

**APPROVED SUMMARY NOTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
VILLAGE CENTER TASK FORCE MEETING
MONDAY, JUNE 11, 2007**



On Monday, June 11, 2007, in the Multi-Purpose Room of the Northfield Village Hall, the Village Center Task Force convened the following meeting at 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Chairperson Terry Gottlieb, Members John Birkinbine, Todd Berlinghof, Pat Karr, Evan Karnes, Ruth Lucchesi, Bill Vaselopulos, and George Warga

ABSENT: Members Blair Robinson and Robert Lopatin

ALSO PRESENT: Village Manager Stacy Sigman, Community Development Director Anne Kane, Bobbie Moore, as liaison from the Skokie Valley Bike Trail Committee and interested residents

Chairman Gottlieb summarized the events of the last meeting of the Task Force, noting that a quorum was not present, however, those present had determined it was in the best interest to move forward with scheduled interviews of the two selected design firms and that both firms had been invited to return this evening to address issues identified at the last meeting as major obstacles in realizing an inviting and enviable Village Center sought by the community. Both firms had been provided a list of the specific design challenges that must be resolved to facilitate the redevelopment plan.

Charles Cook, principal with Myefski Cook Architects (MCA), walked the Task Force through each of the points raised in the issue sheet, as detailed in their response letter dated June 6, 2007 (attached). Following his presentation, Mr. Cook was joined by his partner, John Myefski, and the discussion turned to parking requirements and distribution. Mr. Cook noted that throughout the district the typical lot configuration has the structure pushed to the back of the property with parking up from. He indicated that while individual retailers may find this an appealing design, that is a short-sighted perspective—and that all are better off as a whole if the overall design encourages pedestrian activity between sites. Strictly adhering to a parking ratio per individual tenant detracts from the sense of community and he cited Glencoe's example of remote employee parking.

Member Karnes inquired whether MCA had contemplated “wholesale” redevelopment of the district, to which Mr. Cook responded that they had not approached the project in that manner, not only since the issue sheet raised site-specific impediments; but also that it further input from the community is required before moving too far along in the design phase. Member Karnes expressed his doubts whether a piecemeal approach can achieve the Village's vision and often encourages mediocrity. Chairman Gottlieb thanked the representatives of MCA, noting that he found the discussion very helpful and believes that a cohesive vision can be created, even if developed incrementally.

The next interview was with Robert Ruggles, of Ruggles Architecture, who again introduced himself and his design firm, based in Lake Bluff. He highlighted several of the similarities common to both Northfield and Lake Bluff, noting the challenge of how a community can retain boutique retailers that may be pushed out by service businesses. Rather than address the design challenges presented in the issue sheet, he believes the appropriate approach is to conduct a detailed assessment/inventory of the existing conditions—from engineering surveys of right-of-ways and utility plans, to use surveys and analysis of market demands. After completion of this critical initial phase, the next step is a detailed financial pro forma. In Lake Bluff, market analysis revealed that office rents on the upper levels off set some of the lower rents charged to the retail tenants of the first floor. After a detailed financial analysis, only then is it appropriate to consider aesthetics and architectural design.

Discussion ensued regarding the impact restaurant tenants have on traffic patterns, noting that oftentimes evening hours are extended at area retailers to capture the audience. In summarizing his firms' approach to Northfield's Vision Plan for the Village Center, it was not clear at what stage would be appropriate for the public forum, as there are many scenarios that could play out. Mr. Ruggles did not believe he could realistically provide a timeline that won't mutate over time, with too many factors still unknown at this stage.

Following the interview sessions, the Task Force was able to discuss their perceptions and take on each of the design firms—noting the clear distinction in each of the companies' approaches to the project. Member Berlinghof indicated it was his understanding that the intent was to complete a massing study of each individual parcel on a lot by lot basis. He would like to combine both their approaches, he believed that MCA seemed more capable of designing what is desired here in Northfield.

Discussion ensued regarding the potential benefits of conducting a design competition, yet the results often vary significantly based on the detailed scope of the parameters provided. It was generally agreed that there are two project approaches: wholesale redevelopment, which may be overly optimistic; or lot by lot which offers a more realistic strategy. While the merits of each was discussed, the general consensus was reached that to make the best of the opportunities available in the Village Center the lot by lot strategy offers the most practical approach. As to which firm to select, the possibility of engaging both firms was briefly discussed, consensus was reached to move forward with Myefski Cook Architects. Specific parameters for the project must be developed to provide the proper guidance and to ensure the end product is consistent with the Task Force's expectations.

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.