



Economic Development Plan
for
Harrison West

Prepared by:

*Planning Division
Department of Development
City of Columbus*

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Introduction

Section 5709.40 of the Ohio Revised Code authorizes the legislative authority of a municipal corporation to create, by ordinance, an incentive district and declare improvements within that district to be of public purpose. Improvements are defined as increases in assessed values of properties that occur after adoption of the ordinance that created the district.

To be eligible for establishment, an incentive district must be enclosed by a continuous boundary, contain no more than three hundred acres, and have one or more distress characteristics defined by the Code. Distress characteristics include (but are not limited to) blighted property, high unemployment rates, and above-average poverty rates. Distress characteristics may also be defined as inadequate public infrastructure, as evidenced by a written economic development plan. The municipal corporation's engineer must certify that the existing infrastructure within the district is inadequate to meet future development needs (see page 8) and the plan must be adopted by the corresponding legislative authority.

This particular economic development plan is intended to facilitate the creation of an incentive district for the Harrison West neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. The incremental revenue generated within the district will provide funds for parkland acquisition, park development, landscaping and lighting improvements, neighborhood gateway entrance features, and the use of brick at major street intersections.

Planning Area

Generally known as the Harrison West neighborhood, the planning area is located northwest of downtown Columbus, east of the Olentangy River, and west of Victorian Village. It consists of 773 parcels containing 200+ acres of land. Though the

perimeter of the planning area is irregular, the general boundaries include Fifth Avenue to the north, Harrison Avenue and Neil Avenue to the east, Goodale Boulevard to the south, and the Olentangy River to the west.

North of First Avenue, the neighborhood is predominantly residential in character. Most of the lots have been developed with single-family dwellings and duplexes. Like Victorian Village to the east and other near-downtown neighborhoods, this portion of Harrison West is also “pedestrian scale” - the lots are narrow, buildings face the streets, and sidewalks are an integral part of the circulation system. Many of the homes were built in the early 1900's, although newer dwellings have replaced some of the original structures. Other land uses include various forms of retail commercial development along Third Avenue, the Battelle research facility south of Fifth Avenue, and some apartment residential uses along Michigan Avenue. The multi-family development has provided residents with alternative housing options, but it has also served to increase the neighborhood's density (and thus contributed to the need for additional public improvements). The small neighborhood park, located at the intersection of Fourth and Oregon, is actively used and widely regarded as one of the neighborhood's most significant assets.

South of First Avenue, Harrison West contains a mix of industrial, commercial, and apartment-residential uses. The historical character evident in other portions of the neighborhood still exists to some extent, but redevelopment efforts have replaced most of the homes with manufacturing facilities, industrial structures, and higher-density forms of housing. The easternmost portion of this area, bounded by Buttles Avenue to the north and Neil Avenue to the east, contains a retail shopping center.

Public Parkland Needs

As documented in the Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan, the parkland that exists within the Harrison West neighborhood is insufficient to meet the recreational needs and desires of area residents. At present, the only park that is accessible to most residents is located at the intersection of Fourth and Oregon (mentioned previously). Used primarily as a playground for children, it contains less than an acre of land. The

Olentangy River corridor borders the neighborhood to the west, but it is inaccessible and the banks are contaminated with fuel oil, sulfuric acid, arsenic, asbestos, and other environmental toxins (existing site conditions have been documented in the Clean Ohio Revitalization Funds application).

Clearly, additional parkland and park amenities are needed to provide neighborhood residents with adequate recreational opportunities. In fact, this need was first recognized several years ago during the development of the Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan. In 1996, a series of open public forums were conducted to assess public interest in greenspace planning along the Olentangy River. Harrison West residents participated in these forums and expressed a desire for more open space:

“In conversations and written comments, the desire for better connections between the river and the Victorian Village and Harrison West neighborhoods was clearly expressed. The need for more open space in these neighborhoods was also a frequent comment. Although industry historically has been located in this neighborhood, people thought that the existing industrial uses were entirely inappropriate along the riverfront...”

- Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan, p. 44

Proposed Parkland Dedication

The Wagenbrenner Company and Royal Tallow Holdings, Inc. are proposing to dedicate 4.4 acres of land for public park purposes in conjunction with a redevelopment initiative for the former A.C. Humko industrial site (refer to Attachment C). The proposed park, contiguous to the Olentangy River and south of Second Avenue, would be situated near the geographic center of the Harrison West neighborhood. The proposed location is ideal from a neighborhood perspective; it is also aligned with the greater vision for a continuous greenway corridor along the Olentangy River. In fact, the Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan recommended that the proposed site be converted to parkland as part of the “Harrison West Reach”:

“The east bank of the Harrison West Reach will become the key link that brings downtown into a closer relationship with the University. The new parklands on the east bank will add significantly to the open space resources enjoyed by the residents in the nearby neighborhoods.”

- Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan, p. 45

To render the proposed park site suitable for use, remediation will be necessary to remove the environmental toxins and soil contaminants. Significant improvements and/or additions to public infrastructure will also be necessary to provide the park with sufficient access to public utilities and thoroughfares. Connections to water, telephone, electric, and/or natural gas lines must be made, sidewalks along adjacent public streets may be extended into the site, and lighting fixtures must be installed. Other improvements may include shelters, seating, a paved trail, bike racks, signage, and landscaping.

The land and associated amenities would be owned and operated by the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department.

Other Infrastructure Needs

As Harrison West continues to attract redevelopment, other forms of public infrastructure will be necessary to ensure that the neighborhood retains its character and continues to thrive. The redevelopment of the A.C. Humko site alone will add more than 300 residential units to the neighborhood’s housing stock – and many of those units will be occupied by more than one person. The corresponding growth in population, though desirable, will likely add congestion to local streets and increase the demand for city services. New street lighting, neighborhood entrance features, landscaping, and street intersection improvements have already been proposed to address future development needs, but other improvements may also be required. The establishment of an incentive district will enable the city of Columbus to provide the necessary funding for this infrastructure and effectively plan for the impacts of growth.

Economic Impact

The value created by urban parks is well documented. Several studies have shown that the introduction of parkland not only serves to attract new development, but also positively influences property values. In a recent issue paper prepared by Economics Research Associates (“Real Estate Impacts of Urban Parks”), the author cites several studies that explored the impact of parks and greenspace upon urban real estate. Proximity to parkland affected the selling prices of homes as much as seven percent and rental units with a view of parkland generated rent premiums of 10 to 40 percent. A study in Denver corroborated these conclusions, finding that almost half of all residents surveyed would pay more to live near a greenway or park. The increases in property values not only benefit property owners, they generate additional revenue (property taxes) for cities. In many instances, the increased revenue exceeds the expenses associated with the park and thus can be used to fund other city services.

Parkland can provide other benefits as well. In an article published by The Trust for Public Land (“Benefits of Urban Open Space”), the authors note that investments in urban greenspace help to mitigate air and water pollution, reduce juvenile crime, attract and retain local businesses, and create a sense of place. Parks foster community pride as well; they provide residents with opportunities to connect with each other and engage in community activities.

Supporting Policies

The Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan supports the proposed dedication of parkland. The plan notes that Harrison West is underserved with public open space and that a connection to the Olentangy River should be established. The plan also suggests that the creation of parkland in Harrison West is necessary to realize a larger vision, articulated in the plan’s introduction:

“The continuous parklands and water activities on the Olentangy and Scioto River corridors will create a memorable place that is a defining element of the city of

Columbus. Along the nine-mile riverfront, residents and visitors will be able to understand the city and its landscape through an exploration of special environmental areas, recreational activities, and cultural experiences... As a continuous corridor, the river will link together residential neighborhoods, institutional campuses, and the civic heart of downtown.”

- Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan, p. 1

The Columbus Comprehensive Plan states:

“Infrastructure is necessary whenever development and redevelopment occur. When adequate public infrastructure investments are planned and programmed to accompany development activities of the private sector, ‘growing pains’ can be minimized. It is one of the principal aims of this Plan to ensure that the city of Columbus coordinate and plan infrastructure investments, as well as investments in other municipal functions and services, to meet the needs of this growing community and enhance the quality of life for all.”

- Columbus Comprehensive Plan, p. 42

Similarly, the Principles of Progress contained in the Columbus Covenant 2000 recognize that provisions for adequate infrastructure are essential for economic growth and job creation. The Covenant also notes that the efficient delivery of services contributes to quality of life and helps to promote “strong, distinct and vibrant neighborhoods”.

Public Process

In conjunction with its review of the redevelopment plans for the A.C. Humko site, the Harrison West Society has been actively involved in the planning process for the future parkland dedication. Several public meetings have already been conducted and the Society continues to keep local residents informed of the latest news through distribution of its monthly newsletter. The Society has enthusiastically supported the

proposal as it has evolved and continues to remain engaged in dialogue with property owners and city staff. In November of 2003, the Society voted to support the creation of an incentive district as a means of funding the proposed public improvements (refer to Attachments D and E). The Society also endorsed the application for a \$3 million grant from the Clean Ohio Fund, to help facilitate remediation and clean-up on the site of the future park.

In the coming months, as plans for the park are finalized, residents and other interested parties may have additional opportunities to review the proposal. If a rezoning or council variance application is ultimately filed, it will be discussed in public meetings hosted by the Harrison West Society, the Development Commission, and Columbus City Council. Such meetings are always open to the public and adjoining property owners would be notified of these hearings by mail.

Public processes were also conducted during the development and adoption of the two supporting plans previously mentioned (The Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan and the Columbus Comprehensive Plan). Both plans incorporated committee meetings and a series of public forums to obtain input and feedback from city residents.

Conclusion

The proposed parkland dedication and investments in public infrastructure will benefit the Harrison West neighborhood in many ways. They will address existing deficiencies, enhance the physical landscape, enrich community life, and serve to align Harrison West with a greater vision for the city of Columbus. In the years ahead, the improvements will also enable the neighborhood to accommodate growth and redevelopment. The creation of an incentive district will help the city of Columbus to provide funding for public infrastructure and thus accommodate the future growth, while still providing for the safe and efficient delivery of public goods and services.

Certification

As evidenced by the information contained in this economic development plan, I hereby certify that the public infrastructure serving Harrison West is inadequate to meet the future development needs of the district.

Randall Bowman, Assistant City Engineer

Date

Attachments

Attachment A: Planning Area

Attachment B: Zoning Map

Attachment C: Map of Future Parkland

Attachment D: Letter from the Harrison West Society

Attachment E: Letter from the Harrison West Society