



VILLAGE · OF · WINNETKA

Incorporated in 1869

Downtown Master Plan

Steering Committee Meeting

Tuesday, May 31, 2016

**Village Hall
510 Green Bay Road
Council Chambers, 2nd Floor
7:00 p.m.**

The Downtown Master Plan Steering Committee will hold its next meeting on Tuesday, May 31, 2016 at the Winnetka Village Hall, 510 Green Bay Road (Council Chambers), Winnetka, Illinois, beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Agenda

1. Greetings & Agenda Review
2. Presentation & Discussion of Development Regulations
3. Draft Master Plan & Next Steps
4. Public Comment
5. Adjournment

Note: Public comment is permitted on all agenda items.

NOTICE

All agenda materials are available at villageofwinnetka.org (*Government >Boards & Commissions > Agenda Packets*).

The Village of Winnetka, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, requests that all persons with disabilities who require certain accommodations to allow them to observe and/or participate in this meeting or have questions about the accessibility of the meeting or facilities, contact the Village ADA Coordinator – Megan Pierce, at 510 Green Bay Road, Winnetka, Illinois 60093, 847-716-3543; T.D.D. 847-501-6041.



Memorandum

To: Michael D’Onofrio, Community Development Director – Village of Winnetka
Megan Pierce, Assistant to the Village Manager – Village of Winnetka

From: Michael Blue, FAICP, Principal – Teska Associates
Erin Cigliano, Senior Associate / New Media Specialist – Teska Associates

Date: May 26, 2016

RE: **Village of Winnetka – Downtown Master Plan: May Steering Committee Meeting
Development Regulations Audit**

Introduction

The next step in the Village of Winnetka Downtown Master Plan process is considering the extent to which Village zoning and development regulations secure desirable businesses and development in the commercial districts. As Village officials, staff and the Steering Committee are well aware, the question of downtown zoning is one with many perspectives, opinions and options. Therefore, as with much of the plan process to date, this analysis is as much an art as a science. The bottom line is that the consultant and Steering Committee have been charged with recommending the best path forward for the business districts based on the vision statements.

The Downtown Master Plan will consider five aspects of regulations affecting development or district improvements: 1) The Zoning Entitlement Process, 2) Overlay, 3) Design Review, 4) Parking and 5) Signs. To facilitate the Steering Committee review, each is summarized later in this memo and questions presented for the committee to consider at the May 31st meeting.

Recent Changes

In response to past planning efforts and evaluations of the Village Code, Winnetka recently adopted a number of changes related to development and business district activity. Zoning code changes noted below were adopted on 2/17/16. Other changes noted have been made over the past couple years.

Zoning Changes

1. Increased building height in the C2 commercial zoning district from 2 ½ stories and 35 feet, to either 3 stories and 35 feet, or 4 stories and 45 feet based on the location of a property.
2. Introduced “upper story setback” in conjunction with the height increase. The fourth floor of a building must have a “stepback” that pulls the fourth floor back from the front property line to maintain a pedestrian scale.



3. Eliminated limits on number of dwelling units in a building (density); previously capped at 38 or 32 units per acre.
4. Eliminated lot coverage limits. Buildings and pavements had been limited to 90% of the lot.
5. Eliminated limits on “floors used for residential purposes”. Previous limit required use of upper floors in commercial buildings that were used for residential purposes to 60% or 70% of lot area; the standard was a disincentive to mixed-use.
6. Eliminated “dwelling unit area per occupant” requirements that set minimum unit size. New, more detailed standards used are from national model Property Maintenance Code.
7. Eliminated “inner court / outer court” requirements, increasing flexibility for design of courtyard buildings.
8. Changed parking requirements for downtown residential from 2 ¼ spaces for each dwelling unit to: one-bedroom unit = 1¼ parking spaces, two-bedroom unit = 1½ spaces, and three-bedroom unit = 2 spaces.
9. Changed parking requirements to allow “changes of use” (e.g., conversion of a second floor apartment to office space, or vice versa) to occur by right (without a parking variation).
10. Changed parking required for commercial tenants to be based on net area, versus gross leased area. Calculation now based on “productive use area” and no long includes mechanical rooms, storage rooms, common hallways, etc.
11. Changed parking required for certain larger, new commercial tenant spaces. Only tenant spaces larger than 2,500 square feet are required to provide on-site parking.

Other Changes

Liquor Code Amendments: To encourage more family friendly dining and pubs, the Village amended the liquor code to add license classifications and regulations for restaurants (with and without a bar) related to serving wine and beer. Liquor now also can be served to those not having a full meal based on a per person limit, rather than the time and location. Also, hours of service were lengthened by one hour.

Economic Development Coordinator: A new part time employee who works with business and property owners regarding a range of economic development activities has been added to the Village staff. This includes supporting district marketing events, coordinating village-wide advertising, managing support of business / property improvements and serving as an ombudsperson for applicants of Village code requirements.

Fire Sprinkler Requirements: Code requirements for rehabilitated commercial spaces have been revised to allow a five-year installation time-frame. This allows building and business users defer or phase in the work and more readily absorb the cost of necessary life safety improvements.

Scott Avenue Parking Deck Improvements: The Village made improvements designed to make the deck more inviting to users (such as painting the interior bright white) and is planning further wayfinding enhancements.



1. The Zoning Entitlement Process

Things to Keep in Mind

1. A predictable zoning entitlement process is necessary for any community to draw in desirable development. An approval process certainly is not the only factor in the deliberations of businesspersons, property owners and developers on where to open up shop. However, it certainly is a consideration, and potential developers and business owners will choose not to work in a village if they perceive too much process or, more to the point, an unpredictable process.
2. As for Winnetka, in short, the entitlement process as discussed through the planning process is seen as being long and having too many steps. However, there is no indication of a need or desire to eliminate the process or reduce the Village's expectation of quality. The entitlement process should be evaluated with an eye toward finding the right balance of thoroughness.

In addition to the recent changes noted above, the entitlement process in Winnetka is notable for:

3. Planned Development approval is required for any development over 10,000 square feet in the zoning overlay. Both preliminary and final approval requires review of three boards / commissions (Plan Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and Design Review Board) before Village Council consideration. While this may seem burdensome for some developments, it should be remembered that a development of 10,000 square feet or more can be a significant change in a small business district.
4. The zoning ordinance includes a long list of very specific uses that are either permitted by right, require a Special Use Permit (a zoning process) or are not allowed. The detailed list allows the Village to be strategic in what is and is not allowed, but that list should be evaluated in light of changing downtown objectives, markets and business practices. The table of uses is in Section 17.46.010 of the Village Code.
5. Special Use Permit applications in the Overlay District are heard by the Plan Commission. Those outside of the Overlay District are heard by the ZBA and the Plan Commission.
6. In a typical year, the Village considers four or five Special Use Permit applications: one is likely to be for an institutional use in a residential district, one for a use in the Overlay District, one for a health club and perhaps one for a commercial use outside the Overlay.
7. Special Uses Permits are considered by the Village based on a set of standards related to the use's impact on surroundings, adequacy of traffic, access, parking and available utilities (Section 17.56.120).

A hypothetical example for context:

The owner of a health club looks to open a facility in the Village. She has found a space in the Elm Street District that fits her needs and has negotiated rent with the building owner. She is informed by the owner that before the business can open, or even start to make improvements to the space, a Special Use Permit is required from the Village. Meeting with Village Staff, the health club owners learns that the process will take a minimum of eight to nine weeks. Also, she can't be assured of being approved,



but the seven fitness facilities that have been considered in the past ten years all have been approved. The meeting with Staff is productive and friendly, but the owners just wants to know why, if the other gyms are all approved, does she even have to go through the process. This will cost her valuable time and money. Doesn't the track record mean that the Village really wants these places and should make it easier to come to town? She says she's going to have 75 to 100 people come through every day, and they are also likely to shop and eat downtown. Isn't that what the Village wants? The explanation to her is that the Village has set specific standards for development and businesses in the commercial districts aimed at maintaining their quality and character. The Special Use Permit is one way to ensure that happens. The owner notes that she understands and appreciates the Village's position, but it may just be too complex for her to open her business here.

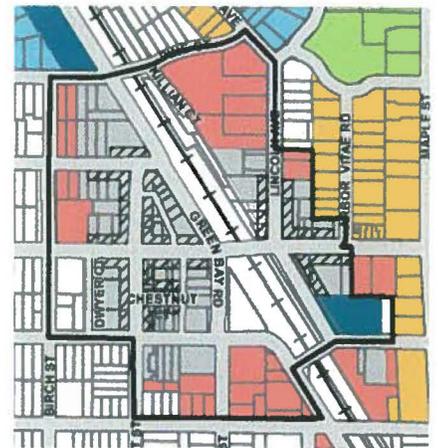
Things to Discuss

1. Should the Village look to make the zoning approval processes shorter? How?
2. What alternatives to current procedures might be considered?
3. What essential characteristics, controls, or expectations should the Village ensure are a part of businesses and development in the business districts?

2. The Overlay District

Things to Keep in Mind

- As noted on the Village's web site, *"The C-2 Overlay Zoning District contains provisions designed to encourage a cluster of retail goods and services on the ground floor of commercial buildings within the District. Ultimately, this practice hopes to expose such shops to maximum foot traffic."*
- The Overlay District covers the more heavily traveled streets in the Elm Street district and primarily just the Green Bay Road frontage in Hubbard Woods (includes Towner Road south of Green Bay Road). In both cases it covers only the front 50 feet of building depth (the C-2 Overlay District is shown in the figures to the right for the Elm Street and Hubbard Woods districts by the gray hatched areas).
- The downtown district does not currently have a high vacancy rate (under two percent if vacant storefronts related to the One Winnetka development site are discounted).
- Sales tax revenue has not been a reason for applying the Overlay. Sales tax, while always desirable, is not a major revenue source for the Village.
- Conditions for approving Special Use Permits in the Overlay are located in Section 17.44.020.b of the Village Zoning Ordinance and focus on providing, *"...continuity, concentration, and pedestrian*





nature of the area in a manner similar to that of retail uses of a comparison shopping nature...”.

A hypothetical example for context:

A resident attending a Special Use Permit hearing for a Health Club in the Elm Street C-2 Commercial Overlay notes that this would be a great use in the area because he would come every morning before going to work, and he doesn't understand what the hearing is all about. He also asks, why can nail salons and dry cleaners just open without this special use thing? We have so many of them, shouldn't those be the uses that have to come for a hearing? One of the commissioners notes that salons and cleaners are considered to bring customers that will also make other stops in the business districts. In this way, they contribute to the concentration of uses that share customers. Another commissioner notes that it is not the job of the Village to interfere with the economics of the marketplace. If there is enough demand for multiple dry cleaners and they meet the objective of attracting people, it is not the role of government to interfere with that part of the free market.

Things to Discuss

1. How does the intent and application of the Overlay District reflect visions statements for the Elm Street and Hubbard Woods Districts? Is the overlay an appropriate tool to support the visions?
2. Should the geography of the Overlay District be changed?
3. Should a single commission be used to hear all aspects of review in the Overlay District in order to facilitate thorough but quick consideration? Such a body (a Planned Development Commission) could be made up of representatives from the Plan Commission, ZBA, and Design Review Board.

3. Design Review

Things to Keep in Mind

1. Expectations for appearance and character of commercial buildings is spelled out in the Village of Winnetka Design Guidelines. The document is very detailed and approximately 90 pages in length, addressing both private and public spaces. There are not specific standards for approval of private buildings in the Village Code.
2. The Design Guidelines document describes the purpose of the process as: *“The Village of Winnetka seeks to maintain the high quality of its business districts’ built environment, with development that is attractive and consistent with a pedestrian-oriented town center character. Whether a proposed project is for new development or an improvement to an existing building or landscape, it is important that each proposal enhances the contextual character of its surroundings and contributes positively to the goals of the community”*.
3. A Certificate of Appropriateness of Design is required prior to issuance of a building permit, *“...if the work to be performed affects or involves an external architectural feature of a building or*



structure, including the style, nature, or general arrangement of associated site improvements...”
for all buildings that are not single family homes; the process applies to signs as well.

4. The Village hears about 30 to 40 design review cases per year. About half of them are for signs, awnings and various minor items.
5. Many communities have design review processes. Specific standards for approval and different levels of review, based on scale of improvement, are common.

A hypothetical example for context:

At a recent Design Review meeting, the board was reviewing an application for a new commercial building in one of its business districts. As part of the façade, the applicant was requesting a red awning be part of the building. The Commissioners all agree that the awning is an appropriate building element and meets the standards for approval. One Commissioner noted that the shade of red being proposed is too dark, almost maroon, and he would like to see something lighter. Other Commissioners provide a number of comments on the shade of red that would be best, but no consensus is reached. The Commission votes to table the approval, asking the applicant to consider the discussion and propose a new shade of red. With no success, the applicant requests an approval vote that night. He then agrees to return, but is uncertain what to offer the Commission.

Things to Discuss

1. What types and elements of buildings are most important to consider as part of the design review process?
2. What type of administrative approval for some building elements (signs, awnings, etc.) would be appropriate?

4. Parking

Things to Keep in Mind

1. Providing parking for small retail spaces, additions, or developments can be very costly relative to the balance of improvements. Based on the building layout, a location to provide parking may not even be possible. The current Zoning Ordinance standards for parking reflect this fact and no parking is required for commercial spaces below 2,500 square feet.
2. Recent changes to the code allow that a change in use to a higher parking demand (say going from a retail store to a restaurant) does not require providing the additional parking. This helps keep spaces occupied and encourages new restaurant.
3. The Downtown Master Plan process so far indicates that there is not a parking supply issue. At roughly 75% capacity of all spaces being used, the Elm Street district has adequate parking (recall that 85% capacity and above is considered full usage). The issues in the Elm Street District are that the location of the parking is not necessarily where it is most often desired (the west side of Green Bay) and that detailed parking rules and related signs are confusing. In Hubbard Woods, the garage and surface lots provide parking at the ends of the district and on-street parking serves the middle portion. NOTE: Mrs. Green’s is served by an adjacent parking lot.



4. Parking requirements in the Zoning Ordinance for commercial uses are very straightforward and lower than typical codes. At 2 spaces required for every 1,000 square feet of retail, parking requirements are comparatively low. However, at 30 spaces per 1,000 square feet of retail, requirements for restaurant are high.

A hypothetical example for context:

A chef who operates restaurants in other communities has approached the Village of Winnetka about opening a new restaurant in Hubbard Woods. She understands the building and zoning requirements; they are similar to other places. However, she has some questions about the parking rules. The requirements for restaurants are much higher than she typically sees, but as she reads the code, since she is reusing an existing storefront, parking is not required. Staff confirms that is correct. The chef is glad to hear this as the cost of opening a restaurant is steep, and this code approach is very helpful in making her business plan work. Yet, she wants to know how the Village will make it easier for patrons to find easy parking. The garage is only a short distance away, but sort of hidden; how will people find it? Also, she would like to know if valet parking is permitted.

Things to Discuss

1. Would having a “fee in lieu” of parking for new businesses with high parking impacts be appropriate if funds were used to maintain current parking lots, add parking when feasible, and improve regulatory and wayfinding signs?
2. Given the parking available downtown and the needs expressed in the visions statements, are there parts of the current parking program that require change?

5. Signs

Things to Keep in Mind

1. The Village of Winnetka sign code defines permitted signs by either their structural form or, in some cases, how they are used. This is consistent with other communities’ regulations.
2. Certain signs are prohibited – this includes animated signs, internally illuminated signs, changeable copy signs (except for gas stations) and signs advertising sale of goods on another property (billboards).
3. The code specifically exempts certain signs, include murals and building decorations not an integral part of a sign.
4. Some signs are allowed without a permit – this includes temporary signs and restaurant menu boards (with certain regulations).
5. Sign requirements vary by zoning district type (residential and commercial).
6. Existing signs that do not meet code requirements (non-conforming signs) may remain but cannot be changed in such a way that increases the nonconformity; they also cannot be moved. Nonconforming signs that are damaged beyond 50% of their value may not be replaced.
7. A certificate of appropriateness from the Design Review Board is required for signs.
8. A process for appeals or variations for signs is spelled out in the Village Code.



A hypothetical example for context:

The owner of a business in Hubbard Woods observes that even though the traffic goes down Green Bay Road rather slowly, it's not always that easy for drivers to see the sign on his wall – probably for the best since they should be looking forward. Further, he and other merchants have noted more people say they like to stroll and window shop in the district. And of course, once the renovated Hubbard Woods Park is open, there will be way more people walking around the area. He decides it would be good to invest in one of those small blade signs that extends from the building and is easier for pedestrians (and drivers) to see. He comes to the Village Hall, hoping it won't be a challenge to get the sign approved. He finds out that yes, the sign is allowed, but a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Design Review Board is required. He asks if the sign contractor can do that for him – he learns that some do, some don't. He wonders if he will need to pay an architect or engineer to figure this out and get the sign approved. Ultimately, he likes the idea of the sign and decides to pursue the Certificate of Appropriateness on his own; he's never done this before and never will again, but figures it's worth the effort.

Things to Discuss

1. What are the greatest concerns raised by residents or the business community in regard to sign regulations?
2. Are there specific sign code elements that seem to serve the Village well or should be changed?