



MEETING MINUTES

LAND USE COMMISSION

Wednesday, January 29th, 2025

7:00 PM

Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center, 2100 Ridge Avenue, James C. Lytle City Council Chambers

Members Present: George Halik, Kiril Mirintchev, Chair Matt Rodgers, Myrna Arevalo, Jeanne Lindwall, Darush Mabadi, Max Puchtel, Brian Johnson, Jameika Mangum

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Neighborhood Land Use Planner Meagan Jones, Senior Housing Planner Uri Pachter, Planning Manager Liz Williams, Policy Coordinator Alison Leipsiger, Community Development Director Sarah Flax

Presiding Member: Matt Rodgers

I. CALL TO ORDER/DECLARATION OF A QUORUM

Chair Rogers called the meeting to order at 6:05PM

II. OLD BUSINESS

A. Public Hearing | Comprehensive Plan - Envision Evanston 2045

The City of Evanston is proposing a new Comprehensive General Plan to guide development for the next 20 years. The draft plan includes a vision statement, goals, policies and actions related to the environment; land use; transportation; housing; economic development; placemaking, arts and culture; parks and open space; and preservation.

Alison Leipsiger provided an update on the project timeline, based on the City Council's discussion and what they would like to see in the final plan. The final version is expected to be completed by February 26, 2025, with a document being available for review on February 21, 2025.

Commissioner Halik raised concerns about the timeline, stating that not enough additional feedback from the Commission or the community had been considered. He expressed that there would not be enough time for public or Commission review, and that Commissioners might not be willing to provide comments given the short timeline. Halik requested additional time and multiple drafts to allow for a more comprehensive review.

Chair Rodgers mentioned that he had been informed that a draft would be available on February 19, 2025, for feedback, followed by an updated draft. He noted that the current

timeline did not allow enough time for review and pointed out that more comments were still coming in. Chair Rodgers emphasized that it felt as if the Land Use Commission was being asked to make up for lost time. He questioned what had been happening since January 13, 2025, and noted that it seemed unfair that staff would have more time to review while the LUC was only given one day. He expressed a preference for receiving a Word document without design elements to review.

Commissioner Halik supported Chair Rodgers' point and added that maps were also crucial to the discussion, along with a to-do list of items requested by both the Commission and the public. This would help streamline the discussion and ensure all feedback was considered.

Commissioner Mirintchev inquired about the expectations for the decision-making process regarding the draft, asking if there would be a document that listed all the Commission's recommendations. He emphasized the need for more time to review the draft thoroughly.

Chair Rodgers suggested working backward from the February 26, 2025, meeting to assess what was needed. He proposed that at least three meetings would be necessary to adequately review the document. He believed it would be unfair for Commissioners not to have sufficient time to review the draft and incorporate recommendations on missing elements.

Commissioner Mangum agreed, stating that the timeline was insufficient to review everything in detail and that the data and charts that had been requested were still not available.

Commissioner Mabadi asked how much time would be necessary for the Commission to review the document thoroughly. Chair Rodgers clarified that there would be no issue with receiving the document five days in advance if additional meetings were scheduled for further review.

Commissioner Halik reiterated that if something was missing, the Commission needed to see corrections to ensure the document reflected the feedback received. He emphasized that a to-do list would be helpful to track progress on these revisions.

Alison Leipsiger suggested considering alternatives, such as holding a working group after February 26, 2025, or hosting a public meeting for further discussion.

There was continued discussion about the number of meetings needed for adequate review. The Commission agreed that a redlined document should be provided for clearer understanding of the changes made.

Commissioner Lindwall shared that the planning background was expected to have more for review by November. She stressed the importance of getting a second draft for review by February 21, 2025, and emphasized that the community must be on board with the proposed changes. Lindwall noted that the Land Use Chapter needed more work and that a Land Use workshop was necessary to lead into the zoning discussion. She also mentioned the need for an implementation chapter, which could not be completed until later in the process. She noted that the City Council had urged the Commission to "do it well but hurry."

Lindwall also suggested sending the chapter outline for the Community Systems section to the Council for input. She noted that a key driver of the plan was the projected population increase, although she acknowledged that this was still a matter of debate.

Community Development Director Sarah Flax pointed out that population projections from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) were not certain but highlighted the need to plan for future development if the population increased as expected.

Commissioner Puchtel stated that the draft due on February 21, 2025, was sufficient and that amendments could be made with edits. However, Halik disagreed, questioning the difference between staff creating a revision and inserting changes into the document, emphasizing the need for track changes to ensure transparency. Discussion continued on needed items for an updated draft.

Commissioner Rodgers expressed concerns about the February 21 draft and its ability to accommodate adequate review and public comment. He suggested sending the draft to the City Council to see if they wanted to adjust the timeline.

Commissioner Lindwall mentioned the Community Systems chapter and there was discussion on the need to address the capacity of community facilities to support new development. The Commission discussed the status of various community buildings, including fire stations, service centers, and libraries. It was suggested that a separate chapter could be dedicated to community buildings. Commissioner Lindwall noted that the Transportation Chapter needed further work, particularly to include regional discussions on how people get to work and access amenities. There was also a suggestion to recognize Evanston's single-family buildings as a key part of the city's character.

Commissioner Halik recommended incorporating comments from Design Evanston into the plan, particularly regarding the quality of the built environment. He suggested adding the term "quality" into the plan to ensure it was considered.

Commissioner Mirintchev noted that there was a missing conversation about the land around the lake shore and the uncontrolled loss of shoreland. He called for long-term solutions to address this issue.

Commissioner Halik also raised the issue of the Healthy Building Ordinance, noting that building owners had expressed concerns about increased utility costs. He suggested that the word "recommend" would be more appropriate than "ensure" for policy statements.

Chair Rodgers agreed that if the document was to be considered a living document, it should include a recommendation for periodic review to adapt to changing circumstances.

Commissioner Johnson supported Lindwall's point about the single-family housing stock, reiterating the importance of preserving the character of the city.

Commissioner Halik mentioned that a member from the Housing and Community Development Commission (HCDC) had provided information on their strategic plan, which Chair Rodgers stated would need to be factored into the zoning code. He also suggested that the Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCCs) be included in the document review.

Finally, there was discussion about the outline of the implementation chapter, with some Commissioners requesting a more detailed draft when the revised plan returns.

Chair Rodgers then asked if there were any additional communications from staff, of which there were none. He then asked to move Election of Officers to follow Public Comment on the agenda

so as not to switch Chairs in the middle of the meeting. Seeing no objections, the meeting then moved on to Public Comment (*see agenda item V. Public Comment below*).

III. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Election of Chair

Motion: Rodgers nominates Lindwall as Chair

Seconded: Seconded by Puchtel

Ayes: Halik, Mirintchev, Rodgers, Arevalo, Lindwall, Mabadi, Puchtel, Johnson, Mangum

Nayes:

Absent:

IV. COMMUNICATIONS

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Jeff Smith from the Central Street Neighborhood Association (CSNA). Smith provided an overview of the history of the Central Street area and outlined the current plans, highlighting the importance of Fountain Square in the proposed development. Commissioner Halik asked Mr. Smith's thoughts on why downtown retail is struggling. Mr. Smith responded that there are a number of things including Old Orchard Mall, introduction of brutalism architecture and lack of shared space like Fountain Square could be and shared thoughts on how to create more space for people to gather and ways to combat vacant space and incentivize filling it with retail.

David Galloway from Design Evanston then summarized the comments of his organization regarding the plan, emphasizing the need for neighborhood-based planning and updates to both the plan and zoning codes. Mr. Galloway stressed that such an approach would better reflect community needs.

John Kennedy addressed the council, mentioning that both the Mayor and Deputy City Manager had indicated that additional time for public feedback could be granted if necessary. Mr. Kennedy pointed out that various community groups had provided feedback and should be given the opportunity to present their views during the meeting. He raised the need for increased density and affordable housing, pointing out the growing demand for housing in Evanston. Mr. Kennedy also observed that while people may not initially own cars, they are likely to acquire them later on as they want to visit other locations.

Gul Agha requested the removal of language supporting tall buildings downtown, suggesting that density should be considered separately from building height. Mr. Agha presented a petition asking the council to prohibit tall buildings in the downtown area and recommended that the Environment Board examine the carbon footprint and quality of life impacts of such developments. Mr. Agha mentioned that most participants in a downtown meeting had expressed opposition to tall buildings in the area.

Commissioner Halik responded by cautioning against a uniform height restriction, suggesting instead that a variety of building heights might be more suitable for the area. He also recommended considering the use of form-based codes to better regulate development.

Commissioner Mabadi raised the question of whether the building emissions calculations in the plan took tenant behavior into account, highlighting the potential influence that residents could have on overall energy consumption and emissions.

Steve Test shared concerns raised by neighbors, particularly about what he described as questionable claims and missing data in the plan. He noted that the current timeline for the project did not allow adequate time for public input. Mr. Test urged the council and commission to slow down the process to allow for more feedback, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive meeting on the zoning and broader planning issues.

Ann Head expressed her appreciation for the Commission's efforts to listen to the public but urged that the process not be rushed. She questioned the urgency of the planning process and warned that Evanston could lose its character with every new building that goes up.

Linda Dameshek voiced concerns over the proposed upzoning strategy in the housing chapter, referencing a study by the Urban Institute that indicated upzoning tends to lead to higher-end development, which does not address the needs of affordable housing. Ms. Dameshek pointed out that changing single-family zoning to allow four units was problematic, especially when the Inclusionary Housing Ordinance (IHO) doesn't apply to developments of less than seven units. She argued that allowing developers more leeway would not necessarily result in more affordable housing.

Michelle Chlebek raised concerns about sustainable growth, fearing that upzoning would lead to demolition instead of adaptive reuse of existing buildings. She emphasized the environmental benefits of retrofitting buildings and argued that new construction contributes to increased carbon emissions. Ms. Chlebek also mentioned receiving a card with additional concerns two days after the meeting, calling for more information on the approach taken by Chicago in such matters.

Commissioner Lindwall suggested that the Land Use Chapter include discussion on quality of life issues and mention of human-scale and pedestrian friendly phrases that have been brought up during public comment.

Jim Caprile noted that the next draft of the plan was expected on February 21st, providing a timeline for the next steps in the process.

Mary Rosinski questioned the lack of data and the short notice given before the meeting, pointing out that most requests for proposals (RFPs) allow for adjustments in timelines. She advocated for a more sensitive approach to zoning, citing Minneapolis as an example, where zoning overlay districts were maintained and lot sizes were scaled according to the potential number of units. Ms. Rosinski also highlighted the lack of predictability in the real estate market and suggested that the housing chapter needed more attention, particularly in supporting multigenerational housing.

Finally, Jim Slingo provided a revised version of his statement from the previous meeting, focusing on the debate over building height, particularly the difference between 35 feet and 28 feet.

Chair Rodgers asked for a motion to continue the hearing on the Comprehensive Plan. **Commissioner Lindwall made a motion to continue the hearing to the February 26, 2025 meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed 9-0.**

Ayes: Halik, Mirintchev, Rodgers, Arevalo, Lindwall, Mabadi, Puchtel, Johnson, Mangum

Nayes:

Absent:

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Lindwall moved to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Puchtel seconded.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:51 PM

The next Evanston Land Use Commission meeting will be held **on Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at 6:00 pm**, in the James C. Lytle Council Chambers in the Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center.

Respectfully submitted,
Justin Bock, Administrative lead

Reviewed by
Meagan Jones, Neighborhood and Land Use Planner