

**City Of Birmingham**  
**Regular Meeting Of The Planning Board**  
**Wednesday, January 12, 2021**  
Held Remotely Via Zoom And Telephone Access

Minutes of the regular meeting of the City of Birmingham Planning Board held on January 12, 2021. Chair Scott Clein convened the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

**A. Roll Call**

**Present:** Chair Scott Clein; Board Members Robin Boyle, Stuart Jeffares, Bert Koseck, Daniel Share, Janelle Whipple-Boyce, Bryan Williams; Alternate Board Members Jason Emerine, Nasseem Ramin (all located in Birmingham, MI, except for Bryan Williams who was located in Commerce Charter Twp.)

**Absent:** None.

**Administration:** Jana Ecker, Planning Director  
Jamil Alawadi, IT Staff  
Brooks Cowan, City Planner  
Nick Dupuis, City Planner  
Laura Eichenhorn, City Transcriptionist

**Master Planning Team:** Matt Lambert, DPZ  
Sarah Traxler, McKenna

01-001-21

**B. Approval Of The Minutes Of The Regular Planning Board Meeting of December 9, 2020**

**Motion by Mr. Share**  
**Seconded by Mr. Koseck to approve the minutes of the Regular Planning Board Meeting of December 9, 2020 as submitted.**

**Motion carried, 7-0.**

ROLL CALL VOTE

Yea: Share, Koseck, Boyle, Williams, Whipple-Boyce, Clein, Jeffares

Nay: None

01-002-21

**C. Chairperson's Comments**

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Chair Clein welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting. He stated the meeting was being held under the auspices of state legislation. Chair Clein reviewed the meeting's procedures. He said he was heartened to see over 100 people in attendance.

Chair Clein took a moment to remind the public that:

- All communities in Michigan are required under state law to have a land use master plan and to update that master plan on a regular basis. Birmingham hired a master planning team to facilitate the process and write the plan.
- The master plan draft for Birmingham that is currently under review is a first draft, and none of the recommendations have been endorsed or adopted by the City or any City boards as of yet.
- A master plan is a framework for land planning in a City. The adoption of a master plan does not change ordinance on its own. Rather, once a master plan is adopted, it is used as a guide to inform the City administration on how to better align ordinances with the City's goals.
- This draft combines national best practices in master planning and extensive feedback from community stakeholders.
- The intent of the current draft review meetings is to provide the master planning team with even further community and board feedback. Including the present meeting, there will be three more meetings to review the first draft of the plan. The master planning team will then use that feedback to create a second master plan draft that will even more accurately reflect the community's goals for the City for the next two decades.
- The public will also have ample opportunities to provide feedback on the second master plan draft as well.

**01-003-21**

#### **D. Review Of The Agenda**

There were no changes to the agenda.

**01-004-21**

#### **E. Study Session Items**

##### **1. Review of First Draft of 2040 Birmingham Plan • Neighborhood and Housing Policy (Section B. Neighborhoods)**

Mr. Lambert presented a review of the Neighborhood and Housing Policy portion of the draft master plan.

Chair Clein then invited public comment.

Twenty-three members of the public spoke: Eleanor Smith Litt, Adam Folby, John Smith, Donna Garlitz, William Watkinson, Amanda Fishburn, Jeffrey Atto & his mother Ms. Atto, Andrew Haig, Natalia Dukas, Frederick Acomb, Jack Burns, Robert Shopp, David Bloom, John Watts, Carl Kona,

Patricia Lang, Norm Cohen, Andy Kopietz, Gigi Debbrecht, Paul Reagan, Susan Perry-Nolte and Joe Ciccarelli.

A number of members of the public conjectured allowing multi-family units near single family homes would:

- Reduce the property value of the single family homes;
- Increase noise in the neighborhoods, parking issues, and traffic congestion;
- Cause privacy and safety issues in the neighborhoods; and,
- Only benefit hypothetical future residents and developers and not current Birmingham residents.

A number of members of the public opined that:

- More of the ~~single-story~~ bungalows in Birmingham should be maintained as more affordable housing for both young families and retirees instead of being torn down and replaced with larger, \$1 million-plus homes;
- Birmingham is already very densely populated;
- ADUs would adversely affect the character of Birmingham's neighborhoods;
- People did not move to Birmingham to live in higher-density neighborhoods;
- The seam concept will damage the character of the neighborhoods where they are situated (ie, Lincoln) and the neighborhoods they abut;
- Traffic-calming on Lincoln must remain and has made the street better;
- It is unclear why increasing population density in Birmingham is necessary;
- Unless there would be strict enforcement by the City of the City's requirements vis-a-vis ADU occupancy there would be a number of issues with ADUs;
- It was not clear whether the master plan aimed to make Birmingham affordable enough for City Hall employees to live in Birmingham given the reference to City Hall employees' average income in this section of the report;
- If the above is one of the aims of the master plan, it should not necessarily be;
- ~~The data supporting Some residents doubt the validity of the growth data contained in~~ the master plan draft ~~must be flawed because some residents have frustrations and concerns with the proposals;~~ and,
- The goal of a master plan should be first and foremost to serve the preferences of current residents.

Individual concerns expressed about this section of the master plan draft were that:

- Divisions between neighborhoods would erode Birmingham's cohesive feel.
- Construction of multi-family units will make neighborhoods louder during the process and damage the streets.
- Multi-family units in Birmingham have not consistently been more affordable than other Birmingham housing options and so may not necessarily increase the affordability of living in Birmingham.
- If people continue working from home beyond the current pandemic, noise and traffic during the day would likely increase from the average pre-pandemic amounts. Increasing population density in some areas could exacerbate those increases.
- The ability of the City to enforce future possible ADU ordinances is questionable because the City does not effectively enforce its current rental ordinances.

- Birmingham is surrounded by cities that could absorb any SEMCOG-projected population increase to the area, and Birmingham need not make new residences available simply because there is demand.
- The population forecast used in this section of the report indicates that for age groups 35-59 and 60-64 there would likely be a cumulative reduction in population. Since those are an individual's prime earning years, it is important to know what impact those population decreases would have on the recommendations proposed in this section.
- DPZ seems to operate on a basis of New Urbanism, which may advocate for increases in population density as an objective good regardless of the preferences of the residents.
- Fears regarding the seam concept will prevent overall resident buy-in to the master plan.

Chair Clein noted that while the enforcement of rental ordinances is not a master plan matter, he agreed that the City needs to better address the issue.

Mr. Lambert noted that some figures were provided in this section of the draft to demonstrate the trend in housing costs in Birmingham and the pressures on housing in Birmingham that cause the prices to rise at an accelerated rate. He acknowledged that some of the figures currently provided in this section are from studies that are now outdated and would need to be updated if used again since they were sourced at the outset of the master planning process.

Three residents who sit on both the City's Historic District Commission and the Design Review Board spoke in favor of the master plan draft devoting more attention to historic preservation. It was noted that:

- The proposed seams overlap with areas that have a number of historically designated homes, a number of homes already over 100 years old, and a number of homes that will be over 100 years old by 2030. If the goal is to increase population density in some areas of the City, it should not be done in areas that would require the demolition of many older homes. The maintenance of the historic neighborhood character in Birmingham is a large part of what makes Birmingham so attractive to residents.
- The plan should propose ways to expand or develop historic preservation concepts. Possible options would be for homes over 50 years old to be reviewed before demolition permits are granted, for the City to offer incentives for historic preservation, for it to be easier to add-on to the back of a historic home as long as the facade is preserved, for renovations in general to be promoted over demolitions, for all viable building materials to be saved for future use before a house is demolished, and for people to be encouraged to document the historic character of their neighborhoods and share the information with their neighbors and the City.
- One of the proposed locations of a seam is at the intersection of Adams and Maple, where Birmingham's second oldest building is located. That building, and buildings like it, must be preserved.

A smaller number of residents expressed support for the proposals set forth in this section of the master plan draft, either in part or in total. Comments supportive of this section were that:

- ADUs could create desirable density if used in the right places throughout the City. Issues with ADUs would be unlikely to arise as long as they were thoroughly reviewed by the City's boards and departments before being built.

- ADUs could also function as useful work-from-home options since many will likely continue working from home beyond the current pandemic.
- ADUs could create more accessibly-priced housing in Birmingham, and communities that are planned to include financial diversity tend to be more stable.
- ADUs need not negatively impact the character of a given neighborhood. They can be designed to aesthetically blend in with the surrounding architecture.
- Seams could also create desirable density while keeping excess density away from the centers of neighborhoods, thus preserving the character of those neighborhoods.
- Overall the proposals seemed logical and thoughtful. The drive to increase population density makes sense, especially for a city along the Woodward corridor.
- Population density can exist while maintaining a city's character and charm.
- A quality that makes Birmingham desirable is the slightly urban feel combined with a neighborhood feel. If residents wanted a quieter, more remote experience there are comparably affluent municipalities nearby that could provide that experience. This section of the draft seems to aim to maintain the unique balance that Birmingham has, and the recommendations largely succeed in doing so.
- This section's attention to increasing walkability, creating more places to spend time outside, creating more opportunities for community building through land planning, and attracting a more diverse population in terms of cultures, ages, and economics are all likely to benefit the community as a whole.

Seeing no further public comment, Chair Clein invited Board discussion.

There was general consensus among the Board members that:

- There were too many proposed seams on the provided map and the areas where they are proposed should be significantly reduced;
- Given that demographic changes are inevitable, it is better to plan for them to make sure the City is able to maximize desirable land-use outcomes;
- It would be positive to have more young families and more economic diversity among residents;
- This section's proposals regarding where lot combinations should occur is too specific;
- ADUs, if implemented at all, should be strictly limited in terms of where they could be used; and,
- There is preliminary interest in the possibility of cottage courts as one method of creating varied housing and increased density.

Offering a summary of the broader themes raised during the Board's discussion, Chair Clein said:

- Many residents expressed concern that the plan draft seems more oriented towards potential future residents than current residents. While that might seem like the case, putting efforts into attracting and maintaining future residents does benefit current residents in terms of property values, schools, livability, and all the other things about Birmingham current residents appreciate about the City.
- If plans are not adjusted for likely future demographic changes, then the City could be faced with closing down schools, further bussing of students, and school choice from children outside of the community, all of which is currently causing controversy in other local cities of similar economic means.

- Since 2013, the enrollment in Birmingham Public Schools has decreased by 5%, which is the lowest point since BPS started tracking that data in 2006. Declining school population is a regional issue but it is still incumbent on Birmingham to develop a plan that allows the City to proactively deal with that in order to maintain property values and quality-of-life, especially as the baby boomer segment of Birmingham continues to age.
- Focusing efforts on increasing population density and/or housing variety would be best focused in areas without a large number of single family homes. Ideal areas for this kind of upzoning or multi-family units could include Haynes Sq., the Triangle District, Adams Sq., the Rail District, and Downtown. Those areas could have buildings with a variety of massing, styles, price points and controls.
- Focusing energy on housing policy in these areas would allow the City more of an ability to put together an overlay district for those areas and would take pressure off the neighborhoods since the feedback from many of the residents is that they appreciate their neighborhoods largely as they are.
- Pursuing any broad policy regarding ADUs might have an insufficient return on investment, especially since many residents of single family neighborhoods seem to be expressing a lack of interest in and desire for them.
- Seams should likely not be located on Ann, along most of Lincoln with the exception of the small commercial area, most of Southfield, and Maple. Seams could be considered for parts of 14 Mile, Coolidge, and other limited areas.
- The plan should ultimately aim to set the foundation for where Birmingham needs to go over the next 20 years, and should allow for flexibility and pivot points since circumstances can shift so rapidly.
- In single family residential areas it would be helpful to have more proposals for how to maintain the character and physical make-up of a neighborhood. It would also be helpful to have ideas for incentivizing horizontal additions over vertical ones, if that fits the character of the neighborhood, and renovations over demolitions and rebuilds where possible. These kinds of policy shifts tie into aging-in-place, more zoning allowances for first floor master bedrooms, and housing that would be more financially attainable for young families.
- It would be helpful for the plan to include broad guidance on why certain types of lot combinations might be desirable or undesirable in certain neighborhoods, and what kinds of additional criteria for lot combinations might be useful to include in the City's ordinance.

The remainder of the Board endorsed Chair Clein's summary of the general themes.

A few of the Board members expressed a desire for more architectural controls for potential future multi-unit buildings.

Ms. Whipple-Boyce noted it might be more effective to try and maintain ranch homes over bungalows for starter homes and homes for retirees. She noted it is easier to get a first floor master in a ranch and that ranches have more space for a young family. She also noted that while a number of residents expressed concern regarding multi-family units, the City already has a number of beautifully done examples such as the historic duplexes on Henrietta.

Mr. Williams said that if the plan does not deal with some of the changes likely to stem from the current pandemic it would be a huge mistake. He added that if the plan focuses on expanding

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residential in the areas previously mentioned it would be even more important to create safer pedestrian crossings of Woodward.

Mr. Share and Mr. Williams agreed with the HDC members' comments that historic preservation should be more prioritized in the plan.

Mr. Jeffares noted that increasing residential density near commercial centers tends to lead to more businesses where residents can affordably and easily get their needs met. In response to resident concerns that Birmingham has only become increasingly densely populated and that this could have negative impacts on the community, he noted that the current population of Birmingham is actually 24% smaller than it was in 1970.

Planning Director Ecker provided a quick overview of the next steps in the master planning process.

Chair Clein thanked the public and the master planning team.

**01-005-21**

**F. Pre-Application Discussion**

**1. Brown and Watkins** – Portion of property facing Watkins

Since there was no representative for the pre-application request present at the meeting the item was not discussed.

**01-006-21**

**G. Miscellaneous Business and Communications:**

- a. Communications**
- b. Administrative Approval Correspondence**

After a short Board discussion, consensus was that option one being proposed by Brooklyn Pizza to add outdoor seating on Henrietta only could be administratively approved but option two to also add seating on Maple would need to come before the Board if the business decided to go that route.

**c. Draft Agenda for the next Regular Planning Board Meeting (January 27, 2021)**

- **219 Elm - All Seasons SLUP**
- **856 N. Old Woodward – Fruition SLUP**
- **2101 E. 14 Mile - Orthodontic office**

**d. Other Business**

**01-007-21**

**H. Planning Division Action Items**

- a. Staff Report on Previous Requests
- b. Additional Items from tonight's meeting

**01-008-21**

**I. Adjournment**

No further business being evident, the Chair thanked staff and the Board and adjourned the meeting at 10:39 p.m.

Jana L. Ecker

Planning Director

APPROVED