

**THE CITY OF KENT, OHIO
WORK SESSION
WED., MARCH 11, 2009**

This work session of Kent City Council was called to order at 7:21 p.m. on Wed., March 11, 2009 by Wayne Wilson, President Pro Tem in the absence of John Fender, Mayor. Pro Tem Wilson explained there would be no public input, in accordance with their Standing Rules.

PRESENT: MR. AMRHEIN, MR. DeLEONE, MR. HAWKSLEY, MR. KUCHAR, MR. TURNER, MS. WALLACH, AND MR. WILSON

ALSO PRESENT: D. RULLER, CITY MANAGER; J. SILVER, LAW DIRECTOR; J. BOWLING, CITY ENGINEER; AND L. COPLEY, CLERK OF COUNCIL

**ABSENT: G. FERRARA AND H. SHAFFER, COUNCIL
J. FENDER, MAYOR**

Dave Ruller, City Manager, explained that **Jim Bowling, City Engineer**, would present information on their downtown planning process. Mr. Ruller said that Mr. Bowling and **Gene Roberts, Service Director**, did an amazing job on the Fairchild Avenue Bridge, the topic of the preceding Committee meeting. He said when the prices increased dramatically, both of them got really busy. He said they maxed out every source of funding, adding it is a real credit to both of them. He said Kent is a small fish in a big pond, when it comes to AMATS. He said it is no coincidence why "little ol' Kent" is getting the money, adding it is because their project fits and is ready to go. He said both of them had to work hard to sell their project. Mr. Ruller said they were spending \$4 million, and receiving a \$26 million project, which is a significant reinvestment in Kent that they have been able to leverage. He said he did not want to belabor the point, adding it was interesting to know they have done a terrific job. He said they owe both of them a tremendous debt for keeping them out of debt.

Mr. Ruller said over the last eight to nine months, Mr. Bowling has been busy with downtown planning. He said they all hear the value of having a blueprint on redevelopment, adding it is a smart strategy. He said they are standing on the shoulders of some terrific work in Kent. He said the Bicentennial Plan was a great vision, adding they needed to decide how it translated in the day-to-day world. Mr. Ruller said much of what they have done is translation, and how they can adapt it to their current circumstances. He said they are trying to capture the synergy, while re-engaging their neighborhoods.

Mr. Ruller said they brought in a firm that does urban design work, adding they have been successful at "stirring up a bunch of stuff." He said they want to make sure they deliver the end product and that it works well together. Mr. Ruller said Mr. Bowling has been a part of a team, including Main Street, the Chamber, downtown businesses, some Council, PARTA, as well as environmental activists. He said they were open meetings over the last eight or nine months. He said Mr. Bowling would make a presentation at this time.

Mr. Bowling said he struggled at where to start with this update. He said it is similar to telling a story. Mr. Bowling said the Bicentennial Plan was where goals were set. He said the redevelopment of downtown Kent is similar to remodeling a home. He said the goals are what they are going to do, adding the Bicentennial Plan came up with good goals. He said the main goal was sustainable development, adding they are providing quality recreational opportunities. He said other goals include preservation of quality structures, improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities, maintaining Kent as an economic focal point, and to maintain the KSU/downtown Kent connection.

Mr. Bowling said after one decides how to remodel a part of their home, they should call a contractor. He said with the downtown development, they have to search for a partner to help them. He said the Bicentennial Plan had great goals, and the question was how they make it happen. He said partners make it happen. Mr. Bowling said that KSU and Kent Parks and Recreation are easy partners, while they had to go through procedures to find other partners, like Fairmount Properties. He said they had a partner

in Right Dimensions, adding they no longer have them. He said they did not expect PARTA to be a partner, but now they are playing a major role with moving the planning forward. Mr. Bowling said that in addition to the goals, they had to find the partners to meet those goals.

Mr. Bowling said the next chapter in the house remodeling is to decide what they want in the room to be remodeled. He said that similarly to that, the partners have to decide what they want. He said they need to decide on whether they want housing, retail, or office space. He said their partners are both private and public. He said that PARTA and Kent State are working on the Central Gateway, and must decide how many bus transfers are needed. He said they must decide how to make it fit in the geographical areas.

Mr. Bowling said in the downtown area, parking is like another utility. He said they cannot develop the downtown unless they have place to park. He said that water, sewer, gas, electric and phone are all easy, and parking is really hard. He said once they figure out what they want, they decide on the costs through a financial evaluation. Mr. Bowling said he would be remiss if he failed to mention how SR 59 cuts right through the downtown, and due to its limited access nature, it is difficult to do development. He said this is where they have been in the last six to eight months.

Mr. Bowling said they began with a picture of Kent, with the Riveredge Park, Fairmount redevelopment properties, KSU's master plan, the joint safety facility, and the Central Gateway project. He said when they put them all together, they have a mess, and this is where they were. Mr. Bowling said it is not the fault of any public partners, as each was restricted to their geographic region, and could only do what was in their reason. He said Fairmount took a lot of heat for having a parking deck in the center of their block, adding that was all they can do. He said the connecting link to all of the projects was the City of Kent. He said the City has a part in every project, whether it was reviewing, approving, financial obligations, or public improvements. He said the City brought a planner on board to suggest ways to come up with a common resolution for a viable project. He said they decided it was best to not do this in a vacuum.

Mr. Bowling said they met with Council about whether to have a steering committee, and Council left that up to the Administration. He said the Administration decided to have a stakeholder committee, adding it was made up of all partners. He said they also included major players that these projects would impact, like Main Street, environmental groups, and a representative from the arts groups.

Mr. Bowling said they asked, at the first meeting, how they would measure their success when they are done. He said the Committee came up with some global goals, which matched the Bicentennial Plan. He said they felt the downtown was a vibrant center for culture and arts. He said they listed a more diverse retail in the downtown. He said they wanted older buildings rehabilitated with new infill. He said they had specific issues that came out. He said in the long range plan for the Hike and Bike Trail and Kent State, the esplanade needs to connect, adding it is not easy as it is right through the downtown area. Mr. Bowling said desire to reconnect Kent State with downtown seemed to focus on the Erie Street corridor. He said the University wanted a gateway on SR 59. He said they need a "front door" where people can drive to, drop off their kids at the visitor's center, and go to the hotel/conference center. He said they need curb appeal, adding that students needs to see a great downtown. He said if that occurs, enrollment grows, as does support staff, teachers, and faculty, which, in turn, increases revenues for Kent.

Mr. Bowling said the intermodal facility seemed overly big for what the City anticipated. He said they wanted to look at its size. He said they also wanted to discuss Haymaker Parkway with ODOT, as it is a limited access highway. He said they needed to look at the Campus Link area, and decide how to handle that. He said they needed to look at shared facilities, such as the public safety building. He said that building will be a redevelopment of the southern end of the downtown. He said it is part of the redevelopment and the increased tie between the University and the City. Mr. Bowling said Kent only has a limited amount of funding, and they wanted to leverage that money wisely to get the most benefit. He said they want everything to be great and successful, but also recognize limited resources. He said they are looking at leveraging funds.

Mr. Bowling said they looked at the esplanade connection with the trail. He said it went to a larger discussion about pedestrian and bicycle facilities. He said the diagram he displayed represented the

concept they were proposing. He said the blue dashed lines represented the esplanade or a similar facility. He said it would be pedestrians and bikes on a wide facility that stretches to SR 59. He said it would be the “front hallway” for Kent State.

Mr. Bowling said the red lines are the “great streets.” He said these are streets that cars, people, and bikes can coexist with all feeling safe. He said they do not have many at this time, but for the routes to be successful, they need to be the great streets, regardless of their mode of travel.

Mr. Bowling said the green lines represent the off street trails, such as the Hike and Bike Trail or the Erie Towpath Trail. Mr. Bowling said Crain Avenue bridge will meet with the trail that was just built. He said on the south end, they are coming up into Tannery Park on Summit Street. He said that point of Summit Street to the northern point, west of the river, is the hardest connection. He said one connection is to run along Summit, down where the Wheeling and Lake Erie lines as on one of those locations. He said they need to decide on connecting the facilities. He said they can have an off-street trail, near the limited access of SR 59. He said it would be similar to the area in Stow that runs up Fishcreek. He said it is an eight to ten-foot sidewalk adjacent to the street.

Mr. Bowling said this creates a grid connectivity that they want to maintain with their pedestrians and bicycles. He said a facility like the Atlantic and Great Western will have a direct connection to the trail on the north end of their property. He said the workers need a comfortable way to walk to the downtown, eat lunch, shop, and spend their money. He said those routes provide the potential of bringing people downtown.

Mr. Bowling said another item on the agenda was between the University and the downtown. He said the basic concept was extension of the esplanade. He said this would be reflected with a great Erie Street, with two-sided retail. He said it would be similar to Water Street and Main Street. He said they want downtown to grow from two streets to four city blocks, so people can enjoy. He said the question is how to make the gateway, adding there were a lot of ideas presented.

Mr. Bowling said one idea would be a huge green space. He said KSU had started looking at the plan, but it seemed overly large. He said another was highly urbanized, similar to Ohio State University, with a lot of buildings. He said that did not seem like Kent. Mr. Bowling said they came up with a modest green space, flanked by buildings. He said Kent State is talking about a visitor’s center for people to drop their children off for their first visit. He said it would include a green area to connect with the University.

Mr. Bowling said one thing that ties everything together deals with parking. He said in addition to the planner that was hired, they also hired a public consultant who studied the entire downtown to do an inventory. He said they heard many things, including there was a parking quantity problem. He said there is plenty of parking, but no quality parking. He said one lot has 116 spots that are not striped nor lit, with a bad surface. He said they did not want a large mega deck, as they are not downtown Cleveland or Akron. He said those cost \$25,000 per space to build a deck, while a parking space is \$5,000 to \$7,000 per space for a parking lot. He said if they have existing lots, they could be refurbished, and provide a great connectivity. He said he would walk a block, if there are things to see and restaurants. Mr. Bowling said they need to create that area. Mr. Bowling said they have Alleys 4 and 5, which provides the connection. He said the hardest one is the one going north to south, adding that is already started by Ron Burbick and the Acorn Alley. He said it creates a great path to walk.

Mr. Bowling said Fairmount had a deck shown, to support their needs. He said they were only looking at their space. He said they needed 430 spots for their initial program, and met some resistance. He said it moved parking away from the downtown. Mr. Bowling said they came up with another option to serve everyone at the northeastern corner of Depeyster and Erie Streets. He said it would serve the Fairmount development, Main Street, the Hotel/Conference Center, and still can add parking within the development. He said that space was the original location of the multi modal facility, with the parking deck and the bus transfer site. Mr. Bowling said this did not work, and questioned which hotel wanted to face a parking deck. He said it will face it, but will not look like a parking deck. He said Erie Street would be a two-sided retail area, similar to Water or Main Street. He said it would be a great street to visit, eat, and shop. Mr.

Bowling said Main Street is 40' higher than Erie Street. He said they could hide several levels of the deck behind the hill so it would not be visible. He said on the front of the deck, they could have high ceilings on the first floor for retail space, which would face the hotel. Mr. Bowling said the bus transfer facility needs high head room, and it should be behind the retail space. He said it would have ten bus bays for transfers, as well as one hundred parking spots. He said each level of the deck could fit 100 cars. He said the City needed parking, and PARTA needs a transfer site. He said PARTA can access transit money to build the transit site. He said transit money could buy the land, the foundation, and the shell of the retail space. He said they could build the first deck, and the City could pay the next two, adding they are the cheaper decks. He said Kent would get 200 spots, and it would be public parking. Mr. Bowling said the multi modal is the gateway of the University. He said the University does not want their front door facing a vacant lot. Mr. Bowling displayed the sketch of the facility at this time. He said one key element is that the busses enter from Depeyster or SR 59. He said in the original plan by Transystems, they had no access on SR 59, as they believed that ODOT would not permit it. He said in the process, he went to ODOT, and spoke to the local district's planning director. He asked if they could do this, as it is a limited access street, and was told they could do it. He said it is not a limited access street, by nature, because it has breaks at Depeyster and Willow Streets. He said it is an anomaly. Mr. Bowling said they did not indicate it would be easy, but did indicate it could be done. He said the facility would have two entrance ways. He said one would be across from the hotel/conference center. He said the other would be the northwest corner, allowing direct access from the facility to Main Street. He said the Phoenix Project needs a place to park, and it is occurring on Erie Street currently. He said those wishing to shop could also park there. Mr. Bowling said they are not wanting to take over the neighborhood. He said it will be the hallway for the University, and will maintain the neighborhood in the Campus Link area.

Mr. Bowling said they looked at the shared use facilities. He said the public safety building was a component to be shared by the City, the Courthouse, the University police, and possibly the County Sheriff. He said they had already looked at locations, and came to the southeast corner of Depeyster and St. Rt. 59. He said they suggested the southeast corner of SR 59 and Water Street, which has the most vehicular traffic in Kent. He said both locations are viable. He showed some slides displaying some of the possibilities at this time. He said parking will be the key, adding they need to know how many spaces and where they will be placed.

Mr. Bowling showed the area where the former Inn of Kent used to be located. He said ASW Properties tore the property down, and have done a wonderful job moving that project forward, especially in the current economic times. He said this area is an important piece to the downtown. He said the main threat deals with parking. Mr. Bowling said they gave them a few examples of what could be done, including townhouses and office spaces. He said they are looking at what they can build that would be leased. He said parking could be with the multi modal, across the street.

Mr. Bowling said they have talked to all of the partners, and made suggestions to them. He said all of the partners are evaluating their programs at this time. He said that Kent State University is working with the Urban Design Center to work with the area east of SR 59. He said PARTA has been working with Transystems. He said they have selected the consultant for their next phase, which is design. Mr. Bowling said Fairmount and Pizzuti have been working with Streetworks on suggestions of two-sided retail on Erie Street and the parking at the multi modal facility. He said everyone is absorbing the information, and looking at their own projects. Mr. Bowling said they all agree that the multi modal facility is the key, as it provides a resource they do not have in the right location. He said they do not have parking, and this project would provide it in the right place and closer to the right price.

Mr. Bowling said they have all agreed that they need a gateway. He said they need a front door to a better downtown. Mr. Bowling said they all agreed that the Erie Street connection is part of the front door, and should have no vehicles on it. He said the neighborhood needs to be retained, and they want to help create that neighborhood. He said the location of the hotel/conference center becomes key, and has to offset the front door. Mr. Bowling said what was started by Ron Burbick, with the construction of Acorn Alley, has to continue. He said it would provide connectivity to parking, storefronts, shops, and eateries.

Mr. Bowling said everyone wants to see shovels in the ground. He said the parts do not have to go at the

same time, as evidenced by the Phoenix Project which is being built. He said PARTA is getting their design, and will be moving forward. He said once they have parking, it will be easier to do everything else.

Mr. Bowling said demolition is the next step. He said they have removed the diner, their partners are taking down some properties, and the houses purchased from Right Dimensions will be removed in April. He said they have some asbestos they must clean up, and once that is done, they will tear down the homes.

Mr. Bowling said the final step is construction. He said Mr. Burbick is doing that, and started the ball rolling. He said they want to follow up quickly with others.

Pro Tem Wilson called for questions. Mr. Ruller said this is not the end of the process, adding it is a check step. He said they have a lot of work invested, and made a lot of progress on challenging issues. He said he hoped they realized the City is trying to be smart with the process. He said they cannot afford to overbuild or buy something. He said they are going after any available funding monies, adding that the transit monies for PARTA are one example. He said they have not left a stone unturned. He said all of the projects are significant investments.

Mr. Ruller said this is the beginning, adding this was the first public unveiling. He said it will be presented by the consultant at the Bowman Breakfast the following week. He said they want feedback on the basic skeleton.

Mr. DeLeone asked if any property owners from the Campus Link area provided input, and Mr. Ruller said there was an article in the paper about the University's purchase of properties. He said they will probably see more of the discussion. Mr. DeLeone said with this approach, he was comfortable with the direction they are going. Mr. Ruller said they hired a good consulting firm. He said they were the objective third party, and told them there was some good stock in that area. Mr. Ruller said this could re-energize the neighborhood, making it a better neighborhood. Mr. Bowling noted that Ms. Shaffer was on the committee, and is the ward representative for that neighborhood. Mr. Bowling reminded them these are concepts, and the partners have to agree to the concepts.

Mr. Turner began asking questions about the multi modal facility, and Pro Tem Wilson pointed out that would be discussed in the Finance Committee meeting, immediately following this work session.

Mr. Hawksley said he did not go to all of the meetings. He said he saw some of these things germinate over the last fifteen years. He said it is exciting to see the sketch, adding there is real thought and energy behind all of the pieces. He said he hoped they can be ready to grasp any opportunities as the economy improves. He thanked Mr. Bowling at this time.

Mr. Turner told Mr. Bowling that the presentation was inspiring. He said they have the opportunity for things to come into a better focus. He said they are trying to connect all of these projects, and asked if everyone is on board at this time. He asked if there were issues, what would happen to the concept, and Mr. Bowling said the concept stays. He said he did not want to look at the possibility of something falling through, adding they need to move forward. He said they have to do this in phases, adding this is just the beginning. Mr. Ruller said they will never have a perfect plan, but want a workable plan. He said they need something that they can begin taking bite size pieces. He said it will take many years to achieve. He said they are trying to create the road map. Mr. Ruller said partnerships are tough, adding he is confident in the sincerity by each of the partners. He said they have heard President Lefton talk about the need for a hotel/conference center. He said PARTA is at the table, with their own dollars invested. He said they are trying to get the partners involved, and get the investments started. He said they cannot do this alone, but together, they can move it forward. He said their strategy is to implement the big picture incrementally. Mr. Ruller said the financial tightening has afforded the opportunity to do a good plan. He said he would not suggest that developers were footloose and fancy free, but are not going to budge unless they can show the project will work. He said everyone is pulling up their chair, sharpening their pencils, to see what they can do. He said there are no guarantees, but he has confidence in their ability to move forward.

Mr. Hawksley asked what some of the “next steps” are, besides the multi modal facility, and Mr. Ruller said there needs to be more public discussion. He said they need to figure out how to get public feedback on the concepts. He said they continue to work on each of the individual projects, adding the multi modal is out to bid. He said Mr. Pizzuti will be in town on Friday, adding he hoped for a productive meeting at that time. He said it is about the money, and finding out what is affordable, and the best way to do it. He said these opportunities for funding do not happen often. He said this is a sellable project, adding the partnerships are important. He said they are hearing that more partners with a well-thought out plan is more likely to see funding. He said they would have a hard time financing individual projects as opposed the whole project. He said everything works better together rather than in isolation.

Mr. Bowling said others are looking at the partnership process. He said they are all at the table, like with Kent State sending them drafts and asking for their opinion.

Mr. Kuhar said he sees this as \$300 million to \$500 million for the total project, adding it is a lot of money. He said that would be his negative thoughts, based on their current budget and who would pay for it. Mr. Bowling said that returns to the issue of having many partners. He said their partners are all bringing money to the table also. He reminded them of the Fairchild Avenue bridge, and what was leveraged for a cost of \$4 million. Mr. Kuhar asked if they have any total projects, and Mr. Ruller said they do not have that at this time. Mr. Ruller said the price would not be small, adding that phasing is a beautiful thing.

Hearing no further business, Pro Tem Wilson adjourned this meeting at 8:23 p.m.

Linda M. Copley, Clerk of Council