MEETING SUMMARY

Grand Forks Land Use Plan Steering Committee Group Meeting #2
Land Use Subcommittee
May 4, 2021 Meeting

Scott Harmstead with SRF Consulting Group, Inc, (SRF) began the meeting at 3 PM. The meeting was conducted in person at Grand Forks City Hall room A102 Conference Room and virtually via Zoom. Committee members Jamie Lunski, Alex Reichert, Brandon Bochenski, and Kristen Sperry were present. Supporting staff members Ryan Brooks, Stephanie Halford, Andrea Edwardson, Dave Kuharenko, Dawson Dutchak, John Bernstrom, Brandon Boespflug, and Earl Haugen were present. SRF Consulting Group team members present included Scott Harmstead, David Sweeney, and Mark Schill (Praxis Strategy Group).

Revisiting Input to Plan Goals from Prior Meeting

Scott Harmstead introduced attendees to changes to the 2045 Plan goals as discussed during the first subcommittee meeting, and encouraged discussion around themes left unresolved from the prior meeting.

Scott Harmstead asked about whether an urban design goal similar to the one from the 2045 Plan is needed. Andrea Edwardson commented that urban design does need to stay, but in what form? It should be about how neighborhoods look and related design standards. Neighborhood design should be considered for various housing types. Currently no standards are provided about what a developer "should" be doing in terms of neighborhood design, so staff just takes what is submitted.

Mayor Bochenski asked if discussion should focus on downtown versus neighborhoods? Scott Harmstead said that the perception is that standards are in place downtown and some of the arterial corridors but asked about standards for residential, industrial, and commercial land uses outside of those areas. Ryan Brooks responded that right now there is a design overlay zone on all major corridors coming into the city. However, many of the areas are already developed, so it is more about getting new areas set up to form. Currently the overlay speaks more to materials instead of form.

Andrea Edwardson mentioned that the corridor overlay tends to focus more on new greenfield areas, but nothing for redevelopment of the traditional auto oriented commercial – not much is guiding design there. The Mayor said some neighborhoods are lacking a "distinctive place." This could be the result of a small subset of developers focusing on new construction. The existing distinctive neighborhoods are that way due to age.

Ryan Brooks mentioned that the Sunbeam neighborhood is somewhat distinctive and that the Kings View neighborhood has a unique feel. Mr. Brooks added that the city will probably see less commercial in the future and is already seeing gaps where developers are holding out for future commercial opportunities. May need to limit how long developers can sit on commercial land. There is a staff consensus that there needs to be a more realistic expectation about the future of commercial real estate.

Dave Kuharenko said that if the 47th Avenue interchange does materialize, property owners may hold that for a commercial corridor and then residential leapfrogs may occur.

The Mayor commented on the desires to take in unannexed islands and asked what we can do to incentivize or guide development in such areas, such as lowering carrying costs. Old handshake deals with development and annexation cannot be the process in the future. Alex Reichert mentioned that the city may have more "neighborhoods" than we realize, he is constantly hearing "don't ruin my neighborhood" from many residents and worries that design standards might make everything look the same. A way forward might be to encourage new or more creative developers. Mr. Reichert also posed the idea of a regional design conference targeting small metros in the Upper Midwest.

Earl Haugen said more time needs to be spent on an urban design goal, and it may be helpful to show the sub-actions to show what the goal covers. The Mayor mentioned maybe design standards should go under the residential development goal. Scott Harmstead and Ryan Brooks mentioned they could have urban design objectives across many of the other goals as well.

The Mayor asked delete "land use planning" from the urban design goal.

Earl Haugen asked if the planning process goal (#11) was rewritten, and Scott Harmstead noted that it was rewritten based on comments from the first Land Use Subcommittee meeting.

Dave Kuharenko asked about how the Park District is integrated into the land use planning process. Scott Harmstead responded that the school and park districts are together in one focus group, and their contact information will be maintained for plan-related promotion.

Earl Haugen asked if the parks goal is included here because of the city influence on parks. Ryan Brooks responded that it is largely due to the 8-percent set aside for new developments.

Jamie Lunski asked if 8-percent is enough for parks and schools. Ryan Brooks and Andrea Edwardson responded that the park district will often donate part of the 8-percent to the schools. Ryan Brooks mentioned that one development area on the south side already includes some land owned by the school district, and Discovery School was built on partially donated land. Andrea Edwardson mentioned that there is a lift station adjacent to the Walmart on the west end of the city, and nothing has happened there perhaps due to a perception and lack of a school.

Ryan Brooks noted that the city has also not yet adopted the airport master plan and we will have a conversation on the airport as part of this project.

Survey Discussion

John Bernstrom asked about open-ended questions, with a concern that they cannot be quantified.

Andrea Edwardson asked regarding UND questions, what do we hope to learn with these questions? If these questions are included, it signals to the community that this issue is important. John Bernstrom mentioned that maybe the UND topic is covered in the focus groups. Jamie Lunski suggested that UND topics could appear in the open-ended questions.

There was a discussion of breaking up the survey into phases.

There is a consensus that we should remove the interactive map function to something separate.

Earl Haugen said that each time we engage the public we need to include demographic questions.

On the discussion of how to somehow capture general comments from social media, John Bernstrom said that it is a "digital focus group" that also provide comments outside of the survey. Key themes from social media discussion can be gleaned.

Question 7 (economic development goals) – it was requested to provide a response about quality of life.

On housing it was asked if we need a question about rentals versus owned units. Brandon Boespflug said maybe have an open comment to capture input on housing type, such as more insight on things we do not do now. For instance, there are no detached accessory dwelling units. Scott Harmstead responded that detached accessory dwelling units can be included as a separate housing type.

John Bernstrom asked if we can differentiate between low and midrise apartments. Currently, R3 zoning can only be 3-story, but anything above 5-stories requires pilings.

A point was raised about maybe adding a mixed-use category, such as commercial on the first floor with residential above.

John Bernstrom said surveys can help inform future decisions about variances, such as upcoming requests for guest houses.

Dawson Dutchak mentioned not being sure about the definition of townhomes versus duplex. It was mentioned that clarity should be added regarding 5 or more units to townhomes.

Add a N/A column to question number 14 on household types.

There is an issue with the disability question. It was agreed to make the question match the same posed in NDDOT's Title VI survey.

Add a demographic checkbox for UND student and air force personnel, such as clarifying question #24.

Approach to Initial Public Workshop
Scott Harmstead walked attendees through the proposed agenda for the May 11 Plan workshop.

There was consensus about balancing in-person versus hybrid public meetings, and how it is good to separate the interactions between the two sides. Input on the virtual side will be typed, verbal input will not be permitted.