Special Joint Commission Meeting Minutes
Planning Commission, Human Relations Commission and Sustainability Commission

Monday, November 13 2017 - 6:30 PM
Riverside Arts Center, 76 N Huron St
Ypsilanti, MI 49197

I. **Call to Order**: 6:33 pm

II. Roll Call

A. Planning Commission

1. Present: Heidi Jugenitz, Liz Dahl MacGregor, Anthony Bedogne, Toi Dennis, Matt Dunwoodie, Chris Madigan, Jared Talaga

2. Absent: Phil Hollifield, Cheryl Zuellig

B. Human Relations Commission

1. Present: Sam Jones Darling, Amber Fellows, Kyle Hunter, Ka'Ron Gaines (arrived at 6:44), Theresa Saunders (arrived at 6:44), John Shuler (arrived at 6:58
2. Absent: Willow Carter, Tanasia Morton

C. Sustainability Commission

1. Present: Keith Michalowski, Thomas Kovacs, Thomas McKee, Brett Zeuner
2. Absent: Julia Bayha, Emily Drennen, Nancy Heine, Natalie Sampson, Leah Vanlandingham

D. Staff

1. Bonnie Wessler, City Planner
2. Joe Meyers, Community Development Manager
3. Seth Torkelson-Regan, Commission Secretary

III. Approval of Minutes - none

IV. Audience Participation

A. Ray, Ypsilanti: Thanked commissions for having this meeting. Described how when she first moved to Ypsilanti, a $500/month for a one bedroom was easy to find, and now no longer is. Stated that Portland, OR is no longer enforcing an ordinance that restricts people from parking an RV or tiny house on private property, and also that Fresno recently passed a tiny house rule that authorized tiny homes on wheels as a permanent second dwelling for the homeowner or a rental. [Read from Fresno paper.] Strongly urged Ypsilanti to move in a similar direction as Portland and Fresno. Urges commissions to do something dramatic in order that residents may secure housing.

B. Nathaniel Romero, Ypsilanti: Thanked commissions for this joint meeting. Referenced a theme he has heard from Commissioner Zeuner--"civic helplessness," as in *this is just the way it is*. Stated that now we have an opportunity to push back against that helplessness. Stated that as a municipality Ypsi is restricted by state and federal laws, but it also has creative opportunities.

Encouraged commissioners to think about ways to *not* throw our hands up, so we can defeat this habit of learned helplessness.

V. Public Hearing Items - none

VI. Old Business - none

VII. New Business

A. Creation of a citizen committee under the Planning Commission to review and update the Master Plan with a focus on affordability and accessibility

Discussion:

Jugenitz: Stated that the role of the PC is to review zoning and land use matters. Part of mandate is to review the master plan (MP). MP is a vision for the physical aspects of city. Last MP was done in 2013, called “Shape Ypsi.” MP is designed to be participatory for people in different neighborhoods. Document of 2013 MP is available online. This is the first document of reference for the Planning Commission (PC). Two of the guiding values in MP are 1) diversity is our strength, and 2) everyone, no matter age or income, can find a home in Ypsi. These have been most important in the past years as issues of affordability and physical accessibility have become more prominent. I have proposed the formation of a Citizen Committee that would have input on the MP particularly regarding these two values. This proposal was well received by commissioners and the public at the meeting at which it was announced. There was also a proposal for a meeting between these three commissions, which is why we’re here today.

Summarized input points already received since October: 1) Housing is a basic need and human right; 2) Rents in Ypsi have risen significantly since 2011; 3) The population of Ypsi is predominantly young and non-family; 4) MI state law does not strongly protect renters; 5) We’ve heard about the stresses of chronic displacement; 6) Concerns about International Village on low-income renters; 7) Increase of small-scale landlords imposing income minimums on renters; 8) Are we prioritizing interests of current or future residents? 9) Do we have enough senior housing available? 10) People want a strategy with guts and concrete standards and that addresses all levels of affordability; 11) Want to address this issue at the county and state levels; 12) Multiple types of affordable housing; 13) Need robust data/fact finding regarding housing in city over past four years; 14) Strong community engagement efforts; 15) Requiring accessibility for new models; 16) Who should be involved in planning meetings regarding affordability and accessibility; 17) Overnight parking for tiny homes and RV; and 18) Micro apartments.

Bedogne: Stated that the last master plan process was staff driven. Asked where are we at with the staff’s commitment to this, and why are we looking for a citizen driven approach.

Jugenitz: Stated that this is not an exclusion of staff. As commission, we can establish a citizen committee, which allows us to include non-planning commission members in our work. It was within our plan to do MP update, so this is an opportunity to do so with more representation and participation from the community.

Bedogne: Asked if the staff has a reaction and will be a partner.

Jugenitz: Stated that she sees this as an involved process with the staff. This will be a long process--minimum 9 months. Staff will be needed along the way in this process.

Saunders: Asked if it is correct that the committee but not staff that will create the constructs for this process.

Jugenitz: States that she is not sure if staff will *have* to do work. Most work will fall to committee members.

Kovacs: Asked how this is different from our own commissions.

Jugenitz: Explained that this is like a sub-committee *plus*. The citizen committee includes a subset of a planning commission AND citizens from other domains, including the other commissions.

Kovacs: Asked how this is different from the work done in our own commissions. Expressed concern about too many commissions.

Jugenitz: Explained that the Planning Commission is the only one that can update the MP. This will be focusing on issues of affordability and accessibility for the MP.

Zeuner: Asked if citizens will have voting power.

Jugenitz: Responded no--they would be more of an advisory group. The citizens committee's responsibility would be to do a deep dive into the issues of housing in Ypsi and then propose ideas for improving affordability and accessibility in Ypsi.

Zeuner: Asked if citizens on that committee would have equal determination on the issues.

Jugenitz: Responded that they would have equal voice.

MacGregor: Added that the same levels of hierarchy, though, would have to be followed regarding proposing and creating laws.

Bedogne: Asked when will the MP itself be updated.

Wessler: Responded that staff does not initiate update to MP--that is the work of commission. What PC wants to change is up to PC. A review is mandated every five years by State law, but does not require an update.

Bedogne: States that he feels like we should do more of a comprehensive look at the MP, including increasing business tax base and transportation.

Jugenitz: Responded that this is a good point, but she is keen to not dilute the focus on affordability and accessibility. She'd like to see how an affordability and accessibility centered effort would pair with other issues.

Bonnie: Added that in the abstract, MP can updated as frequently as the commissions want. It must be reviewed every five years. Concretely, it is difficult to update more than once per year because of the amount of public notices and community input that needs to take place.

MacGregor: States that she feels like the issues Bedogne brings up are ones the commission has tools to deal with and affordability and accessibility are ones we don't often bring up in PC meetings because we don't have tools to deal with.

Fellows: Stated that at the last PC meeting, she saw the commission was in pretty much agreement about the citizen advisory committee. In an effort to be inclusive, there was an effort to reach out to different communities to get new voices that have not been to the table. She is very excited about it. Affordability and accessibility are very present issues.

Kovacs: Asked who is deciding who will be on the committee and the basis for who will and will not be on the committee.

Jugenitz: Responded that this will fall to the chair of the PC, PC as whole, or planning staff (with consent of PC). PC will consult with SC and HRC. Part of tonight is to determine how we want to decide who will be on the committee. As I see it, we want to create opportunities for all types of people to be included, even if not part of the citizens committee, via focus groups and forums. For efficiency, we're talking about a body of no more than 10-12 people. We want people representing both affordability and accessibility. is a good start. Includes business owners, Ypsilanti Housing Commission.

Hunter: Stated that he wants representation from people in Defend Affordable Ypsi. This is a current citizen led group on these issues.

Kovacs: Want property owners and landlords represented too.

Dennis: As the PC, we're asking other commissions for input on what *your* vision for this is, rather than simply the PC's.

Zeuner: Brought up the idea of "Neighborhood block groups," something that's come up for how to include diverse representation of people, including the many micro-communities in Ypsi. We want people who communicate day-to-day with their neighbors. [Read SC's definition of sustainability.] Stated that equity addresses affordability and accessibility. Historical context is important. Sustainability is not just solar panels--but the historical aspects of our community. Can't allow housing policies to wipe away the historical significance of our communities.

Jugenitz: Stated that an asset we have to use is a working framework for MP, including an outreach process that goes into different neighborhoods. We can make it better, though.

Bedogne: Suggested Next Door as an outlet for getting info to neighborhoods.

MacGregor: Not all people can use it--since they're not in a designated neighborhood.

Fellows: Stated that one idea she heard is a public meeting in which interested people come and apply. Another idea is a focus group to get people of different interested involved. We could also do a mail-outs to alert the public.

Jugenitz: Can't have more than four citizen committee members from the PC.

Kovacs: Responded to Zeuner's point about the definition of sustainability: we want to be careful about how we charter this committee because if we consider affordability only by itself we may forget about where those homes are located. An affordable house could be far from good jobs or grocery stores and may not be on an accessible public transportation line.

Jugenitz: Responded that she understands sustainability and transportation as central to the issues of affordability and accessibility. Doesn't think these issues would have to be separated.

Fellows: Responded that these are intersecting issues.

Kovacs: Responded that this seems to be sustainability that is being talked about.

Jugenitz: Stated that alongside the updates to the MP, there should be a series of proposals. Many laws at the state level restrict what cities can do regarding housing and affordability.

Gaines: Asked why can't the commissions just all do this work. It seems like creating this new committee will take away crucial time and energy from this work.

Jugenitz: Responded that creating the citizens committee does not stop any work we're doing in separate commissions. The PC has the authority to update the MP and create a citizen committee, so this is a way to do both of those towards the goals of affordability and accessibility.

Shuler: Asked what is the strategy for integrating city's MP with county's MP.

Jugenitz: [TAPE] Asked Bonnie if there are examples of integration between municipalities and counties on MPs.

Bonnie: Responded that the county usually initiates such efforts. It would be awkward for municipalities to collaborate with Washtenaw County on this issue because the county here

doesn't do any planning for the municipalities. Therefore Ypsilanti would have to coordinate with the separate municipalities.

MacGregor: Added that part of MP will be updating other municipalities in the area so they can be informed. Added that she would like to hear specific suggestions on who we should invite to the citizen committee.

Talaga: Responded students should be heard from.

Gaines: Added that the committee should include a citizen from each ward.

Michalowski: Added that a city staff adviser would help the committee.

Jones-Darling: Added the EMU's Office of Government Affairs.

Zeuner: Stated that Ann Arbor has great influence on Ypsi's housing crisis. Asked how we address that without giving Ann Arbor a foot to drive the conversation.

Jugenitz: Responded that as part of planning process, we will do deep dive into root causes of issue. We do not need direct representation from AA, but we want to think about how AA players can play important role in this issue and how they could work alongside us in these efforts.

Shuler: Stated that he'd like to know if Ann Arbor outflows strictly come to Ypsi or are there others going to other cities too.

Jugenitz: Asked commissioners to pivot to other questions they want to see addressed.

Michalowski: Responded "What's driving housing/rent costs up?"

McKay: Responded "What's increasing housing prices in the area as a whole?"

Saunders: Responded that she would like to examine the intersections of race, gender and family structure in relation to housing affordability and accessibility.

Zeuner: Responded that quality of housing should be examined, including mold, lack of heat efficiency, etc. Cheap shouldn't mean poor quality. As a landlord you can get away with a lot in Ypsi. I don't know if Ypsi has good standards for landlords.

Jugenitz: Added that the committee should be looking at the total cost of renting, not strictly rent.

Zeuner: Added particularly utilities and maybe Internet.

Hunter: Responded that Identifying food deserts--access to fresh food and grocery stores--should be a priority.

Jones-Darling: Added representation with regards to transportation. On a weekend, people are consistently late for work because they're taking the bus. Additionally,

Fellows: Added renters need to be represented. Also, non-family households, students, and single parents. [Referencing a community input forum held the day before] Stated that in response to the question, "What would equitable economic community development look like?" participants' responses included the following: equitable process that doesn't succumb to the majority; diverse makeup of participants that reflects the makeup of the community; community land trusts; percentage of development for different groups; ample information out to and in from the community; block club coalition; not a trickle-down structure; community needs assessment; communication between schools and universities; discussion of Ann Arbor spillover; development that is community controlled and owned; low interest municipal loans; rent control; tiny houses; rent-owned development; accessory dwellings; participatory budgeting; public land; not every solution become a business solution; not subsidizing large corporations; jobs for people at every education levels; cooperatives; living wage for all jobs; social housing; community center and town hall; grocery stores; thinking about long-term generational planning.

Hunter: Noticed there is no mandatory and enforced law for renters' rights regarding literature about housing before moving in.

Zeuner: Added that if a person grows up in Ypsi, he would imagine you'd want to create a place where not only you'd want to stay, but were able to stay. Children are strongly affected by this. Drawing wards may exclude people. We could look at precincts instead. Asked if we should set requirements for demographic composition of committee (regarding race/ethnicity and renter/buyer).

Jugenitz: Responded that getting a perfect match to Ypsi's demographics is difficult in such a small group, but we should strive for relevant representation.

Jones-Darling: Added that we cannot violate the Civil Rights Act by enforcing quotas via race, gender and ethnicity. I'd like to reemphasize the renter-ownership point. The policies that encourage cooperative housing/joint ownership require landlords to provide renters with voter registration about signing. East Lansing has success with this.

Madigan: Added that physical accessibility should be paramount to these discussions. (Left meeting at 7:55pm.)

Jugenitz: Stated that she wants to investigate to how living wage and other aspects influence affordability.

Hunter: Asked if anyone present had experience with the 2013 MP.

Jugenitz: Responded that she came in at the tail end of it. Bonnie was involved.

Kovacs: Stated rent-control is not permitted by state laws. It seems there are ways around doing this. I've heard of techniques for keeping rents sustainable. I'm wondering if it'd be good to have someone who knows the law well--staff maybe--to be on the committee.

Jugenitz: Responded that this is a good idea. Added that just because something can't be done now under MI law, I don't want it to defer us from making goals/a vision that go beyond MI law.

Fellows: Added that currently there's a bill going to the state house for inclusionary zoning.

Jones-Darling: Added that cities like Grand Rapids and Detroit have instituted policies through their planning commissions that provide exemptions so that developers make up for things in affordability and accessibility.

Kovacs: Added that the city government gets something when we increase rents.

MacGregor: Responded that this is not necessarily. Rents can increase more than the rate of inflation while property taxes cannot.

Zeuner: Added that it would be good to look at which landlord groups have benefitted most from current housing policy. If some are benefiting now from tax breaks that are not exemplary in their practice--whether legally or illegally--they should not be represented in the same way as those who are exemplary.

Bedogne: Responded that landlords use current policy to do business--not back deal policies or lucrative deals.

Zeuner: Responded that an example of this point would be not following up with mold or other housing issues and the code not being enforced. It goes back to the city having a means to enforcing housing code. Asked if there is a property company that is more exemplary than others. Gave the example of Flo Mar, which has increased rents frequently, but has improved their homes regularly.

Jugenitz: Added that because of our mission, we need to include people who are working towards our mission of affordability and accessibility.

MacGregor: Asked if property owners are already overrepresented on our commissions.

Jugenitz: Responded that she wants landlords of smaller units/rental homes represented because there is a large number of them.

Jones-Darling: Added that much of the time, cities don't have the resources to enforce building codes and standards. Ypsi is one of them.

Bedogne: Added that we need City Council to push for increased budgeting to housing enforcement.

Jones-Darling: Added including landlords who care about this mission will be important.

Shuler: Asked if affordability also applies to single-family owned housing.

Jugenitz: Responded yes. If rentals are more affordable, you have a better pathway towards home ownership. I'd like to see a human-centered approach, from someone who's starting off on their own.

Fellows: Added that Ypsi has many home owners who are on fixed incomes or live on disability and because of increased taxes, we are seeing gentrification. Gave examples of gentrification in the south side, West Willow, on the east side of Ypsi. Gave examples of tax sensors coming through and issuing violations in West Willow.

Bedogne: Responded that these are examples of improving the community. You cannot change taxable value without changing hands. Getting property up to livable standards, even if by issuing violations, is how we improve communities and create growth

Gaines: Asked if what Bedogne is addressing is growth or is an example of pushing certain people out of communities.

Bedogne: Responded that this is growth.

Dennis: Responded that this is not growth. Violations are fine, but cities need to have a means to help homeowners fix and improve the issues for which they receive violations, like grants.

Zeuner: Added that violations, from a sustainability perspective, are meant to punitive to keep certain behaviors in check, but not shift populations. If people can't pay taxes, what's the reason they can't pay their taxes? Violations we should look at as a notice, but what we also need to look at what resources are provided to folks by the city that allow them to respond appropriately to these notices.

Bedogne: Responded that we (the city) are not even writing violations. There's a theory in this group that people are trying to push others around, but this is simply action that is trying to level the playing field and make properties safe and livable.

Hunter: Responded that these violations are coming at the expense of people being able to live on those properties. It is criminalizing poverty and it is the first wave of gentrification. Poverty is

a byproduct of white supremacist policies that have existed for centuries. We're trying to fix something, not trying to add on to it.

Jugenitz: Stated that returning to our primary two principles, we want to avoid displacing people at all costs.

Jones-Darling: Stated that implicit bias and implicit discrimination is a thing, and has happened over time. When we do start enforcement, we need to keep this in mind. How are we handing out violations? How are we assisting homeowners to improve the quality of their houses? We have a lot of shattered homes that we can help improve, which will help increase the tax base.

Fellows: Added that she thinks this is about reframing our goal away from incentivizing big developers towards incentivizing those who have lived here.

Hunter: Added that he would like continued acknowledgement that we're dealing with something that's existed for a very long time. We cannot rely on the status quo because it is inherently destructive. Everything needs to be reexamined from the bottom up.

Gaines: Asked how we can go forward when we're having the wrong conversation. Some people at this commission still don't believe in gentrification or recognize it. We all have to be on the same page. We need to educate even commissioners on how serious gentrification is.

Jugenitz: Responded that she will push back a bit to Gaines' point. I appreciate the focus on history, which is important regarding our city, country, and how history has influenced housing up till today. I want to challenge everyone here to understand that we will represent a range of perspectives and that's okay and we can work together. I'm optimistic about that process. We have to move forward on what we do have in common. [Opened up floor to audie

VIII. Audience Participation

Quinn Phillips, Ypsilanti: [Responding to the discussion on the connection between affordable housing, food access, and transportation]. Stated that she recently did an interview with a UM social work grad student about the Ypsilanti tenant community in which the grad student addressed such connection. Added that the commission should not invite Beal Property to the citizen committee. Shared an experience in which she witnessed racist practices from them.

Ray, Ypsilanti: Stated that she represents the Ypsilanti Tenants Union. [Referencing the topic brought up by commissioner Zeuner.] Stated that housing quality in Ypsi is abysmal. Has been photographing homes in Ypsi for several years. There are no standards for mold. [Referencing a documentary], stated that 50% of houses in the U.S. have mold, and she guesses Ypsilanti's percentage is much higher. Many flooding occurs and nothing is done about it. We in Ypsilanti are in a radon hotspot. There are no requirements for landlords to test for radon, which is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Also no requirements for landlords to clean heating ducts. Cost of utilities is far too high because of inefficient utilities. Many landlords won't

let renters put plastic over windows. International Village does not go along with our current MP. It is not designed for people who currently live here. After the housing crash in 2008, many owners began renting, so rental demand went up and rents went up. Strongly suggested reinstituting an old law that required ¾ of the population of an area to approve the selling of public land (like Water Street) to a private entity. Many of her friends want to own homes but cannot afford property taxes, so allowing tiny homes to be parked on private property would help homeowners raise extra income to pay property taxes.

Quinn Phillips, Ypsilanti: Echoed Ray's point on allowing tiny homes and RVs to be parked on homeowners' lots with the homeowners' permission. This would help her pay her property taxes which went up significantly last year.

Nathanael Romero: Stated that he is encouraged to see this meeting happen. It's incredible to see the brainstorming that's happening here in a public city meeting. Wants to express support for formation of a citizen's advisory commission. It has inherent value because it increases public participation and diverse representation. Can lead to a more participatory government structure. Regarding why we're look at affordability and accessibility, stated that we are often looking at how to increase the tax base. When we center equity, the outcome is better for everyone. We can revisit the MP in accordance with the status quo, but if we center affordability, accessibility, racial justice, gender justice, and diverse family dynamics, we will have better outcomes.

Izaiah Levine: Reported that Beth Ernat advised City Council tonight to not go forward on the International Village development.

Erica Mooney: Expressed support for a citizen's committee. Stated that the problem we are addressing is wicked and deep rooted in slavery and speculation, so any solutions we have will not seem rational if they are challenging the status quo. A citizen's committee makes sense because it addresses the challenge of how to have an equitable process for development. Stressed the importance of avoiding redundancy across the commissions and committees. Added that the update of the Ypsilanti Transit Center should be included in this work. Repeated that this is a difficult process because finding a new answer means challenging the status quo of community development that has gone on for many centuries.

Quinn Phillips: Thanked commissions for organizing this meeting. Stated that she just learned that the Ethics Committee only has one person on it, and this doesn't seem okay, particularly at this time during the International Village investigation. Not sure if this is the right forum for this, but wants the commission to know about this issue as well.

Jones-Darling: [In response to Gwen Phillips] Stated that as chair of the HRC, he will personally investigate why there is only one person on the Ethics Commission.

Erica Mooney: Stated that she remembers there was a significant amount of interest in the Sustainability Commission when it first started, and she thinks people who were not chosen for the commission could have been asked to be part of the Ethics Committee.

Quinn Phillips: Added that in order to be heard by the Ethics Committee, one has to file a complaint with the city attorney; however, there is no clear way to do that.

Jugenitz: Thanked all audience for their participation. Added that she will take the notes from tonight and draft into a charter for a citizen committee to be review by the PC in December.

IX. Adjournment 8:46 pm