

APPROVED  
SEPTEMBER 8, 2020

**CITY OF WIXOM  
49045 PONTIAC TRAIL  
PLANNING COMMISSION (ZOOM) MEETING  
AUGUST 5, 2020**

This meeting was called to order by Chairman Day of the Planning at 7:34 p.m. at which the Pledge of Allegiance was pledged to the American flag.

**PRESENT:** William Day (Chairman), Phillip Carter (Vice Chairman), Ray Cousineau, Sandro Grossi, Cheryl Tacy and Mark Lada

**ABSENT:** Excused: Anthony Lawrence

**OTHERS:** Carmine Avantini (CIB Planning) and Mona Freiburger (Recording Secretary)

**Determination of a Quorum:**

A quorum of the Planning Commission was present for this meeting.

**Agenda:**

No additions or changes were made to the agenda.

**Approval of the June 29, 2020 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes:**

**MOTION** and seconded by Commissioners Lada and Tacy to approve the June 29, 2020 Joint Board City Meeting Minutes.

**VOTE:**

**MOTION CARRIED**

**Approval of the July 8, 2020 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes:**

**MOTION** and seconded by Commissioners Lada and Tacy to approve the July 8, 2020 Planning Commission Meeting Minutes of July 8, 2020, as amended.

**VOTE:**

**MOTION CARRIED**

**Correspondence:**

July 28, 2020 City Manager Update

**Call to the Public:** (Limited to 5 minutes per speakers, addressing Agenda items on Agenda only)

None

**Old Business:**

None

**New Business:**

An Introductory discussion regarding Industrial Commercial Property (former Ford Plant Property)

**Discussion:**

Mr. Avantini stated there were two guests at the meeting from ICP, the owners of the remaining portion of the former Ford Wixom Assembly Plant property, Mr. Chris Semarjian and Mr. Chris Salata.

Mr. Avantini indicated they had been working with Mr. Brown and ICP for some time. Mr. Avantini stated his role in the company had changed a bit, he is doing more special projects and Ms. McIntyre was doing more of the day to day work.

Mr. Avantini stated he had encouraged Mr. Semarjian and Mr. Salata to take a look at the GPUD ordinance. The GPUD ordinance was written to be highly flexible and to make it easier for developers to have projects reviewed and approved. The critical three points are included in the staff report: One, if you are not in a planned unit development and there is an issue with dimensions, you can't meet a setback, etc., instead of going to the ZBA and having to meet their standards which are fairly rigorous under State law, it could be brought to the Planning Commission. If the plan makes good design sense, then the Planning Commission could approve it as a waiver and does not have to go to the ZBA for approval. Two, the GPUD allows uses in four or five different zoning districts. You are not limited to one district; you have other districts where uses are available. Three, which is the most important, if the property is not zoned GPUD, the project would have to come before the Planning Commission then City Council for zoning ordinance amendment because it is not a permitted use, not a specified use. The GPUD has a whole host of uses that are not specified in the zoning ordinance. The GPUD ordinance gives the Planning Commission the ability to allow that use assuming that it fits within all of the other developments that are occurring on the property. To change the zoning ordinance for a text amendment, the process could take 4 to 6 months. Under the GPUD ordinance, the review process could take approximately 30 days, which is always encouraged. We want to have good plans put together and we want them to come to you with a recommendation for approval within 30 days or less.

Mr. Avantini indicated with all of the discretion being placed within the Planning Commission, Mr. Semarjian and Mr. Salata thought it would be a good idea to have an introductory meeting with the Planning Commission to talk and get their thoughts on the property about the potential rezoning to GPUD.

Mr. Brown indicated how positively he and Mr. Avantini felt about our Planning Commissioners, so that when they have the opportunity to come before them, it won't be the first time to see them. This is an informal setting with this introductory meeting.

Mr. Chris Semarjian, owner of ICP, introduced himself to the Planning Commission. He indicated he wanted to meet the Commissioners to learn more about them and for the Commissioners to learn more about ICP. Mr. Semarjian stated he was excited to be in Wixom, it took them a little while to get going with the water issues and the pad removal but they are well underway at this site.

Mr. Semarjian stated they looked at this site because they have had exposure in several projects in Detroit, Romulus, two in Pontiac, Grand Rapids and Holland, Michigan. They have had very good luck and success in all of those locations, brought tremendous value and a lot of jobs within those communities and projects. Mr. Semarjian stated they weren't in any type of GPUD, they were dealing with industrial zoning which they are used to operating under. It is more of a comfort zone. Looking at Wixom and this property, they felt very good that they could accomplish what was needed within the zoning. Mr. Brown and Mr. Avantini thought the GPUD would be a real benefit to ICP. ICP wants to be good neighbors, and good team players. They discussed roadways coming through to alleviate traffic throughout Wixom. ICP sees this site as industrial as much as they would love a company headquarters to come to this site, but they do not want to wait 20 years to find one. Mr. Semarjian is concerned because they may not be able to do the traditional, industrial business that should occur on this site. Mr. Semarjian indicated it was important for them to meet the Commissioners and learn a little bit more about their expectations of the site to make sure they are aligned because ICP are industrial developers. They want to make sure that they can be successful in Wixom and understand the Planning Commission's thoughts regarding the site.

Mr. Chris Salata, Chief Operating Office, ICP, introduced himself to the Planning Commission. He indicated he had met with Justin Sprague, CIB Planning, and the Economic Development Director from Oakland County as well as representatives from the Detroit Regional Partnership.

Mr. Salata stated given the progress they have made on the site over the last couple of years and removing some of the problems left by the predecessor, they are confident the site has grown, dramatically. It is the number one site on DRP's list heading into 2021 from a development standpoint. There is a strong interest from industrial users for this location given its amenities which include the power, the rail, the size and the 182 acre site lends itself to some of those users. No one could have predicted the pandemic within

the last five months as a country which did not help their progress but ICP was happy to report that they are very close to having this development ready.

Mr. Brown indicated assisting with the traffic situation in town came up in a discussion as they were brainstorming through the road system through the site. The idea came up regarding connecting to the industrial part to the northwest and creating an additional, more south way of traveling through town and bypassing the Pontiac Trail/Wixom Road intersection and bring it down to either West Road, and potentially, down to Assembly Drive in the spec building area which could be beneficial to Wixom. It could have some collateral benefit for the development, if there was additional traffic that came through, depending on the uses.

Chairman Day stated he thought rezoning GPUD does not rule out industrial sites. It gives a broader range and flexibility to work through more quickly, get construction moving more quickly and get tenants/owners into the property. Chairman Day did not see a downside and saw a potential upside in terms of ICP's ability to market the property and to get people and projects underway quickly and efficiently.

Mr. Semarjian stated he did not have a preconceived notion, if somebody wanted to come in and own their site, build their building, ICP would go that route; if the company wanted a joint venture and they thought it made sense, they were very flexible. Mr. Semarjian indicated their success has been built on understanding the market and they feel very strongly that this is a key industrial site. They have partnered with all of the communities whether it is an existing building or a site like this to benefit everyone.

Mr. Semarjian explained a couple of projects that ICP had done including the Pontiac Truck and Bus, the Tech Center on Center Point Parkway. They turned a \$1.1 million square foot office building into a multi-tenant office an industrial complex; they brought in Fanuc Robotics, I.M. Branded, among other companies including United Shore Mortgage.

Mr. Salata indicated this is not their first transaction with Ford. One of the reasons he thought they were as successful in getting this done in such a short period of time was absolutely attributed to their strong relationship with Ford. They had redeveloped multiple Ford plants in the past. Ford was very cooperative with ICP as it related to the state tax credits that are associated with this site which they did not assign to their predecessor.

Mr. Salata stated they purchased the property in May, 2018, and all of their time has been spent cleaning up the site. The work is almost completed with the cleanup.

Mr. Brown spoke of the water problem on the site. They went through a lot of coordination with ICP and the City came up with a way to treat the water. They installed an onsite pre-treatment process to accept the water through the waste water treatment plant system.

Commissioner Tacy indicated she was pleased to meet Mr. Semarjian and Mr. Salata. She echoed Chairman Day's comments on the potential to rezone to a GPUD. It makes sense for the City of Wixom in moving forward.

Commissioner Cousineau asked about ICP's current plans, as they had undertaken significant work on the site. Mr. Semarjian indicated they were working with a major manufacturer who decided to go to a more rural location. ICP made a bid proposal for 100,000 to 200,000 square foot office and industrial building for a company on the north 10 or 12 acres. They are waiting to hear back regarding the bid proposal.

Commissioner Cousineau asked if ICP believe the property is best suited for industrial and to enlighten the Commission on the strength of the industrial market, currently. Mr. Semarjian stated pre-Covid, it seemed the office market, the office tech markets might be a little more driven towards Novi and Southfield, who seem to be getting some of the larger office type deals today. Auburn Hills, there is engineering and technology. Industrial occupancy is approximately 95 to 98% occupancy. There is no product available. People want to build industrial right now. He indicated retail is in real trouble right now. Warehousing is evolving; the internet is driving sales in the warehousing/industrial type warehousing, like an Amazon type facility. They have talked with a few retailers, their e-commerce business is off the charts right now. Macy's was going to close six distribution centers; they pulled them off the market and Macy's is only selling one.

Commissioner Cousineau asked the original Planning Commission members when this property became available for the first time, what kind of visions did they had for development of this area. Chairman Day indicated everyone wanted to see the property redeveloped and nobody was really sure which way it was going to go. There were a lot of different ideas, but maybe a sports facility but also an office world headquarters type of building. Everybody wanted to see a mixed use type of facility where the appearance was such that it provided an attractive gateway to the city. They did not want something that was going to generate a huge amount of truck traffic in and out because Wixom has tremendous traffic problems already. Mr. Semarjian indicated they felt comfortable that they have a great access to the highway but working with Mr. Brown and Mr. Avantini, trying to help alleviate some other problems in the community coming through this site, if that's what helps to get everything done, they would be happy to consider it, as long as they keep it within the boundaries. It would be great for everyone.

Mr. Brown stated the purpose of some of the interactions recently to coordinate meetings with the county and with the Detroit Regional partnership was bring in additional bandwidth, capabilities and leads to ICP to help facilitate development to the site. The meetings went very well, there were some great ideas and, hopefully, it will bear fruit sometime in the near future.

Commissioner Carter indicated the main common thread in all of the developments is that residents of Wixom did not want more traffic, which is not a great surprise to anyone. The

only thing everyone agreed on during the first discussions with the Wixom property was they didn't want a big warehouse with a lot of trucks. They wanted different types of uses, self contained, a lot of options and attractions for people from other communities. University extensions and a ballpark would be nice. Everyone agreed distribution centers was something they were not interested in.

Mr. Semarjian indicated they were not involved in the Amazon facility in Lyon Township. The only one they have done so far is Randall Park Mall. Right now, Amazon is okay in the areas, but ICP did submit the site for them. Amazon liked the site but they were not ready for it, yet. The market does not require them for another site out here. The site in Ohio, Randall Park Mall, the building was 900,000 square feet, it was on 65 acres, they have 2,700 employees and \$180 million project. It was quite a depressed area, and if they were only \$15 to \$16 an hour jobs, they are giving \$400,000 a month to the community. Greater Detroit is not a one way market. It is a myriad of businesses.

Chairman Day stated one of the things the Planning Commission discussed was to promote development that was going to provide jobs that would allow people the opportunity the desire to purchase homes and reside in Wixom. \$15 an hour jobs aren't going to do that. They want people living and working in the community.

Chairman Day indicated the Planning Commission is very open minded and pragmatic which is one of the reasons that going GPUD makes sense because it is a pragmatic solution in getting things up and running quickly. The property sat vacant far too long. There is no question the Planning Commission is interested in working with ICP and they are happy to have someone who is interested in moving this along.

Mr. Salata indicated part of the challenge they have had at the site is the narrative. The fact that it had sat there vacant for the last few years and the fact that there was a perceived environmental condition on the property. During the past two years, they have countered that narrative and are prepared to participate along with the county and the DRP that will, essentially, announce to the market that this bad history of the site has been cleaned up and they are open for business. Their hope is that it can generate more interest in the site and help them move to the next step which is to get that first deal off of the ground. That is the catalyst to get this property moving.

Commissioner Lada stated he is in favor of the GPUD change. It is not going to hinder the use in the industrial piece at all. It is going to open it up to other applications, as well. It is a win/win for adding diversity.

Commissioner Grossi echoed the other Commissioners. He thought it would offer greater flexibility with the GPUD, also. Commissioner Grossi indicated he read an article on the ICP website after they purchased the property and this almost mirrors Wixom's master plan for the rest of that property.

Mr. Avantini stated this meeting had been very productive and, hopefully, it had given ICP the comfort level with the Planning Commission. Mr. Avantini echoed that the GPUD is the way to go, they are comfortable with it and it does open a lot of doors, adds more flexibility to make it easier to developer.

Chairman Day stated they are looking for high quality design features to make it an attractive entry into the city.

Mr. Brown stated the GPUD would help move a little more quickly with any kind of proposed uses. It opens up the opportunity for unique things into the site more quickly than otherwise would be possible, without any real detriment to the manufacturing side of things.

Commissioner Grossi asked how ICP felt about the GPUD. Mr. Semarjian stated the concept didn't bother him, he saw the benefit. The biggest issue was not knowing the Planning Commission's thoughts. They know what they can get done in the current zoning, they understand it might lack flexibility but at least they knew what they could get it done.

Mr. Avantini stated in the site plan review section of the ordinance, everything still goes through the Planning Commission. The standards that will be applied under the GPUD will not be any different than the standards under that they would apply under the current ordinance but it really does give more flexibility.

**Call to the Public:**

None

**Staff Comments:**

Mr. Avantini thanked the Commissioners; he indicated this meeting would help them understand the GPUD. Mr. Avantini stated he thought the GPUD would not have any negative effects, it is all positive.

Mr. Avantini indicated they had pulled back on the loading dock amendments and they would look at basing them on the number of required employee spaces, which was, originally, discussed. They are working to make sure that they are not creating ordinances to make their development more difficult.

Chairman Day stated the property may end up being industrial but making this a GPUD, the property could be marketed more broadly.

City Manager Brown stated they are confident that the County could assist with attracting multiple uses to the site. They have talked about reaching out to different organizations to get the property on the radar.

Mr. Avantini stated everything should be in place to the future land use map and the plan is complete to go to City Council. He will submit a copy to the Planning Commission before it goes to Council.

**Commission Comments:**

Commissioner Tacy stated she brought up at the February meeting regarding the lights in the downtown area. There are more lights that are burned out. The lights at the main intersection are out, lights across from city hall are out; they have been out since Christmas and now there are even more street lights out.

Commissioner Tacy indicated she posted the question as to why there were no lights in front of the two most recent, most northern townhouses. The rest of the VCA area has street lights along that area and the lights continue in front of the VCA. Lights continue in front of the church, as well. Commissioner Tacy questioned why street lights are not required in front of the townhomes. She recalled when phase one of the townhomes were built, photocells on the lights were required at the doorways to contribute to ambient lighting for safety reasons.

Commissioner Grossi indicated he is in the downtown area every night, and sometimes it has been pitch black; all of the lights off along Pontiac Trail. He indicated he did inform the DPW Director that the lights are not turning on. It is dark at 9:45 pm and he won't see the lights turn on until after 10:00 p.m. Commissioner Grossi stated he may call the DPW Director again regarding this situation.

Mr. Avantini stated he would follow up with a phone call. They required them to meet all of the conditions of the original approval.

**Adjournment:**

This meeting of the Planning Commission was motioned and adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Mona Freiburger  
Recording Secretary