



WINFIELD PLAN COMMISSION

STUDY SESSION

DECEMBER 3, 2020 @ 5:30PM

The Winfield Plan Commission held a Study Session on Thursday, December 3, 2020 at the Winfield Town Hall at approximately 5:30 p.m. Those present: Tim Clayton, Dave Anderson, Gerald Stiener, Jim Hajek, Joe Gacsy and Mark Nelson. Also present: Town Administrator Nick Bellar; Town Attorney, David Austgen; and Mike Duffy, Town Engineer.

TOPICS:

1. Review of Town Planning documents

a. Aerial Boundary Map

Nick Bellar and Mike Duffy went over the town boundaries which run from Colorado Street to County Line Road and 101st Avenue to 129th Avenue. This excludes Lakes of the Four Seasons and Stoney Run.

b. Zoning Map

Nick Bellar stated they just did an update to the Zoning Map which will be approved by the Town Council next week. Mike Duffy noted some of the roads around the outside of Lakes of the Four Seasons were not originally a part of the Town. Some of the old sections of Stonegate were under Lake County. Randolph was not a controlled road, which is why passing blisters were not required at the time of some development.

c. Pedestrian and Bicycle Route Plan

Nick presented the Pedestrian and Bicycle Route map, the sidewalk on Randolph is an example of an element of this plan. He explained it is necessary to have a plan like this whenever applying for grants especially with NIRPC. Dave Anderson commented Porter County has started their part of the bike plan and have already paved up to Hebron coming up to the southern border of Winfield for the Erie-Lakawanna Trail. Mike stated Crown Point lost control of their corridor to development for that trail and NIRPC would like Winfield to apply for grants to help secure the town's part to bring the path up to Randolph. Gerald Stiener noted all of that land is owned by private property owners. Nick stated they have this plan in place so that will also help them acquire right of way and easement dedication for this path in the area as developments come in. Mike Duffy brought it to the Commission's attention that they have been awarded a grant from NIRPC to continue the sidewalk on Randolph from Jerry Ross Elementary to the park. They are in the design phase now and it is a part of the 2023 project schedule. The project could be moved up but it depends on the completion of the environmental documents. Mike explained the environmental documents are investigations of the wetlands in the area and any historical or archeological sites in the area. This will run congruently with the Clover Grove development that will be required to provide right of way for the Randolph sidewalk if approved. Nick noted they have submitted their paper work to come back to the Plan Commission in January. Dave Anderson stated this also fits with the desired rural modern feel of the town for pathways that would offer modern amenities in a rural setting. Mike stated they now require developments to put in their frontage sidewalks because of this plan. Older subdivisions or ones that were started before this plan was adopted will be the town's responsibility to install sidewalks like Wyndance and the older part of Stonegate. Mike said the most recent application they have applied for was also for a roundabout at 117th Avenue and Randolph St. They were able to get more points for that application by still having these plans in place. Attorney Austgen asked how many units of residents are in the town right now. Mike stated 2,000. Attorney Austgen asked how many acres of land within the boundaries is there, Tony Clark answered 12.2 square miles. Attorney Austgen asked how much of the 12.2 square miles includes the 2,000 residences. Rick Anderson stated between 15-20%; Nick noted some parts of town would be difficult to develop due to floodplain and wetland areas. Nick estimated about 70% developable land is available. Attorney Austgen asked if it was possible for another 8,000 residential unit to be developed then. Nick said if they went on their current average of density, yes, but more are possible if that were to change. Dave Anderson said that is not what is called for in the Master Plan, a mix of different sized lots and maintaining the rural feel of the town is. Nick also stated some of the parcels are owned by the school and hospital systems so it is unlikely they would be developed for residential use.

d. Downtown Master Plan

Mike Duffy stated this was requested by NIRPC to develop to define the center/core area of town. The Redevelopment Commission took it a step further to develop a palette and overall design for the downtown area. This was to create medians for safety and beautification to the area for a cohesive downtown feel. Dave Anderson stated they were able to complete the new medians on Randolph Street. This has helped slow traffic down and let people know they were actually in a town instead

of just passing through. Mike stated in the study it was found that people do want to be able to walk around so safety improvements along with walkability were important to design around. This also would help the businesses get more notice as well. Gerald Stierer said more subdivisions are also putting in walking trails and connecting them to other subdivisions along with sidewalks so they can walk through nature. Attorney Austgen commented more developments all over are adopting that trend. Mike agreed and stated more subdivisions are trying to incorporate their ponds as a nature element as well, but it is not included as requirements for parks within the subdivision. Further discussion is had on the other design elements of the downtown area including the fencing and low hedges to hide cars without blocking the view of the business.

e. Thoroughfare Plan

Nick said this plan talks about right of way needed for future roads and intersections throughout town. Mike stated they had a gap in the Ordinance before to get developers to dedicate right of way. It was largely undefined and they needed more right of way especially on the main roads for safety standards. Gerald Stierer stated prior to his time on the Town Council the former Councilmembers tried to make subdivision separate, they did not try to connect them at all which got rid of some access points that should be there. Mike explained the 109th Ave Scoping Report which was started a number of years ago by Congressman Pete Visclosky to study the impact of the I-65 interchange. It was determined that 109th should be a 4 lane road through Winfield. This was impractical for cost and safety and it was concluded that the road should have center turn lanes along with passing blisters and turning lanes instead. For the past three years they have been actively purchasing right of way to make these improvements. A passing blister was added by Pike St. and another outside of the Wyndance entrance last year. Next year they should be adding passing blisters at Arizona and making improvements to the State St. and Benton St. intersection by the Trees entrance. The Grand Blvd. intersection is also going to go through a major reconstruction. Gerald Stierer said all of the drainage will also be addressed in that area. Tim Clayton said 80% of that storm water work is being covered by a grant from the Little Calumet River Basin Development Commission. The overall cost of the Grand Blvd project is \$2 million. Gerald stated they have met with Senator Niemeyer on this as well to get him to champion this so the town will only have to come up with half the cost and they should find out in the next week or so. Dave Anderson also noted on the map there are stop lights shown but it does not necessarily mean a stop light is what's wanted; it just means intersection improvements are needed. They would prefer to keep traffic moving while slowing it down enough to create breaks in traffic for the side streets. Mike stated the future traffic projection is also why they applied for a grant for the 117th and Randolph intersection. In the peak hour or afternoon, it gets an F on traffic studies and will only get worse with further development. Latitude did agree to put in turn lanes which will help for the time being. Dave discussed the amount of traffic that was immediately added to 109th when the interchange was put in. Mike stated they got the full projection once it was put in and they also noticed changes in some traffic patterns for people also going down 117th from Lakes of the Four Seasons. Gerald stated that is also part of the issue that the majority of the traffic comes from the Seasons more so than Winfield residents and they do not pay any taxes that contribute to the roads. Tim mentioned the large meeting they held on 109th and the scoping project a year ago with every local agency to put it on their radar and they have since had support from local representatives to champion this. Mike stated there is also a lot of through traffic from Porter County. The other issue is the other communities that are affected by 109th traffic, do have the funds to make improvements and have started making them but this will also create a pinch point in Winfield. Dave stated the problem stems from their tax rate and asked Rick Anderson to review the town's funding. Rick reviewed when the town was first established in 1993 Lake County took care of police and roads, they did not have the same expenses they do now as the town has grown. The first Clerk-Treasurer warned against adopting the lowest possible tax rate as it will hurt the town down the road which is where they are at now. Rick reviewed the tax rate for other communities in Lake County compared to Winfield's. Winfield tax rate is \$.07, the next closest is Crown Point at \$.43. Even amongst towns of the same size the average tax rate is \$.90. Currently the town only receives around \$300,000 for its general fund if the town had the same rate as Crown Point, they would get at least \$1.4 million. They have to use creative ways to fund everything. Dave Anderson explained they cannot just raise taxes either they have to have special legislation in place to do so. They have met with Senator Niemeyer to try to get someone down at State to try to make this happen. Otherwise, they will never have the funding to improve all of 109th. Mike stated it cost just \$1 million to repave 109th years ago and they used a bond cycle to do that.

f. Storm Water Master Plan

Nick stated the town has very strict storm water standards for developments. Mike stated there was really no procedure for even grading for developments before and it wasn't really checked on before. They inherited a lot of issues from Lake County that they are continuously working on correcting them. They have to make sure any new development coming in has a correct water flow plan in place to properly direct water so more problems do not occur. Nick stated the Storm Water Master Plan also highlights large projects the town wants to prioritize as funding becomes available like the Hidden Creek project. Tim Clayton said they are working on updating the plan now and they have been able to take care of some projects here and there with the help of the Public Works Department.

g. Sanitary Sewer Master Plan

Nick reviewed the areas of town with sanitary sewer connection. Gerald noted the major sewer repair project in Doubletree East they had to take on and they are now set to begin expansion on the Waste Water Treatment Plant next year. This will double the size of it, make it run more efficiently and make it easier and more cost effective to add further expansion to it in the future. Dave stated this goes back to what is developable and sewer and roads are the main things that effect development in town.

h. Indiana American Water service area

Nick pointed out the service areas of water in the town.

i. Other area utilities

Nick noted the other utilities in town including Twin Lakes Utilities in the area on the east side of Randolph. REMC also services the east side of Randolph while NIPSCO covers areas west. There are many utilities just along either side of Randolph. Nick stated this is why the sidewalk on the east side of Randolph meanders, due to all the utilities in the area.

2. Economics of the Town

Rick expanded further on the economics of the town and how new developments actually impact the town; some developers assume a development will automatically bring a ton of revenue in taxes for the town. Rick reviewed a scenario of a home that would be built for \$250,000, they will pay about \$2,700 a year in property taxes on that amount, the town will receive \$380 that is split between a variety of different funds and the town debt services. If a developer were to build a 100 homes in one year at that price point, one would think they town would receive \$38,000 in taxes but the town will only actually receive about \$20,000 because the state restricts the growth of the tax levy of 3-4% of non-farm growth of income average over the last 5 years. The remaining \$18,000 of the amount is a tax reduction for everyone else in town that pays property taxes. Right now, the town has about a \$500 million in assessed valuation which gives the town a total property tax levy of \$572,000 including all debit funds and other small funds. The debit funds are not restricted which is why he can go out to bond on some projects. Even if they doubled their assessed value the State caps growing towns the most. They can apply for a growth appeal if they have 3 consecutive years of growth. They have been able to do that twice in the 17 years he has been with the town. Rick stated he just wanted to clarify that when a developer comes in and makes it sound like their development will generate more in tax revenue for the town, it's not always true due to the tax cap. They do get the Park Impact Fee on each home permit which has allowed them to do capital improvements on parks and they have been able to put \$2 million into Randolph Street Park over the past three years and some of the work was also donations and work done by developers. The problem that leads to is the maintenance on the facilities that the town doesn't have the staff or funds to keep up with. Dave stated it's a conundrum because the town needs the revenue on somethings from the home permits but the developments add to the impact of the town and it does not generate the tax revenue to cover it. Dave stated as the Plan Commission that is what they need to think about when approving these developments. Gerald Stiener stated its going to get worse before it gets better. He also believes as it gets worse it will force more action by State to help the town get the tax rate changed. Jim Hajek stated they do not have much commercial development either. Gerald stated they do have more commercial development happening now and the TIF District helps generate funds too but you also need the population to support and draw business to the area. Mike also noted they can't just focus on maintaining and improving 109th either all of the other roads in the subdivisions need repaving and maintenance too and they need the funding for that as well. Dave stated that is also something to think about with a new development because they also end up taking over the roads a new subdivision brings. Gerald asked Rick what would happen if the town did not bring in a single new home permit next year. Rick stated they would have to layout half the staff at the town hall. Gerald said so they have to continue and the only fix is to get the tax levy changed. Joe Gacsy asked how long have they been working on getting the tax levy changed and how much longer could it take. Gerald stated they have only just recently started this process but it could happen quickly if it's able to get through state legislature. Rick stated when they spoke to Senator Niemeyer, he understood very quickly what their issue is and he is working diligently on this. He is trying to get the right support and possibly attach it to a noncontroversial bill to push it through. Jim Hajek worries if Winfield did this other towns like Crown Point will also try to do the same. Dave stated those towns are already okay financially and that depends on their boards but they have the proper staff and other amenities already.

3. Development trends

a. Active developments

Nick stated Providence at Stonegate is on their last Phase and almost done with the subdivision. Doug Ehen from Providence Developers will be at the next Plan Commission meeting to present a new development and receive comments. Wyndance has been very busy and this phase is nearing completion. They will be reconfiguring a multi-family portion of the subdivision but the current phase should be finished next year. Deer Creek Estates has been consistent, Jim Hajek stated he believes there is about 15 lots left. Nick explained they are starting to come up on an issue they had a couple years ago where they ran out of

platted lots to build on. Jim stated they need to have a balance then of keeping up with buildable lots and not having so much development the town can't keep up with the impact. Rick stated they need to maintain about a 100 units a year. When they did the sewer project and did a bond on anticipation of growth and have to maintain that growth for financing purposes.

b. Proposals on file

Gerald Stierer noted at least two other developers that he is aware of are interested in this area, aside from the two who have already presented to the Plan Commission. Tim Clayton asked if Gerald knew how many large parcels are for sale that could be a subdivision. Gerald is aware of one more large parcel but he has not had interest on it yet. Gerald stated they have also had interest from people south on Randolph of possible annexation. Dave Anderson wants the Plan Commission to make informed decisions for the current residents.

c. Where we are growing

Further discussion is had on making responsible decisions on growth. Tim commented that it makes sense that thing will get worse before it gets better but they at least have all of these plans in place for the town they discussed this evening that incoming developments have to adhere to. More discussion is had on traffic flow and connecting areas throughout town.

Discussion then moved to the Lennar proposed development. Dave Anderson stated he believes there has to be a roundabout at Green Place intersection of 109th. He is also not a fan of the small lot sizes. He did enjoy the walking trails Olthoff presented and that they were connected to Latitude to get people to the park. He would like to see Lennar also have creative walking paths. Tim said they do have walking trails through the Lennar development as well. Dave also said he was not a fan of Lennar's density and he is unsure of how it fits with the town's throughfare plan. He does like the amenities they propose to bring in. Jim asked if they will have to maintain everything. Todd Kleven was present and stated only one wooded 12 acre park would be maintained by the town. Jim said he agreed with many of Dave points but stated they need to come up with something they can require across the board and come up with something on top of that for developments that are going to strain the town's infrastructure. He said they need some sort of continuity of what they ask from the developers that come in. Attorney Austgen agreed with Jim's comments, they need to have the parameters in their ordinance for developers so they aren't picking and choosing items that are not called out objectively. The law of subdivisions requires that if they present the development based on towns requirements, they cannot turn them down. Dave stated they have a PUD (PDR) though, Gerald commented that the town zoning has so many restrictions they would not have anyone build without going through the PUD process. Gerald stated most other towns have more defined zoning. Further discussion on the pros and cons of the PUD process and maintaining fairness. Attorney Austgen advised they have to have criteria that is subjective and understandable. Some negotiation is understandable but it becomes a problem when they start arbitrarily negotiating. Dave Anderson said it comes down to if they do or don't want the development. Tim Clayton said that it cannot be a personal choice of they do or don't want the subdivision. Dave stated if they have residents that speak out against it and he has traffic safety concerns, it is a legitimate reason to vote against it. Attorney Austgen stated the developer could have a traffic study though that would disprove that concern. Gerald stated they still have to have development based on the town's economics and Nick has noted they are starting to quickly run out of platted lots. Dave does not want a development just pushed through. Gerald stated that is not what would happen. Dave stated this is a very large development though and they have to take that into consideration. Nick did confirm this is the largest planned development to come in. Joe Gacsy asked if an impact fee could be placed on every home of the development. Attorney Austgen answered legally that would be difficult to do and he would not recommend it. Gerald stated they have asked developers to work with them in the past and they have made donations to the town towards road improvements their developments will directly affect. Dave stated some negotiation is needed and 109th has to be addressed. Nick stated the throughfare plan is important. Attorney Austgen cautioned Dave that he might be demanding too much. Jim stated they need to choose exactly what they want from them and be flexible in exchange like on lot sizes then. Joe Gacsy asked what is the distance between Colorado and Grand. Gerald stated probably around 2 miles. Joe asked how much it would cost to make that stretch of road 3 lanes. Mike stated between \$6-10 million. Dave said that is unreasonable to ask for. Todd Kleven stated from what he has concluded from tonight's discussion is that a roundabout is what is being requested for 109th. They would like to bring in all the amenities they suggested like the pool and pool house but some amenities like that will have to be cut to see if they could balance the cost of the roundabout. Todd also noted the town's building permits are very low compared the surrounding areas and especially in Illinois. Todd was unsure about the tax issues or how they could help there. Todd asked if there will be a request for 117th Ave. Jim stated there is less of a concern but they are also going to be affecting that road first. Todd is also willing to sit down with the town and Olthoff on addressing that road. Mike stated have only just applied for a grant for a roundabout on 117th and Randolph, they have not gotten a definite answer on that. Mike stated Lennar will have to show the traffic impact on both 109th and 117th since they are fronting on both roads.

ADJOURNMENT: 7:38 pm

With no further discussion before the Commission, Dave Anderson made the motion to adjourn. Mark Nelson seconded the motion and the motion carried with all in favor.

Attest:

Plan Commission President

Plan Commission Secretary

Transcriber: Kim Wachowski
Administrative Assistant

DRAFT