Oberlin Planning Commission

69 South Main Street Oberlin, Ohio 44074

To: President and Members of City Council

From: Frank Carlson, Chair
Oberlin Planning Commission

Subject: Comprehensive Plan 5 Year Review

Date: March 8, 2011

Please be advised that the Oberlin Planning Commission has undertaken a Five Year Review of the Comprehensive Plan over the course of the past eighteen (18) months. As City Council is aware, the City's Comprehensive Plan was adopted through the enactment of Ordinance No. 04-76 AC CMS on January 3, 2005. The purpose of the Commission's review was to consider the continued relevance of land use policies contained in the adopted Plan, and to adjust the Plan as necessary to address current community needs. The Commission completed its review of the Plan at its meeting on March 2, 2011 after a thorough review of each chapter of the Plan. The Commission concluded its review by noting that the Comprehensive Plan continues to be relevant and appropriate.

The Commission on March 2nd moved to adopt the attached report and findings concerning the Plan as well as an updated "Action Chart" for the next five year period.

This report is hereby respectfully submitted for your consideration.

Foreword

The City of Oberlin's Comprehensive Plan Update was adopted by City Council through the enactment of Ordinance No. 04-76 AC CMS on January 3, 2005 after a public hearing on the same. The Plan was developed with the input of a Steering Committee comprised of twenty-four (24) members of the Oberlin community. The Steering Committee met almost monthly from October, 2002 to June, 2004 to review and study demographics, economic conditions, utility issues and land use. This Committee's active input and debate helped to shape the Plan.

The Planning Commission subsequently reviewed the draft Plan recommended to it by the Steering Committee. The Commission completed its review of the Plan and adopted it in October, 2004. The Commission forwarded a recommendation to City Council that the Plan Update be adopted.

The Commission has subsequently conducted a 5 Year Review of the Plan at various meetings over the course of the last eighteen (18) months. That review has focused primarily upon land use issues. In addition, the Commission has identified the next steps to be taken in implementing the Plan.

The following summarizes the Commission's principal areas of discussion, and its observations and recommendations concerning the Plan.

Chapter 1. OVERVIEW

The Planning Commission reviewed this chapter, which chapter provides background information on the development of the Plan, a review of past and current plans, and goal setting. The Commission found that the Plan's general community goals remain viable and appropriate related to land use, open space, transportation, infrastructure and development priorities. The Commission also observed that while there have been some changes to land use in the US Route 20/State Route 58 corridors as well as on campus, the Plan's overall approach to land use and policies remains relevant and acceptable.

Chapter 2. BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

The Planning Commission assessed the contents of this chapter of the Plan, and noted that background information on population characteristics and projections remains relevant in the absence of the 2010 Census, that local economic factors continue to apply, that the physical environment has not substantially changed, that open space remains available as described in the Plan, that the transportation-related issues are still relevant, and that utility considerations are for the most part applicable. With respect to the electric utility, the Commission noted that the City's electric power portfolio now contains a higher percentage of renewable power in 2011, and that the Gorsuch Generating Station is no longer in service. Electric supply remains more than adequate to meet the community needs. The City's water plant has undergone major improvements, and the wastewater plant has capacity to accommodate development. The Commission further noted that the City has entered into an agreement with the Lorain County

Chapter 5. IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The Commission reviewed this chapter, and determined that many of the Plan's implementation strategies have been addressed including various new zoning districts, and utility studies. The Plan identified that a wide range of planning and zoning initiatives should be considered. Those planning and zoning initiatives relate to amendments to the Zoning Code including adding provisions to encourage "Conservation Development," regulations for an "Office District" and "Planned Highway Commercial District" in the US Route 20 and State Route 58 corridors, and an "Institutional Zoning District" to address the development needs of the College while protecting surrounding neighborhoods from negative impacts. The Plan also suggested that the Commission review and update Code requirements related to commercial districts to ensure conformity with the Plan, and to consider a Code amendment to allow the annexation of property in a zoning classification other than the "R-1A"/Single-Family Residential District where appropriate. The Commission noted that it has accomplished Zoning Code amendments to create all of the Plan's recommended new zoning districts with the exception of the "Institutional District" despite its past requests to the College to partner in the development of the same. The Commission also noted that it recommended that the Code be amended to accommodate the zoning of property annexed from Pittsfield Township in a zoning classification consistent with the City's Agreement and Plan, and that has also been accomplished. The Commission has also taken efforts to review commercial district regulations for conformity with the Plan but that assessment remains to be completed.

The Plan also identified the need for access management and traffic impact studies in the US Route 20 and State Route 58 corridors. Such requirements have been recommended for adoption by the Commission and are now part of the Zoning Code in both the "C-3"/ Planned Highway Commercial District and "O"/Office District classifications.

The need for continuous planning efforts by the City as suggested by the Plan has been undertaken by the Commission. The City has also extended efforts to the neighboring Townships related to planning and cooperative projects as suggested by the Plan.

The Commission also notes that the issue of recreation/open space impact fees, updated storm water management, and utility studies have been undertaken by the Public Works Department and are ongoing.

The Commission further observed that "special program" areas identified in the Plan related to infill development, conversion of rental properties to owner-occupied housing, and encouraging open space preservation for the "Great South Woods," etc. remains as viable policies. The Plan's policies related to "economic development tasks" such as strengthening the downtown area as the heart of the community, promoting downtown infill and expansion, and industrial retention/expansion/attraction efforts also continue to be relevant public policy.

The Commission concluded that much of the overall policy language in this chapter remains applicable. The Commission does, however, note that the future "Action Chart" which outlines planning, utility, special projects and economic development actions should be replaced with the attached updated chart for the next five (5) year period.

Rural Water Authority regarding the provision of water service in the US Route 20/State Route 58 corridors.

Chapter 3. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

The Commission reviewed the Plan's "General Policies" related to land use, infill development, sustainability, transportation, etc. and found them to be relevant. The Commission also considered the Plan's more detailed policies related to residential, commercial, industrial, office, parks and open space, and also found them to be applicable to the community's present needs. The Commission also determined that the "Land Use Plan," as amended in 2006 to reflect the City's agreement with Pittsfield Township, continues to be relevant and acceptable.

The Commission also focused its discussion on the location of the "Office District" found in the northeast quadrant of US Route 20 and State Route 58. The Commission agreed that these designations should continue at this time, but that the Commission review land use designations in that area in the future as development occurs.

The Commission reviewed the transportation element of this chapter, and noted that the future street pattern and connectivity policies remain applicable.

Lastly, the Commission noted that new zoning district classifications have been developed related to "CDD"/Conservation Development, "O"/Office and "C-3"/Planned Highway Commercial Districts as called for in the Plan.

Chapter 4. SPECIAL AREAS

The Commission noted that this chapter of the Plan identifies specific geographic areas in the community that require either special consideration or more detailed concept planning and policy development. Those areas include Downtown, the Gasholder area, the US Route 20 and State Route 58 corridors, the Southeast Neighborhood, the College campus, and the surrounding townships.

The Commission noted that it had adopted a "Downtown Revitalization and Development Plan" in 2010. That more detailed Plan provides additional policy direction for the downtown district. The Commission noted the importance of parking in the downtown district and that it requires ongoing consideration. The Commission also was of the opinion that the "mixed use area" south of downtown, and the "Gasholder Commercial Area" continue to require attention although present zoning and parking regulations are considered to be appropriate and generally consistent with the Plan. The "South Corridor" policies and the more detailed "District Plan" for this area were also considered to be appropriate. The proposed future collector street system was also found to be desirable to accommodate future development, and should remain in the Plan. The Commission also observed that Oberlin College has again been asked to work with the Commission to develop an "Institutional District" zoning classification which district is identified as being desirable in the Plan.

Conclusion

The Planning Commission has conducted a thorough review of the Comprehensive Plan with particular emphasis on land use policies and zoning implementation strategies. The Commission, as noted above, observes that a large number of planning and zoning initiatives have been undertaken and completed in the five (5) year period since the Plan was adopted by City Council. Those initiatives include the creation of new zoning districts including "CDD"/Conservation District, "O"/Office District and "C-3"/Planned Highway Commercial District. The Zoning Code has also been amended to permit the annexation of property from Pittsfield Township in a zoning classification consistent with the City's Agreement with that township and Plan. While draft "Institutional District" zoning regulations have been prepared, the Commission has not concluded the review of the same pending input from Oberlin College. Other planning and policy studies in this review period have included an updated Downtown Revitalization and Development Plan, a review of commercial zoning districts and urban design standards, a review of the Sign Code, bed and breakfast inn regulations, downtown sidewalk café and business activity regulations, outdoor patio dining facility regulations, etc.

The Commission's 5 Year Review of the Plan indicates that there needs to be an ongoing effort to evaluate zoning regulations during the next five (5) year planning period. Those efforts include, among others, updating the "PD"/Planned Development District regulations, engaging the College in discussions concerning an "I"/Institutional District zoning, updating the Zoning Map and completing the review and recommending amendments to the Sign Code. The Commission also intends to review the "Office" district designation and zoning standards in the northeast quadrant of US Route 20 and State Route 58, the regulations appropriate for the "mixed use" study area along South Main Street between the "downtown district" and Station Square, the building setback regulations in the "Gasholder Commercial Area," and urban design guidelines for commercial areas.

The Commission further notes that the proposed "Green Arts District"/"Oberlin Project" is a significant undertaking that will have an impact on the City's planning and zoning policies. The Commission anticipates that much of its time in the next five (5) year planning period will be devoted to analyzing and reviewing those concepts.

In conclusion, the Commission is of the opinion that the City's Comprehensive Plan continues to be largely relevant and appropriate. The Commission intends to continue to evaluate planning conditions and zoning regulations as identified in the Plan in an effort to ensure that the City's planning and zoning documents remain applicable and reflective of community needs.

ACTION CHART 2010-2015
City of Oberlin Plan Review