

EAST GRAND AVENUE COMMITTEE
January 24, 2001

Attendees: A sign-in sheet was made available at the meeting

Staff & Consultants Present: Jon Wildenberg, Director of Building & Zoning; Tracy Velkover, Village Planner; Kirk Skoog, Associate Planner, Al Maiden, Planning Consultant; and Leeza Golden, Planning Consultant

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m.
2. Introduction

Mr. Richard Welton, Mayor, stated that in 1980, a separate zoning district (C/S-3) was established for the Village Center area. This area consists of older homes, many of which have now been converted to professional offices. The establishment of this zoning district has led to increased landscaping and improved signage. Other enhancements to this area include the development of Viking and Peterson parks and the Des Plaines River trail. The district has also become an institutional area with the establishment of 3 schools, the village hall, the library, a fire station, and the new public works, post office, and police facilities. A similar type of process could be used to improve the East Grand district.

The Comprehensive Plan was updated in 1997. This plan addressed segments of Grand Avenue including East Grand, however, the entire length of Grand Avenue through Gurnee should be addressed, all the way to Route 45.

Mr. Donald Rudny, Trustee, stated that he was a member of the Plan Commission for 16 years. They worked directly on the Comprehensive Plan and made recommendations concerning the East Grand area. Several residents attended a recent Village Board meeting and asked that the Village move faster in improving East Grand.

He suggested a three point plan that could provide for some recommended improvements in time for budget hearings in March or April. The three parts of the plan include, one, the establishment of an appearance commission to review and identify specific improvements in the street and surrounding infrastructure, as well as existing businesses, which will enhance the appearance of the business corridor; two, contact the owners of the vacant grocery building to offer the Village's assistance in pursuing redevelopment of the property and proactively work with U-Haul in guiding them in the redevelopment of the old Handy Andy property; and three, the identification of funding mechanisms such as special public and private grants.

3. History of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Special Development Areas

Mr. Wildenberg summarized the Village's Comprehensive Plan history. The State of Illinois does not mandate that municipalities prepare comprehensive plans. The Village's first plan was in 1976. It was subsequently updated in 1983, 1990, and 1997. The role of the Plan is to serve as the principal policy document to guide the location of future land uses within its planning sphere of influence (the incorporated and unincorporated areas within one and one half miles from Village boundaries) and to act as the basis for resource management decisions of Village officials.

The 1997 update identified four Special Development areas:

- 1) The Regional Opportunity/Community Corridor (Tollway area)
- 2) Grand Avenue east of Great America (single-family residences)
- 3) The Village Center
- 4) The East Grand Gateway

A zoning overlay district (C/B-2A) was established in 1999 to address continued development in the southern section of the Village Center area. These parcels will contain the new post office and the Village's new police station.

Mr. Maiden stated that their firm, Rolf C. Campbell and Associates, has worked on a wide variety of commercial redevelopments ranging in size from downtown Long Grove to downtown Highland Park. The most important aspect of a successful redevelopment is support from the business owners and local residents.

4. Overview of East Grand Avenue/Range of issues for Committee

Ms. Velkover conducted a slide presentation of East Grand Avenue that highlighted areas of concern such as overhead powerlines, lack of landscaping, large pole-mounted signage, cobra head light fixtures, sidewalks too close to the street, insufficient setbacks, and the large number of curb cuts. The Village has secured an estimate from Com Ed of \$500,000 to bury the overhead powerlines. This would improve the visual look of the area and also provide space to install landscaping.

Mr. Rudny asked about the schedule for improvements to Routes 41 and 132. Mr. Wildenberg stated that the reconfiguration of the interchange of these highways is through the funding process, however, the timeframe for construction has not been set. It will probably occur sometime in the next 5 years. The plan is to build a tight diamond interchange, similar to the interchange of Route 41 and Deerpath in Lake Forest.

This summer, the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) will widen and repave Route 132 from the railroad overpass to east of Magnolia Avenue. A center turn lane will be added through this area. Retaining walls will be constructed on both sides of Grand from the railroad overpass to Waveland Street. The Village will submit recommendations to IDOT regarding the appearance of the improvements, such as terracing the walls to allow for landscaping, sidewalk placement, etc.

Gust Petropoulos, property owner, stated that this is good news. He was not aware that improvements would occur this summer.

5. Discussion & Input from Committee Members

Ron Emanuel, representing Ethan Allen, asked how improvements and their costs would be imposed on existing businesses. Mr. Wildenberg stated that the Plan Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals (PC/ZBA) will be holding joint workshops concurrently with the East Grand Committee's meetings. Their goal will be to establish an overlay zoning district for East Grand. It would be helpful if a consensus can be reached about what steps to take in the area. A plan can be implemented over time. The Village may have to stimulate change. There are many successful programs that can be emulated such as facade rebate programs and signage incentives.

Mr. Rudny stated that improvements will require a joint effort, for example, the Village could pay to bury the powerlines while businesses could pay for each of their connections. Mr. Winter asked if estimates have been secured for the cost of businesses to pay for these service connections.

Mr. Wildenberg stated that Com Ed is hesitant to provide these estimates because the conditions vary by site, however, staff will look into this situation.

Tom Olsen, owner of several properties on East Grand, stated that Com Ed performing the work to bury the powerlines may not be advantageous. Subcontractors could probably do the work for less. In some cases, it may be feasible to relocate the connections to the backs of buildings instead of burying them. He asked that if only 70 to 90 percent of the business owners are willing to install landscaping, could a program get started? Mr. Wildenberg stated that it could move forward. Getting a program established could stimulate improvements to other sites.

Steve Park, Zoning Board of Appeals member, stated that the actual physical layout and dimensions of the area need to be known; this will be critical for success. He asked if this information has been compiled. Ms. Velkover stated that staff has started a site by site analysis of the area.

Karen Thorstenson, resident, stated that some improvements could occur right away, such as planter bases in the parkway, the installation of trees to the large area between the parking lot and the sidewalk on the former Atkinson property and the screening of dumpsters. The Village could invest in these improvements. Ms. Velkover stated that we will have to be careful with the parkway; the State will be concerned with any landscape installation in this area. Communication with IDOT regarding improvements will be required. The former Atkinson site is private property; the Village cannot unilaterally make improvements on these properties.

Mr. Welton stated that the Village should offer incentives in the East Grand area. The Village has invested in many improvements to sites west of I-94; it should be willing to help property owners on the east side as well.

Barbara Riedel, resident, stated that there should be improvements not only to the commercial areas, but to the residential areas as well. There are many code violations in her area including junk cars and cars parked on lawns. Her neighborhood needs new streets and streetlights.

Mr. Welton stated that some improvements have been made to this area including new parks and a school. The success of the residential areas is tied to the success of Grand Avenue. Mr. Wildenberg stated that several vehicles have been removed from the area; if there are others, he asked that Ms. Riedel tell him the locations after the meeting and the Code Enforcement Officer will take care of the situation.

Leon Seay, resident, stated that his suggestions for improvements to East Grand would be to install more stoplights to slow traffic, move the sidewalks back farther from the street and install low growth trees such as red maple and mountain ash.

Mr. Welton stated that we should be looking for some quick fixes as well as a long-term program. Some initial successes will generate interest in the area and lead to long-term success. A participant suggested that container plantings can provide instant beautification with minimal maintenance. There are a lot of good ideas in a publication called Landscape Architect Digest.

Lauri Randall, resident, stated that she would like to see a supermarket and general store locate in the vacant grocery building. As it is now, she shops in Waukegan because it is closer than traveling to the west side of Gurnee.

There is concern for slowing traffic; it may force it into the residential areas.

Mr. Sula stated that most East Grand improvements will occur on private property. No one here tonight has disagreed that the area needs some improvements. A budget should be established for the next 3 to 10 years in order to provide the necessary funding. He asked if improvement programs that have been established require that a certain theme be established in the district. Mr. Wildenberg stated that generally most of them are set up that way. Ms. Velkover stated that the recent trend of some of the programs has been to look at each site individually and capitalize on the characteristics of each building.

Several suggestions were made by the group including contacting Waukegan to see if they would be interested in burying the powerlines on their section of East Grand, the creation of an east side business association, and conducting a roundtable discussion where groups of 4 or 5 business people could meet.

Chuck Crowley, resident, stated that short and long term budget ranges should be established for improvements to the East Grand area.

Mr. Wildenberg stated that a survey will be distributed to interested persons so that each can prioritize improvements in the area.

6. Next Meeting

The next East Grand Committee meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, February 28, 2001 at 7:30 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Submitted by,

Kirk Skoog
Associate Planner