

**CITY OF INDEPENDENCE  
JOINT COUNCIL/PLANNING COMMISSION WORK SESSION  
MINUTES  
JANUARY 30, 2007 5:30 P.M.  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

Present were Mayor Ramos and Council Members Blaze, Cichocki, Crooks, Klepacz and Kurtz. Absent were Councilman Grendel and Councilwoman Wisnieski. Also present from the City were City Planner Markley and Economic Developer White. Present from the Planning Commission was Dale Lytkowski and Jack Shallcross.

Present from the Downtown Redevelopment Task Force were Kathleen Kapusta, Don Krolikowski, John Nicastro, Sr., Anthony Togliatti and Hank Panek.

Also present were Paul Vernon of Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative and Garth Woodsen from the Port Authority.

Mayor Ramos called the Workshop to order at 5:39 p.m.

Ron White stated, after the Work Session of January 16<sup>th</sup>, we wanted to make a progression. We wanted to continue from where we left off to work continually forward in the process. So the agenda was set up to address certain things. Before we get too far into those items, we're going to take a little more focus on them hopefully and move them forward.

The Mayor wishes to make some comments and then we'll go from there.

Mayor Ramos stated, thank you for coming.

This is the second of our preliminary three meetings. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done. We need to keep the process going. When I speak about the process I'm speaking of ultimately a master plan for the downtown area. It should be a working model that is not etched in stone. We need to come up with what the people of Independence and what we would like to see in our downtown area.

There are two developers that are very much interested in making something happen in our downtown area. However, what we're going to be doing is approaching it from a planning point of view as far as discussion relating to several of the issues that are before us today.

One of the ideas that has been kicked around is the possibility, and I think we all have feelings as far as what we would like to see and how to address certain issues such as the middle school, the residential component, land acquisition, water tank, Public Square and open space. I think we all have opinions as to what we would like to see there. We're trying to reach some type of consensus.

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I have formulated the agenda with Jeff Markley and Ron White for today. I would like to concentrate on the issue of whether or not we should do a survey. The Task Force spent a lot of time discussing that, and maybe that's a course that we should follow – we should find out what our residents feel about the residential component of this, what our residents feel about the water tank, what our residents feel about Public Square, what our residents are looking for as far as open space, tying in with the National Park. Maybe it's a possibility of bringing the trail that we've been discussing up to the center of town so that it could be used as a destination.

There are a lot of ideas that we can kick around and maybe we could talk about doing the survey. What do we cover in the survey? What are some of the topics that we would like to address?

I certainly appreciate your time and I hope we're moving forward. Everyone is not going to be happy with every facet of it, but I would like to see if we can reach some type of consensus so that the Task Force, the Planning Commission, Council and the Administration can all come forward and say, look, this what we would like to see. At least this is a starting point.

My big thing is the economic vitality of the project. I really feel that that is going to be the engine that is running this thing, whether or not it makes economic sense for a developer, whether or not it makes economic sense for our community to go forward.

I'm not averse to providing some type of partnership with the businesses, whether it be through TIF, whether it be through infrastructure improvements in order to help the project move along.

I am not averse to doing a land lease of the City owned property in order to take out the cost of the land and make it a viable project.

I think we need to be creative. As you know, in Northeast Ohio development is tough right now and I think we need to take the initiative steps. We have our good friends from the Port Authority who were very instrumental in helping out with the Cavaliers and I'm happy to see them here at least listening to some of the issues that we would like to see addressed and the possibility of a partnership with the Port Authority as well in making this a viable project.

Ron White commented, this is to be a casual Work Session, a discussion. We want you to make comment and statements.

Jeff Markley is going to lead us through a couple of these topics. As you see, the first one we wanted to address is trying to come up with a vision. There was a theme that the Task Force worked with.

Jeff Markley stated, a lot of the times we're focused on the "what." Instead of focusing on the "who" let's focus on the "what" so we can get things accomplished. Tonight I'm going to say that instead of focusing on the "what," the specifics of the water tank, middle school or this, that and the other, let's focus on the "how."

The Task Force over the last six months has talked a lot about the "what," how we're going to deal with this or how we're going to deal with this in one situation or another. I think with this

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group I'd like to work on the "how?" How can we reach some even minor victory or consensus of sorts just to say, let's move forward on this task, this task and this task.

As part of the master planning process I think the Task Force would like to know where do we go and how do we get to that next step? So it's that "how" that I'd like to focus on.

If the group would like to talk specifics on the water tank or middle school, we can do that but it would probably take quite awhile to do that and we may not be able to move the process along. In order to move that process, the "what" and the "how" how do we move ahead with the master plan?

We talked about the project boundaries. I don't know if we can achieve consensus on the project boundaries. We have a map here indicating the project boundaries that we're working under right now. If there aren't major concerns, then I'd like to propose that those boundaries be somewhat static at this point, unless there is some radical reason to change them. Those are the boundaries we need to work with. We have to know what framework we're working within before we move to the next step which is the planning. What is the process? If there aren't concerns or comments regarding those boundaries, then moving along then and defining the goals.

Why does this town feel like it needs an economic redevelopment of the downtown? Some of that might be evident – the buildings aren't up to par. Maybe the businesses need to be rejuvenated. We've heard out bicycling and pedestrian access.

Instead of me talking, I'd like to hear some of the concerns. Why are we sitting in this room? Why has the Task Force been formed? Why have six months of effort gone into it, and where do we hope to go? Maybe for ten or fifteen minutes we'll just talk about the "why." Why are we doing this, and are we all committed to moving forward with it?

Don Krolkowski responded, the Task Force felt that we wanted to bring this to the Administration to keep us on track with what we discussed as the Task Force and to see how the Administration is going to move forward with the process.

I was interested in what the Mayor said about a couple of developers that have expressed interest. I'd be interested in hearing specifics if it can be divulged.

Mayor Ramos replied, one of them gave a presentation to Council. Sam Petros came to the City approximately 18 months ago or even longer. He came forward with a plan. It was a combination mixed use which also contained a residential component.

At that time, Council felt that they shouldn't just jump on the first proposal that came across the desk. That's when we got into opening up the process and going out to try and find other ideas and inviting people to think outside of the box. In other words, don't be concerned about zoning. Don't be concerned about land ownership. What do you envision? Consequently, that's why we ended up with the three proposals.

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Mr. Petros is still very much interested. He has asked what the status is. He is very interested in participating if we'd like to hear from him.

There was also another developer who came forward that was also very much interested in the downtown area as far as a mixed use type of plan. I advised him that we're going through the planning process. He said he would like to attend some of the meetings when it's appropriate and participate.

There is interest. It's just a question of, do I give them this booklet and say, these are the issues. This is what we're looking for. We're looking for pedestrian friendly. We want to tie into the National Park. We want to have an appreciation for the historical aspect of it. We want to have open space. We're not looking to make this a Crocker Park or a Legacy. These are some of the components or issues.

Maybe that's a starting point as far as dealing with these two developers. I would certainly like to at least give them some type of framework and then invite them to come in with something. Once again, I'm not married to either one of these guys so consequently, it doesn't matter except for the fact that they are willing to invest in our community. They find this project very challenging and I think I'd at least give them something.

Looking at the report I think there are a lot of things that all of us agree to. I think there is disagreement as far as the residential component. There are some people that feel there should be a strong residential component. Other people feel there should not be a residential component. Those are some of the key issues that I think we need to nip in the bud and resolve. If that takes a survey of our community, so be it. I think that a residential component is very strong there. I bet if we took a survey of our community, I don't think the residential component would be that strong.

Don Krolkowski asked, does Council and yourself decide if you want to entertain the two developers? Is there a consensus needed for that? If a developer says at no cost to the community he'll do some sketches or studies, can you move forward with that or does all of Council need to agree?

Mayor Ramos replied, the Administration as well as a majority Council feels that they want to go that way that could be a starting point. Before a developer is going to invest any substantial amount of money he's going to need something to work off of.

Dale Lytkowski commented, last meeting I said that I liked the plan. I thought the Task Force did a good job. I have a couple of concerns and questions. Who did Legacy, Hudson and Crocker Park? Who were the architects? Have we ever checked that out?

Ron White asked, developer or who put the pictures to paper?

Dale Lytkowski replied, I know Petros a little bit. He's a residential developer per se. I think this is a great document and I agree with the Mayor. Where do we take the documents from this

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point? Seems to me if we gave it to one, two or three architects or architectural firms and say, what do you envision with having this criteria within our plan?

The second point on the survey, and I agree with the Mayor, if we did take a survey, odds are housing would be questionable.

The third point is, did we consider what Seven Hills is doing with respect to their property and can we make it somewhat compatible with that property as opposed to being in competition with it? It doesn't make sense to have this in competition with Seven Hills.

To recap, my feeling is I like the package very much. Where do we take it from here? How do we go forward from this point? I like the idea of giving this to one, two or three architectural firms or even Petros. I have no problem with that, but I'd be concerned if he moves us down one path as opposed to somebody who would have more vision (inaudible) different areas.

Councilman Crooks stated, I'm going to explain how I'm understanding this as a Councilman. We're talking about specifics and I thought we were going to stay away from talking about specifics but I understand. It's easy to talk about specifics. Before I can understand the specifics I'm envisioning this process but I don't know what the process is. This is how I'm envisioning it and maybe it will generate a discussion.

Councilman Crooks drew the Task Force at the top of the page as a beginning of the process.

Councilman Crooks drew a line between Task Force and "Completed Downtown" at the bottom of the page.

Councilman Crooks stated, I know there is some disagreement as to what a completed downtown means so this needs to be defined. Here is the timeline between the two. We know for sure that the Task Force was spring of 2006. The completion of downtown we don't know. It would help me if we could fill in a timeline between the two, giving target dates for different steps in the process – preliminary plan, major issues that need to be decided, engaging a developer, sitting down with landowners downtown etc. and work our way through this process.

Jeff Markley asked, is there a consensus among this group as to why the group formed to begin with?

Vice Mayor Kurtz replied, we want to fix up the downtown area.

Jeff Markley responded, we can agree on that. What does that mean? Does that mean more business? Does that mean a pretty picture?

An unidentified woman replied, modernize it. Tear down the old buildings. Pretty picture.

Jeff Markley responded, pretty picture, aesthetics. We all agree that we want to fix it up and make it look better.

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Vice Mayor Kurtz responded, is it a pedestrian destination? Is it for a focus on retail development? Is it for some alternative housing? There are a lot of puzzle pieces.

Jeff Markley stated, besides improving the aesthetics of it, is obviously to bring some tax dollars in. It has to be a generator.

Vice Mayor Kurtz commented, it needs to be a functional pretty picture. You can drive around nice areas with a lot of money put into aesthetics but if it's not a destination for the amenities that we have or the opportunities that we have, then. . .

An unidentified woman in the audience made an inaudible comment.

Hank Panek stated, back to the original question of why we're doing it, it's my understanding in the Task Force was that over many years the downtown area has become less and less utilized for various reasons. We have the recreation area that has proven to be a very viable place for residents to go. The question then becomes, do we capitalize on the (inaudible). Do we want those things in the area to stay in the area?

Early on in the Task Force what we tried to focus on, and which he thinks their market area fell apart on, is to poll the residents to find out where they're going and why they're going outside of the area, because if we don't satisfy those needs, we're not going to get our residents. So, you have two ways to go. Do you want to keep the residents here, build something for the residents, or do you want to bring people in from outside in order to generate revenue.

Looks like we've already been beat to the punch in generating revenues. I'm not saying that people from surrounding areas are not going to come into this area, but until we know what it is that the residents actually are in need of, what they leave the area to go get and (inaudible) that's really the viability part. So we don't know what percentage of what we're missing is in business, what percentage of it should be additional recreation. Let's say for example accessibility for seniors. How about an area that's quiet.

Going back to residential areas of senior housing, my personal feeling is that is a very (inaudible) item for the residents. I think that it was not passed was because of misinformed voters. It seems like most of the people that I talked to didn't have a clear idea of what it was they were voting on. They just knew a concept and (inaudible).

I think the purpose of the Task Force was to find a viable use to keep the residents in the area. The component that's missing is what are the residents really in need of? If we have a group of 16 people make that decision, we were having a very tough time and were struggling with it. What is it? There are lots of things it can be, but until we know from the residents why the majority of the people are not coming and what is going to get them to come once or twice a week. . .

Vice Mayor Kurtz asked, is that during the day or is that in the evening? Are we trying to make it a destination during the daytime hours? You can take a variety of paths even off that statement.

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Hank Panek responded, absolutely, and different sections throughout that area that capitalize at different times of the day. For example, a recreation area or park which is great for daytime. Where do you go in the evening? Where do you go to have your cup of coffee and sit outside during the nice weather? Where do you have a place to eat and choices to do that with the idea of being able to bring the kids as well? It's one thing to bring a vehicle in and have something for somebody (inaudible) that's great, but so many of the people (inaudible) so you have three generations there to work with.

Once again, you get back to the question, what is it going to be for the residents as the general population and where they need it. I believe we need that marketing, that questioning of the people to determine what that is. If it isn't something like senior housing, then so be it, but I think we should do a real good job on surveying the population to see what it is that we need to put in this project to make it work.

Vice Mayor Kurtz added, that would be supported by the residents.

Hank Panek responded, correct.

Mayor Ramos commented, I agree with you strongly. Going back to what Councilman Cichocki said a couple weeks ago, I don't think that people are looking for Crocker Park or Legacy or a project to bring people into downtown. I think the residents of Independence are looking for something that would service their needs. It would bring people into the downtown area. It would be pedestrian friendly. There would be activities in the center of town. The only way to find that out is a survey.

Dale Lytkowski commented, it has to be economically viable as the Vice Mayor said. I question if we have enough economic services to support our downtown. It probably has to somewhat of a combination I would think. I agree that it's first for the residents.

Councilman Blaze commented, first, but we may not have enough residents to support it.

Dale Lytkowski commented, I agree.

Councilman Blaze commented, (inaudible) like we do on Rockside Road where we bring in thousands of people a day to capitalize.

Dale Lytkowski commented, that's a good point. Maybe we could survey not only the residents but maybe the tenants on Rockside Road.

Councilman Blaze responded, if we capitalize on that, we capitalize on our location in the center of town. Legacy Village is east, Crocker Park is west and Hudson Village is in Summit County. There is nothing here. Seven Hills is trying to move forward with their proposal but I think the jury is still out as to whether it's ever going to become a reality – at least in the scope in which they announced it.

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As far as the timeline, in my mind between the 16<sup>th</sup> when we met and this evening as far as the next step and what we need to do, one of the key steps that I feel is critical at this stage is I don't think there is a great sentiment to use eminent domain in this process. If we can get by without doing it, that's the preferred option.

That being the case, we are a big property owner in the center of town, but there are a lot of private property owners in the center of town. As much as I would like to jump in and just like to tell the design group let's get going and start on this master plan for downtown, if we haven't sat down and really talked with the private property owners in downtown and found out whether they are onboard, whether they support it, whether they are willing to invest, what their thoughts are, we might go ahead and spend the money and create a plan on what we want to do downtown and then find out that we need to get private property to facilitate this – it's not available or it's available at the owner's cost. It puts a kink into our plans. It's critical before we get into the process to see what kind of agreement or participation we have from the private property owners in the center of town. I don't know whether the Task Force has identified that.

Don Krolkowski responded, we tried a number of times to contact Marotta who owns the shopping center.

Jeff Markley responded, we did talk about it. We absolutely need to have that private interest. He thinks that's what the Mayor suggested too – the private/public partnership, that relationship. I think it's somewhat difficult to go to the shop owner and say, we need your buy in on a plan that we haven't yet developed. You have to be able to show them that there is going to be some process that's already in place and that the City is behind you.

Maybe this goes to Dale Lytkowski's point that we want a couple of architects to come out and take the package and look at it. We can do that too and then create a pretty picture, but it may not be economically viable. You have to have both the private interest. It's going to be the shop owners that are either going to choose to invest in this project or not. If they choose not to, what does that piece, that void, leave you in the plans? You have to be prepared for that. You don't want to use eminent domain, and that's fine. I appreciate that, but what does that void do if that private party chooses not to participate? The plan would still have to go on. You can't just say that we can do anything there.

Councilman Blaze responded, I think we need to know that upfront because if you take the west side of Route 21 from Sunset, north to St. Michael's, the City owns some property in there. There is private property in there, and if we've got five of the six property owners on that side onboard and one isn't, what are we going to do, develop around that property? There needs to be some unity and synergy among the adjacent property owners.

Jeff Markley responded, what is the leverage?

Vice Mayor Kurtz commented, I do not support eminent domain for a residential dwelling. On the other hand, we need to have all the tools in our toolbox to develop the downtown area. We used eminent domain, we put out our sword and our shield for Rockside Road to force some people who could have been obstructionists or wanted to do things on their timetable. We used

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the tool of eminent domain. We have never had to execute it. It was never taken that far, but we had the tool in the toolbox. You're talking to yourself, you're kidding yourself if you're. . . Again, I would not support residential eminent domain. From a commercial standpoint, it's similar to the tool that we have in our toolbox when it comes to right-of-way acquisition.

Dale Lytkowski commented, on residential it doesn't mean we couldn't have right of first refusal.

Everyone speaking at once.

Vice Mayor Kurtz commented, you see a number of developments throughout the area where they build around a house and have the right of first refusal.

Mayor Ramos commented, I did a little research on eminent domain and unfortunately, even with commercial, it's going to be very, very difficult. It's very difficult to do in the sense of economic development. Once again, for residential it should never be used, but as far as commercial for roadways and things such as that, I think that could be used for that purpose. But I don't think we're every going to get into the situation where we're going to come up to Marotta and say, okay we're going to negotiate with you and if you don't (inaudible) we're going to take this by eminent domain and develop it in a different way. That's not going to work.

Going back to Marotta, we have met with Mr. Marotta. We really thought if we could partner with him, and that's our ultimate goal, to partner with him because he is a substantial property owner, so we sat down with him and tried to do it. Mr. Marotta has owned that building for 40 or 50 years. He is fully rented for all intents and purposes. He doesn't really look to invest a lot of money into this building because it serves him very well.

We told him we have this downtown plan and we really want to partner with him, we want to make him more viable and we want to turn this into something. He said, let me know what you're thinking about and I'll think about it.

As far as taking initiative, I think he's going to be pretty much laid back.

We talked to him about taking Chestnut into the shopping center which would provide him some frontage, doing something with the parking lot and making it more attractive. He politely looked at us and nodded and said it was interesting. But I don't know if he's going to participate to a great extent financially.

Paul Vernon commented, willingness is a degree of property susceptibility to change whether it's in play for future development or not in play for future development. If a particular property owner says, I'm staying right here. I don't want to sell and I don't want to renovate, that to us says it a design constraint. It's a fixed object that we must maneuver around.

We can establish some criteria or some vision that talks about modernization and the kinds of things (inaudible) ideas around them to show to developers. Then they have a broader

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understanding of what it is the community would like to do and they can respond with whether they are more (inaudible) or less (inaudible). So you're both correct.

Paul Vernon stated the architects firms for Legacy and Crocker. They can be engaged to do a community vision.

There are a couple of things that I think we have to do. We're here in this Work Session and at the same time we've got the developer proposals that we've seen. This tells us about the market and this tells us about community preference. We work from that.

What this tells us broadly is that there are a wide range of possibilities from around 100 houses of various sizes and types to Mr. Petros' which was around 290. So there is a possibility of no net gain in commercial square footage to one of the proposals that had up to 260,000 net gain in commercial square footage. I would say that the DB Hartt/Petros proposal had about 42,000 which feels about right.

Folks that do market analysis we know do tell us broadly that the concept of additional housing and more multi-family housing added into the commercial mix is good for the overall viability of the future and its possibility for development.

So we have to take all those things and design (inaudible).

Councilman Crooks responded, I thought I heard you use the work "before" indicating some sort of order. You said that before we could solicit the developers we need to engage the property owners. Is that correct?

Paul Vernon replied, we can do two things. Because we understand a little bit about what the developers previously in their proposals have told us what they think is the range of economic viability and housing and commercial activity, we know a little bit about that.

We also have the work that the Task Force has done. We know a lot about community preferences – the water tank is probably not going to move. We may be able to have some independence conversations with property owners who say, I'm not going anywhere.

Based on all those parameters we'll take a look at some options and then we'll come back and present them to you. We'll show you a series of ideas, and we can also take those ideas and meet with the shopping center owner, or the folks on the west side of the street. We can sort of test it a little bit and see where we're it. We can get an idea of which option is more preferable. Then we can develop more of a final theme and if we go back to the development community, we can start them with options.

Vice Mayor Kurtz responded, you keep referring to "we."

Paul Vernon replied, we, the Urban Design Center.

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Vice Mayor Kurtz asked, why would I have you talk to (inaudible). Why wouldn't the City do that?

Paul Vernon replied, we're being retained by the City. In this particular "we" I'm talking about the Urban Design Center, a professional organization that does designing, rather than the retaining of individual private firms.

Jeff Markley responded, in conjunction with the Task Force.

Paul Vernon responded, in conjunction with the Task Force.

Councilman Blaze asked Paul Vernon to explain the Urban Design Center.

Paul Vernon replied, we are a non-profit organization. We are solely owned by Kent State University. We're an outreach center of the College of Architecture and Environmental Design. We sit as a freestanding firm and we only do work for cities and non-profits. We do not do work for (inaudible). We work all across Northeast Ohio.

These are the kinds of projects that we do when communities are trying to find a vision for themselves. Rather than having the developer decide, we try to help communities craft that vision for themselves.

In this particular case we're really lucky. Even though there isn't a market study, some developers have told us a little bit about what the programmatic data is – how much housing they'd support, how much commercial activity they'd support. Based on the other fixed constraints, the water tower and the connection to the National Park, we can start to design some options and we can come back to this group and you can say what you like, don't like or kind of like.

Jeff Markley commented, and this project can be concurrent with a survey so we can get the feedback and start to steer and chart the course.

Mayor Ramos asked, wouldn't you need to do the survey first?

Paul Vernon replied, we may have to pause for a bit. There may be some things that come out in the survey. Let's say the survey says, I want another ice cream shop, another drugstore, or I want a different bank or a small grocery, those are square footage numbers. Those aren't necessarily local (inaudible) numbers about whether it's commercial square footage or residential square footage.

Mayor Ramos responded, let's say the middle school. I would think that the middle school is a substantial issue because if you leave the middle school there, it's going to dictate that you're going to do something around the middle school. Whereas, if you clear the middle school, that leaves us a clean slate.

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Paul Vernon responded, that goes back to the willingness and susceptibility. When we start to design a particular option there will probably be one option that shows half of the middle school, all of the middle school, no middle school and addition to the middle school. We'll try and put some options on the table that understands the variance of possibilities that could happen with that building. The developers can look at those scenarios and decide for themselves whether or not they think those things are economically feasible or not.

We know that part of that building is sacred to many members of the community so we will show options and work around it.

Dale Lytkowski asked, why is that building sacred to some members of the community?

Vice Mayor Kurtz replied, it is.

Everyone speaking at once.

Vice Mayor Kurtz commented, it has a historical significance for a number of residents. I'm not saying it's in its entirety as it stands there today, but it's a component of that.

Dale Lytkowski stated, give me an example of where you guys have developed, locations that have been done.

Paul Vernon replied, we work with developers. Our most recent success is in Bay Village. We had a two piece retail and residential mixed use strategy on Dover. The southern end of the strategy is city owned property that they sold to a private developer in Phase 1. The second piece is an existing shopping center that is single story and the community is looking for something of higher density, higher commercial, higher office and we did a redevelopment (inaudible) community preference. The city found a developer to work on it pro-forma and now we're starting to massage that particular scheme so the city or perhaps another developer can acquire that piece of property to redevelop it. Again, it's based on community preference and wherever possible, any market data that we have. So in this case we have developers who have given us some sense of where the market is.

Dale Lytkowski asked, and community preference means a survey? Is that what you're saying?

Paul Vernon replied, there is a ton of information in this draft, and additional pieces of community preference in a survey but the survey may also tell you additional things about services that residents are looking for.

We've added information into surveys where we've asked, if you're going to invite somebody to downtown "whatever," where do you take them? Everyone answers the same thing. We don't. We go somewhere else.

I did want to go back to the school and whether or not it's sacred. Sometimes the issue is, is it a beautiful building or not? Maybe, maybe not. Is it historic? Maybe or maybe not. So sometimes the issue is the fear that if you tear it down, the thing you put back in its place will be

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less beautiful than what is already there. So there is all kinds of variance on why people hang onto the value of a particular structure.

We think it's worth showing the options with it there, partly there or just the façade or some piece of it being there. Obviously, three or four developers came to the table with two of them with some willingness to participate so there is economic viability for a developer to be here. So let's develop the best plan that we can as a group, we as consultants, you guys as a group, and the community, and then let's take it to the developer and massage it a little bit and see if we can get something that becomes buildable.

Councilman Blaze asked, what the Urban Design Center proposes to do for Independence, I believe the number I read is \$22,500.

Paul Vernon replied, I believe it's four \$7,500 (inaudible).

Councilman Blaze asked, how does that differ from the \$150,000 study that Bob Stark is doing for downtown Cuyahoga Falls? Are they doing something more encompassing than we're doing? Are they doing something we should be considering doing? I just saw in the paper about Cuyahoga Falls. They seem to be in the same position we are. They have an area in their community that they feel is underutilized and they could utilize it. I see they're retaining a private developer to do something. I'm not quite clear what that developer is going to do versus what Urban Design is doing.

Paul Vernon replied, I'm not familiar with what Bob Stark is being retained to do. But, for us, to give you more information about the Urban Design Center, we receive a third of our money through the State of Ohio and the Board of Regents. We receive about a third of our money from grants and foundations – Cleveland, Gund, First Energy, etc. So we are a 60% subsidized operation which is why we don't charge very much. We realize that as city budgets have been reduced and planning staff have been reduced, there is sort of a lack of in-house professional service to talk about the kind of planning study that Bob Stark is getting paid a lot of money to do. We're a mission based organization. We're trying to help communities individually as they see fit. I'm not quite sure we're providing the same kind of service that Bob Stark is providing. He may be paying (inaudible) a ton of money to do the architectural piece that we do in-house.

We have architects on staff, planners on staff, graphic artists, public artists and then sometimes we do retain an outside market (inaudible) to help us with the work that we do.

Councilman Blaze asked, if you're wholly owned by Kent then why is the office on Prospect in Cleveland? Is there more work in Cuyahoga County?

Paul Vernon replied, the Center was originally in Kent, but as we have the only Masters in Urban Design Program, the desire to move the program downtown was so that students could receive a more urban experience and learn urban design in a more urban setting. We also have a Masters in Architecture. If you want a Masters in Planning, you go to Cleveland State. Levine College and Kent State University take classes there and their students take classes from us. There is some crossover between all the leading institutions.

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Jeff Markley stated, the Task Force was challenged with these developers and picking one and let them work on it, because that's the only way we're going to be able to move forward and get an economic viability assessment done. We won't be able to get a plan without that partnership agreement. Pick one and let's move forward and then we'll do a community consensus building and move forward. The Task Force, representing the community, was uncomfortable with that process. They did not want to pick a developer, a private interest, in that point in time. They wanted to have more community consensus before they went to a developer. That's what this whole process has been about for six months. The Urban Design Center presented to us as an option for bringing on a non-biased professional in the planning field. That was why I think the Task Force felt compelled to say, we like this process. We're comfortable with this. Then, as we start fleshing this out, we can move forward to the development side of things.

Councilman Klepacz asked, did you say that the Task Force reached a consensus?

Jeff Markley replied, absolutely.

Councilman Klepacz asked, on what?

Jeff Markley replied, the fact that they didn't want to select a developer. There was other consensus in the document.

Councilman Klepacz stated, I want to thank the Task Force members for spending the time in doing all the work that they did.

What I thought was going to occur was I thought when this draft came out we had our plan for downtown. I see a lot of statements about not reaching a consensus. So I was disappointed in this draft because I expected a plan. I am disappointed with this whole process.

Around three years ago the City bought the middle school property as I recall. We were helping out with the building of the new high school, and naively as it turned out, we would be able to get senior housing on that particular site.

Someone made a comment earlier that the reason senior housing didn't pass this last time was because it was only a concept. The Senior Housing Committee the first time had quite a detailed plan for the middle school. That didn't pass either. The survey that we took at the time came back with over 80% saying that they would support senior housing in Independence. Well, they didn't. It failed.

What do we do now? I thought we should have Petros back but all my colleagues on Council at the time said, let's put this out there, think outside the box. So we did. The Council hired someone and put out the RFQ/P's. They came back and they thought outside the box and none of them were practical.

Now, what is our next step? Here we are how many years later in 2007 so we've been doing this for four years now? Are we moving ahead? I'm not so sure.

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I am saying let's put a big "for sale" sign on the middle school and our other property and let's see what it's at. I, as a Councilperson, am uncomfortable with spending more tax money on what we're doing here. It seems to me the marketplace needs to drive this.

I want to thank Paul Vernon for his presentation, but one of the options he talked about was using multi-family housing. It's going to be a lot colder day than today that that will pass. That's the reality. We don't need to take a survey to do that.

Councilman Klepacz asked Paul Vernon about the three \$7,500 proposals. Is the survey one of them?

Paul Vernon replied, at no charge at all we would be more than happy to make copies of all of the surveys we ever did in any of our communities and add that into the pile as the consultant. We're more than happy to add whatever tools we have available to get the best information. We're a public entity. That's part of our mission.

Councilman Klepacz commented, if a survey for Independence is more than \$7,500, and I cannot speak for the rest of my colleagues, and the Administration can do whatever they want for under \$7,500, but if it's over \$7,500 for a survey I think we are wasting our time. The Task Force spent how many months and (inaudible). It's not going to be any different if we take a survey. We aren't going to get a whole lot of different information.

I love the question about where are you going to meet. The answer is, you don't because there is no place to go. They're going to say they go somewhere else. Are they going to support this? Who knows? The market has to drive it.

I think the really valid point that Councilman Crooks made is, let's put a date. We've spent four years and anything we have is at best marginal. Let's put a date. When do we want this done? Otherwise, we're going to sit here and waste our time, and no offense to anybody, but I think we wasted our time for nothing. Let's move this thing forward. Let's set a date.

Hank Panek responded, I think that one of the underlying items that the Task Force had in our minds in our discussions and our decisions, which may have been no decisions, is that there is one opportunity to do this and it's either going to be done right or it's going to be done not as good as it can be. So, I think that was part of the part and parcel (inaudible). It's absolutely correct. The market or commercial activity, commercial interests is going to drive it.

However, to set a timeline and a date is let's review once again why we're doing this. If we're not going to get it done for the reasons that it was originally started, and it's just going to become a date and a commercial interest, we're done. But does that address the issue of why we started to begin with? You give anybody a blank slate and something can be done, but is that addressing why we're doing it?

Councilman Klepacz responded, I absolutely appreciated the work of the Task Force, absolutely. How you guys hung in there that long is beyond my comprehension. And I appreciate what you have done. I said I was disappointed because I thought we were going to have a plan. That's

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what I was disappointed with, not with the efforts of the Task Force. It adds to the frustration that we don't have a plan. I disagree with your statement unless (inaudible) we have some time. Are there going to be two more meetings, three more meetings, four more meetings or five? I don't know. Do we want this done in 2007? When do we want this done?

Several people speaking at once.

Councilman Klepacz stated, when do we want to get (inaudible). When do we want it done?

Hank Panek replied, I think Ron White was very good at keeping us on track because if it was left to us, you wouldn't even have the draft.

Paul Vernon stated, in a couple of months timeframe we will be showing some options. In one month's time we can easily work up a series of basic schematics, options to talk about – a roadway extension, is part of the middle school gone or not, for ownership senior loft higher density living. It will be a very short period of time – within a month or two. We'll have some ideas on the table and you guys discuss them. You can discuss them with the property owners in that area and get their input. We can come back in less than four weeks with some ideas and you guys can start talking.

With reference to the draft report and the information it provides, I wish every time we started our work in a community I had a book like this to talk about community preference. I realize that this took a lot of time. It can only make our job that much easier. We're grateful to have that information in particular.

Councilman Cichocki stated, there are a couple of things on my mind. As far as completion of downtown goes, you cannot have a date if you don't know what you're completing. You can sit and argue all you want but I think we need to reach consensus among this group as to what we want completed.

As far as a survey, how many times did the Downtown Task Force meet and how many ideas came up? If you can't get consensus out of a group of people that met over and over again, how are you going to get a consensus on a survey. So I'm not sure about the survey.

I think we have to reach consensus as to what we want downtown and I'm not sure that we've reached that consensus yet. Then you know where you go. That's how I see it, so you can't have a date. Alternative proposals are a starting point. It is something that you can compare and contrast.

Paul Vernon responded, it's a very basic kind of comparison. If you were building a house and you meet with your residential architect and tell him you want five bedrooms and a 28 car garage and 16 Jacuzzi tubs and then you look at it and say, that's not really what I wanted. So he comes back with something a little different and is a little closer and you send him away and he's really close. That's kind of the effort that we're going to go through.

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The first part will be some very broad based options that have some sort of infrastructure and connective strategies of where basic uses might go – I like that one, kind of like that one and that one is not going to fly. We'll then refine them a little bit more. At the end of the day we'll do some three dimensional work to those so the developer will have an understanding about the kind of quality, the construction, materials and other kinds of detailing and the expectation of the community. Then those can be taken to individual property owners and developers and we'll see what they say.

Councilman Cichocki commented, are any of your proposals not including alternate housing, because all of those proposals will be for naught. Where can we go with a proposal that has alternate housing that we can't sell to the community? Where do we go with that proposal? Will one of them include no alternate housing? I'd like one to include it.

Paul Vernon responded, if alternate housing is never going to pass, then one of the scenarios for the renovation future has got to be about what are the things to do to renovate the buildings in place (inaudible).

Councilman Cichocki asked, a recommended architectural scheme?

Paul Vernon replied, right. Then at the end of the day what's the best possible commercial revitalization strategy on the east side of the street. (Inaudible) talk about the west side. So, what's the right thing to do? (Inaudible) all the housing developers put all the housing to the southeast without increasing north of the line. If at the end of the day it's never going to increase north of the line, (inaudible). (Inaudible) will tell us whether or not that works. There may be too much competition at Rockside to allow for so much additional or a reconfiguration of commercial activity to happen here, which is why market analysis that we know without having done a market study is probably going to need to include some additional residential for it to happen. Again, these are the options we're going to have to take a look at.

Councilman Crooks stated, just to clarify, it wasn't my intention to put an arbitrary date on the completed downtown. That's why I didn't put a date up there. My intention was that if we could identify the process involved, starting where the group formed and build toward it and then have an idea instead of goal (inaudible).

Mayor Ramos commented, we always focus on what we disagree about. We need to focus on all the things that we do agree on. That is, we want it to be pedestrian friendly. We want open space. We want this to be a destination for people. The housing is a variable. The middle school is a variable. We focus on the things we do all agree on. There are variables and that's where we come up with the options.

Once again, I'm not exactly sure that this is the way to go but going through this whole process I think what we need to do is get as much information as we've accumulated, present it to the Urban Center and let them come up with the options. And then we have some options to look at that we can take to the community. We can talk to the community.

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Right now, if someone stops me on the street and asks what the plans are for downtown, without actually seeing what the options are and then massaging it into a working plan. . . Then we can take this plan and say what we would like to see. Then the developers, based upon economic viability, will tell us what they can do and what they have to change around. At least we would have something that we can go out with.

We should be concentrating on the things we have consensus on, rather than the things we disagree upon and let there be options. Let the middle school be options. From what I can see I don't think if we include the housing element the downtown area is going to be acceptable because it's just too controversial of an issue. I'd like to remove that element out of it to make this work. If later on it comes into play as far as senior housing is concerned, I would like to see the senior housing part of it be implemented in there, whether it be behind Concordia, whether it be behind the Technology Center site, just include those as options. Give options. I'm not saying that this is cast in concrete, but at least including it.

Don Krolkowski commented, we've been sitting here and going back and forth discussing this. We really don't have a vision on this so when we leave the meeting tonight we can say we kind of know what we want. We need to come up with a vision – functional, pleasing, attractive downtown destination for the residents which provides economic viability for the merchants serving the community at that destination. I'm just throwing that out there. I think if we do develop a vision, at least we can always come back to that statement and say, (inaudible). Is it going to be functional? Is it going to be pleasing? Is it going to be attractive? Is the downtown a destination for the residents? If we can clearly nail down that vision, I think that's going to help Paul and the rest of us to stay on track like the mission statement kept the Task Force on track. I'm not asking you to adopt this but it's in the minutes. Maybe we can revisit that next time and clearly define what we want for the downtown area so that when they ask us (inaudible) this is what we want. We can say it in one sentence. This is what we're looking for.

Paul Vernon stated, by the next meeting, although they would be very schematic and very basic, I can come back with some broad, conceptual idea for this group to respond to. I can also bring a series of other boards and figmentations that we've used in other communities to sell this same kind of message. If that would be helpful, I would be more than happy to do that.

Discussion ensued regarding the meeting of February 13<sup>th</sup>. It was agreed to cancel it and reschedule it for February 20<sup>th</sup> to allow more time.

Hank Panek commented, let me see if I understand where we're at. It seems like the downtown area is the commercial area. Everyone agrees on that. The water tank is going to stay. Everyone agrees on that. South of the Square is pretty much reserved for green space. If that's the case, it seems to me that on the east side of Route 21 we have Marotta, we have (inaudible) and we have (inaudible). Those are the only three players on that side of the street. If only those three come onboard and something can be determined as to what somebody might want to do with the middle school, and if we can find out where our residents are going out of the area for either for their food or recreation, then we have the area pretty much taken care of. The architect can then come up with a plan that nails down the majority of that area.

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The west side of Route 21 everyone is going to have to come onboard in stages. Those are the smaller buildings.

Paul Vernon responded, to address your issue of the cost to the property owners, there are three or four on the east side and seven or eight on the west side. We're talking tops less than 20 property owners. In the neighborhood that I live in a private developer was recently able to assemble 160 individual houses to (inaudible). So this is a nice number of individual property owners. It's not huge, and that's good. The lower the number of property owners the better.

From the Urban Design perspective, I think that with the information we have today, we can start to put something together and throw some ideas down and get your reaction to that.

Mayor Ramos added, especially with the City being one of the largest property owners. The City, both on the east side and the west side, is a very substantial property owner. Consequently, things can have a domino effect.

Vice Mayor Kurtz stated, before we debate the merits of adding a new consultant, why don't we at the next meeting debate these issues – the direction, see if we can draw a conclusion. Before we go out for a massive survey, maybe there's a consensus that could be achieved with a variety of these issues. The water tank is pretty simple. We're not moving that water tank for \$11 million. I'd like to participate and debate on these issues on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Eventually Council and the Mayor are going to have to reach a consensus.

Everyone appreciates the Task Force's efforts. They provided a wealth of information. It takes a good bit of time to digest that information to try and understand. By having this group meet and present this information, you've expanded each topic. You've drawn more information on each topic. I'm not sure you were commissioned to draw conclusions. You were commissioned to draw and present the range of information on each topic.

You could have the best plan in the world but if Council and the Mayor don't appreciate or want it, forget it. So I don't think you were ever given the directive that we want you to draw up this plan.

I think you did a great job collecting the data, the information and presenting it in a fashion that gave us a range of options. Now, it's our job to take that and try and develop a consensus and then incorporate some professionals to take it to the next level. I'm not sure we're to that point.

I think there is a healthy debate we can have. I'd like to participate and understand better these issues and then maybe we can take it to somebody.

Dale Lytkowski asked, are you suggesting that Paul not draft up ideas and concepts for the next meeting?

Vice Mayor Kurtz replied, I'm not sure what that is going to achieve.

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Dale Lytkowski responded, he wanted to draft something for us to think about and give us something to work off of.

Vice Mayor Kurtz responded, I think that was before we say (inaudible) and then do something.

Paul Vernon responded, we can do some design options and then every one of these items on the list may end up being debated based on (inaudible), or we can debate them ahead of time for better clarity and then design. . .

Vice Mayor Kurtz responded, the Mayor can spend up to \$7,500 so he can do what he wants. If that's within that framework, go ahead. That's his decision.

Dale Lytkowski responded, I just want to get clarification of what the goals are between now and the. . .

Vice Mayor Kurtz commented, I think what we need to do, and with all due respect to Paul, he's not going to tell us how to saddle a horse. We should know how to do that. Short of that, we can't go anywhere.

Ron White stated, I think we've done pretty much all we can do this evening.

Mayor Ramos stated, the next meeting is set for the 20<sup>th</sup>. I'm going to let Paul just work on some things, nothing etched in stone. I think it's important to bring those things here. We'll go through some of these issues. I agree with Vice Mayor Kurtz. I think we can have a healthy debate about these issues.

Vice Mayor Kurtz added, reach a consensus.

Councilman Crooks stated to Paul Vernon, as part of whatever you're going to start doing is it possible to clarify that timeline? I know that would be helpful to me.

Vice Mayor Kurtz stated, I appreciate my colleague, Councilman Crooks, for creating a framework. In concert with what he said, I would like the bottom corner [downtown redevelopment] as the goal. I think somewhere between we have to have a direction, a path, but we also have to have accountability and consensus. Without accountability and some measurables you're not going to achieve that goal.

I don't want to hire somebody just to hire somebody. I want to have some type of measurables so we keep on track.

There being no further business to discuss, the Joint Council/Planning Commission Work Session was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.