

## **COUNCIL OF THE WHOLE MINUTES**

### **Topic: Van Wert Forward Downtown Parking Study**

August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

President Jon Tomlinson called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Representatives of the Van Wert County Foundation (VWCF), in conjunction with representatives from Jones Petrie Rafinski (JPR), provided Council with the results of a study of downtown parking in the city. The purpose of this study was to determine parking needs and walkability, in order to ensure business and residential growth, appropriate parking supports for both current and future needs, and mobility for members of the community.

In their presentation, JPR provided Council with a map of the area studied, maps to demonstrate their definition of walkability timeframes, and data that compared Van Wert's parking needs to similar regional cities, such as Defiance (OH), Findlay (OH), Norwalk (OH), Auburn (IN), and Decatur (IN).

The presentation then continued to provide Council with Van Wert's current parking requirements by the city parking ordinance, the projected requirements based on the Van Wert Forward business and residential plan for downtown, as well as maps that demonstrated the potential building loss if the Van Wert Forward plan was carried out under the current parking ordinance.

The presentation then shifted to JPR discussing cities in the region that have no downtown parking requirements, or their downtown is exempt from a citywide parking ordinance. These cities include Celina, Wapakoneta, Toledo, Findlay, Dayton, Marion, Sandusky, Norwalk, Decatur (IN), Columbia City (IN), and Fort Wayne (IN).

Furthermore, JPR and VWCF provided an overview of the parking strategies within the Van Wert Forward master plan, which included discussing a change to do the downtown parking ordinance, a reimagining of the existing parking system within the city, signage and wayfinding, multimodal environments, a parking benefits district, and timed/permit restrictions on specific parking spaces.

From that point, the study moved into the strategic and specific improvements in the overall Van Wert Forward master plan, as well as the specific Phase 1 improvements, to the city's parking structure. This portion of the presentation divided the downtown area into five separate "walk zones", detailed some of the proposed changes in parking supply in those zones (include current public parking, lots at the Van Wert County Jail, Dominion, Wassenberg Art Center, Post Office, and other shared parking properties or redevelopment properties), and addressed the increased number of parking spots in each area, if implemented. This also included current vs. future proposed parking supply by time of day and demand/supply considerations.

At the end of the presentation, VWCF asked Council to consider removing parking requirements for Main Street Van Wert, stating their opinion that if development within downtown is exempt from current parking ordinances, then development could center more on atmosphere, environment, and walkability instead of parking lots and cars.

At this point, the meeting was opened up for questions. Tomlinson asked for confirmation that the angled parking spaces currently in place would stay in place, noting that area businesses requested this. This was confirmed, and noted that parallel parking spaces on Jefferson Street would change to angled parking.

It was also clarified that the slides in the presentation that showed buildings removed was a hypothetical to visually demonstrate the parking needs for redevelopment under the current city ordinances. There are no plans to actually take down the buildings highlighted on the slides.

Tomlinson asked about the planned timeline. Seth Baker stated that they have awarded demolition bid packages for internal construction, which is slated to begin Monday, August 30, 2021. Streetscape and exterior improvements likely would not begin until the spring of 2022.

Markward asked a question about the specific number of parking spaces from the presentation. It was stated that adjustments to the parking spaces mentioned in the report would happen over time, with Phase I of the plan accounting for part of the improvements, but other increases would happen over the course of the entire master plan timeline. They also stated that specific calculations and data would be provided in the full parking report that Council would receive.

Davis asked about future restaurants and the parking needs that these developments might bring. Baker stated that those questions were taken in account with the best use of redeveloped buildings, and those growth areas were taken into account in the study.

Davis also asked a question about commercial vs. residential parking, as well as target demographics of the residential units that were part of the redevelopment plan. Baker stated that the target demographics were a mixture, highlighting college students, retired residents, and additional mixed living availability. There was also discussion about the parking and unloading/loading needs of potential families within this type of development, and Baker also mentioned that unloading/loading stations were part of the plan.

Joe Jared raised an objection to the meeting, stating that no other area business owners were in attendance. Another member of the public identified themselves as a local business owner. Tomlinson stated that a notice was sent out to the paper/media, this information was stated during prior Council meetings, and had been posted on the city website since the prior Council meeting. Further, Tomlinson stated it was an open meeting, no action was being taken during the evening, and no ordinance was being discussed or asked for preparation during this meeting.

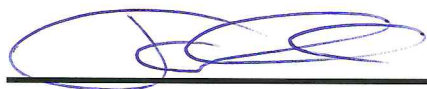
Fleming stated that he was in favor of utilizing city lots in the manner that was presented, and angled parking on Jefferson would net additional spots, but he also stated his opinion that there should be no residential parking on Main Street or Washington Street. Baker concurred with this statement, but the question of how to enforce that was brought into the discussion. A quick discussion centered on the idea of bringing back parking enforcement, which hasn't been needed for some time, but it was also noted that additional parties would need to be present for that discussion to move forward.

The Council of the Whole meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.



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**Clerk of Council  
Andrew Bittner**



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**Council President  
Jon Tomlinson**

**9/13/21**

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**Date**

