

Thomas Harrigan

From: Lisa Becker <lisabeckeremail@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2019 9:08 PM
To: Thomas Harrigan
Subject: Considerations for the Downtown Master Plan

Dear Trustees,

My name is Lisa Becker. I live at 1155 Church Street. I attended the meeting of the Committee of the Whole on May 7th. And since there wasn't time allotted in the meeting for public commentary, I would like to take this opportunity to provide some feedback regarding the Downtown Master Plan.

First of all, I would like to thank Neil Palmer for his memo dated May 6th 2019, in which he adeptly summarized the concerns and comments that residents have expressed regarding the Downtown Master Plan.

In his memo, President Palmer noted that, first: **Residents want more discussion /listening sessions.** Certainly, among the neighbors I've spoken with about the Downtown Master Plan, very few have any familiarity with it. We need a lot more communication with our village residents about zoning changes that would be affected by the proposed plan. At the Committee of the Whole meeting, it was discussed that the next Public Open House would take place during the 1st or 2nd week of June, with a final development plan to be voted on by the board in July. If that is still the proposed timeline, I would argue that it fails to address a primary concern of residents to allow for more time for discussion and input. This should not be a rushed process. There should be adequate time to engage all of our citizens in this planning process which will have enduring consequences for our village once implemented.

And just as President Palmer noted in his summary, I also strongly believe that 3 stories should be the maximum height allowable for new construction. I think Trustee Haas made an excellent contribution to the discussion when he proposed at the meeting on the 7th a limit of 2 stories with the possibility of allowing for 3 stories as a bonus. Since this is an important matter of debate which will dramatically impact the character of our village, and since the board of trustees is not in agreement on this issue, I would advocate seeking more public input specifically regarding maximum height allowances for new developments.

President Palmer also noted that **Residents are concerned about the potential amount of future multifamily housing a plan identifies.** The latest count of additional dwellings in the updated development plan posted along with tonight's meeting agenda, proposes 243 new housing units, representing a 10% increase from our current number of households of 2,441. But this revised number of proposed units does not take into account the likely addition of many more dwelling units on the 16.4 acres of land that will be developed when the School Sisters of Notre Dame property is sold, nor the potential redevelopment of the castle building as a residential property. No development plan should propose adding dwelling units to the downtown area without accounting for the impact of additional dwelling units on the Schools Sisters property.

I would add to President Palmer's observation about residents' concern over the *amount* of multifamily housing, that residents are also concerned about whether those properties will be owner-occupied or rental units.

Research on the social benefits of homeownership confirms that homeowners tend to be more involved in their communities than renters. Because owners tend to stay in their homes longer than renters, they add a degree of stability to their neighborhoods. One recent study looking at the civic engagement of homeowners posed the question of whether people volunteer more if they have a stake in the community by owning a home. The study found that simply owning a home increases the number of hours volunteered. In addition to positively affecting civic engagement, homeownership has been shown to impact educational achievement, crime, and property maintenance and improvement. Elm Grove currently has an owner-occupied housing rate of 95%. In order to preserve the essence of our community, we ought to encourage development projects that favor owner-occupied housing.

In a recent ranking of communities based on crime, public schools, cost of living, job opportunities and local amenities, Elm Grove was listed as #1 for 2019's Best Places to live in Wisconsin. That should underscore what's at stake here. This community is beloved by its residents for being safe, charming, walkable, and a great place to raise kids. Our public schools are top-notch. Our village park is beautiful - with recreational amenities that contribute to an enhanced quality of life. But what makes this community truly unique is the amount of civic involvement and volunteerism on the part of our residents. We have the smallest school in the Elm Brook School District, but Tonawanda Elementary is the mightiest in terms of parent involvement, PTO fundraising capacity, and community outreach. Ten years ago, when flawed forecasting predicted a population decrease in our schools, Elm Grove citizens passionately rallied to keep Tonawanda open, agreeing to raise \$25,000 a year toward capital improvements to the school over a five-year period. Trustee Irwin was a part of that successful effort to keep Tonawanda open. Trustee Irwin, along with other dedicated neighborhood volunteers, was also instrumental in helping the Elm Grove Community Foundation raise \$100,000 to help pay for the new splash pad. The impact of the financial and social contributions of volunteers in this community cannot be overstated. And in the 8 years that I've lived in this community, I have met hundreds of amazing neighbors, and all of them, including you, our volunteer Board of Trustees, have given countless hours of time and talent to make this community what it is: the #1 Place to Live.

And so I urge you to not rush the planning process. Please allow adequate time for input and improved communication with our residents so we can build a consensus around shaping the future of our amazing community.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lisa Becker
1155 Church St.