

A work session of the Council of the City of Blue Ash, Ohio, was held on August 1, 2005. Mayor Rick Bryan called the meeting to order in Council Chambers at 7:00 PM.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Mayor Bryan led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Rick Bryan, Vice Mayor Robert Buckman, Councilman Lee Czerwonka, Councilman Henry Stacey, Councilwoman Stephanie Stoller, Councilman James Sumner, and Councilman Mark Weber

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Marvin Thompson, Solicitor Mark Vander Laan, Clerk of Council Jamie Eifert, Deputy Clerk of Council Sue Bennett, Assistant City Manager David Waltz, Treasurer/Administrative Services Director James Pfeffer, Parks & Recreation Director Chuck Funk, Service Director Dennis Albrinck, Economic Development Director Judy Clark, Assistant Community Development Director Dan Johnson, and interested citizens

WORK SESSION - PRELIMINARY REPORT FROM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/BRANDING CONSULTANT

Economic Development Director Judy Clark introduced Mr. Marty Blubaugh of TrueNorth Strategies. Ms. Clark gave a brief explanation of Mr. Blubaugh's background, which includes 20+ years of experience with various public organizations (including cities, states, and other municipalities), as well as extensive experience in the private sector. Mr. Blubaugh was retained by the City to assist with economic development efforts as well as to provide guidance to Blue Ash in better differentiating or positioning itself among competing communities (especially for investment dollars).

Mr. Blubaugh expressed his appreciation for this opportunity to address and update Council. He gave an approximate 20-minute presentation regarding an update of his efforts related to economic development strategy and branding. Some highlights and comments from Mr. Blubaugh are summarized below:

- ?? His work strategy does not involve coming in to find out what's "wrong." He stresses a positive approach, especially to a positive and very functional community such as Blue Ash.
- ?? He stressed that just like businesses need to be aware of trends and what the competition is up to, cities do as well, especially as it relates to economic development. He explained that there is always a "deal flow" going through the business relocation pipeline, and it is important that Blue Ash gets its fair share of prospects.
- ?? He commented that it is clear that Blue Ash has an outstanding reputation. The key is to build on that to make sure that the momentum continues and that Blue Ash stays competitive.
- ?? He has been talking with many people (both internally and externally) to determine how decision makers perceive Blue Ash (Mr. Blubaugh calls this "calibration"). A key question is "do perceptions measure up to the facts?".
- ?? Mr. Blubaugh will have his final written recommendations in a report to the City within 60 days.
- ?? Mr. Blubaugh views Blue Ash's concept of balanced growth as a winning edge. Maintaining balance within the business community is again a part of a winning formula.
- ?? Mr. Blubaugh does see untapped opportunity for Blue Ash and he wants to be able

to define that clearly. His recommendations will include suggested direction and action steps to assure Blue Ash remains competitive and distinctive.

- ?? He described the Blue Ash government as a “well-oiled machine,” functioning very well, which just needs a little “tweaking” to assure it remains competitive in the economic development arena. His written report will include his recommendations on how and what to “tweak.”

In addressing a comment from Assistant City Manager David Waltz, Mr. Blubaugh explained that a mid July visit included a roundtable discussion with representatives throughout the community, including citizens, developers, business representatives, etc. Though much more was discussed, one suggestion from the business community was the need for more support type businesses (especially those which fostered convenience for their business and its employees). This group also favored the concept of mixed-use development. They also expressed need for more business-to-business type services.

In addressing a question from Mayor Bryan, Mr. Blubaugh commented that he has not spoken to a business that decided not to choose Blue Ash; however, he did speak with a Blue Ash business that has scaled down. He also has spent considerable time in discussions with site search executives, including those who had clients who had not chosen to locate in Blue Ash.

Mr. Blubaugh explained that economic development is more than just jobs. It leads to quality of life. It is a process that never stops and a process that requires a consistent approach to assure continued investment dollars come to and stay in a community. In looking at what type of businesses you want in Blue Ash, improving quality of life should be a major decision factor.

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, Mr. Blubaugh explained that examples of other business support types could include a conference center. The concept of a conference center did come up during the roundtable discussion and it appears a concept of interest. Though a conference center would not be enough to sustain a community, it could be considered a “feather in its cap.” Other business support service examples include event planning, limousine services, etc.

RETAIL MIX DISCUSSION

Mayor Bryan reviewed comments included within a previously distributed “statement on future retail development” written by him. Those points, in the order discussed by Council, are summarized below:

- ?? High quality **Retail** development/redevelopment will be encouraged in areas currently zoned for retail (e.g. D-1 district, Plainfield - Hunt Road Commercial area). The Plainfield-Hunt Road commercial area includes basically all four corners of Plainfield/Hunt, including the Crossgate Lane area of Hunt.
- ?? Big box retail will be discouraged beyond existing space (K Mart, Kroger) and projects under development (Target).
- ?? Maintaining a stock of high quality, diverse housing is a key priority.
- ?? Commercial/Industrial Zone
 - a. In large part, Blue Ash’s current success and financial strength traces to commitment to and the execution of Comprehensive Plans which encourage Commercial – Office development.
 - b. Going forward, we remain committed to Commercial – Office development and redevelopment of commercial and industrial zoned property.

- c. Nationally, the Commercial – Office development model has evolved to include supporting retail (e.g. restaurants, deli's, dry cleaners, etc.). Blue Ash Council recognizes the value of supporting retail as a component of future Commercial - Office development/redevelopment. Large-scale development/redevelopment projects could include 15-20% retail development for the convenience of workers and residents.
- d. Residential may be a component of Commercial – Office development/redevelopment. When incorporated, residential and retail may comprise 35-40% of the project.

Councilman Sumner stressed the need to adhere to the Comprehensive Plan. He commented that in essence, the Comp Plan says what is in Mayor Bryan's statement. The City must continue to align its actions to what is stated in the Comp Plan.

City Manager Thompson agreed that planning is, and always has been, paramount to Blue Ash's success. However, that planning process must remain flexible as well. A major current trend is mixed use, and was not apparent during the last Comp Plan update (late 2002/early 2003). Blue Ash has large tracts that could benefit from this mixed-use approach, including the Airport, Downtown, and the Hines and warehouse sites north and south of Osborne Boulevard. He suggested that the City may need to look at a new zoning concept for these large tracts to integrate the potential of a mixed-use development. In considering such developments (which could include additional residences), the revenue produced by the commercial space should be equal to what it would have been otherwise allowed by current zoning. The City must continue to be logical, fair, and consistent. Actions such as "spot zoning" and being overly restrictive, would be troublesome.

Councilman Sumner commented that pure retail gets away from the business-to-business support services needed.

Councilman Stacey agreed that the Master Plan must remain dynamic and flexible. It is his opinion that the previously discussed potential Target development, as well as the Paradiso on the Square residential development (Cooper Road/Cooper Lane) approved by Council earlier this year, are appropriate examples of flexibility which would benefit Blue Ash.

Assistant City Manager David Waltz commented that a tool that the Administration is currently investigating is the possibility of a PUD overlay (for larger tracts of land such as Downtown, the Airport, and the Osborne Boulevard areas). Such an overlay for potential mixed-use developments could involve granting concept approval to a developer (such concept which might define certain percentages of types of development within that mixed use); however, final details would come and evolve in the future. The overlay would permit concept plan approval. Mr. Thompson added that such a zone could be treated similarly to the downtown district where a multi-facet committee, such as the Downtown Design Review Committee, would review every building as a part of that plan and would make recommendations to the Board of Sites. This would guarantee development consistent with the intent of Council. This process would allow approval of a concept plan, with future review to make it stronger and more closely defined. Mr. Thompson commented that the City currently is working with a major developer towards mixed-use type development that would benefit Blue Ash; however, current zoning would not consider the type of mixed-use development being proposed. This type of PUD overlay could allow quality projects, while still maintaining the integrity of the Comp Plan.

In addressing a question from Councilwoman Stoller, Mr. Thompson commented that it is his opinion that nothing will happen in the near future on the Airport property. Mr. Thompson explained that even though the FAA would like for the Blue Ash Airport to remain an airport, the FAA lost the ability to control what happens when the conditions of the grant monies expired in 2003.

Councilman Weber commented that the City needs to consider various types of retail that would keep residents and the business community satisfied. He agreed that mixed-use type development is something we should consider and suggested that an element to these types of developments may be drawing business away from Blue Ash and to areas such as Mason and Rookwood.

Vice Mayor Buckman agreed that a mixed-use development on the Hines and abutting properties would be a good use and that he would not object to zoning changes to accommodate such a development.

MISCELLANEOUS DISCUSSION

In discussing future work session topics, it was agreed that the September 22nd meeting would be a work session to discuss concept plans for a potential Rec Center expansion, potential Golf Course Clubhouse expansion, and an update of the potential Performing Arts Center project. An October work session would include a follow-up from the downtown planning consultant (Menelaos Triantafillou) and the economic development/branding consultant (Marty Blubaugh).

ADJOURNMENT

All items on the agenda having been acted upon, Councilman Sumner moved, Councilman Weber seconded to adjourn the meeting. A voice vote was taken. All members voted yes. The Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:16 PM.

Rick Bryan, Mayor

Jamie K. Eifert, Clerk of Council

MINUTES WRITTEN BY:

Susan K. Bennett, Deputy Clerk of Council