not a business driven parking problem in downtown right now.

Most of the parking problem seems to be centered on the residential parking. There was a suggestion to split the parking problem into two issues. Then look to see what onsite requirements were for the residential units and were they provided. This may help determine why they are parking on the street, is it because there was not enough parking provided or is the parking being used for things other than to park or is the provided parking to inconvenient to use. There needs to be a walkway between 6th & 7th Avenues that could make it easier to park and get to downtown. When looking at parking in downtown, it has to include the residential units as well as the businesses in order to get a clear picture of the need for parking.

Councilmembers discussed that perhaps a tax incentive would help spur property owners to spend some money on updated their buildings. The State is specific about giving tax credits, but another possibility may be a maintenance ordinance to encourage landlords to do their part to add to the charm of downtown.

Councilmember Kaplan raised the issue of the permit process and the time it takes to get a permit from the City. The process needs to be streamlined and buying the new software would help alleviate some of that problem.

Mr. Fredricks commented that part of the difficulty in getting a permit is the codes are specific and the application of those codes often do not allow people to do what they believe they need to do in order to be successful.

City Manager Piasecki will bring more information on the sign code to the next meeting. It is very specific and staff is trying to enforce the code passed by the Council.

Councilmember Thomasson stated that there is a balance the city has to consider between too much and not enough signage.

Mayor Sheckler stated that there will be another meeting and the arrangements will be sent to the Councilmembers as soon as available.

Mayor Sheckler adjourned the meeting at 2:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Lady of Letters, Inc.