

Master Plan Working Group Meeting
Minutes
October 16, 2024, 6:30 pm

Members present:

Chris Webb, Bob Chase, Meg Walton, Carey Ford and Maggie Bacon

1. The draft of the 2025 Master Plan Update (addendum to the 2019 Village of Empire Master plan) was provided to committee members previously. It was posted with the committee meeting notice on the Village website. Members were asked to review the document and be prepared to answer the following questions:
 - What might be in the plan that concerns you?
 - a. Overarching Concern: Page 3 -5 (Demographic Data). Because of the low sample size, the percentage of increase or decrease looks significant. Can we obtain the “real numbers”?
 - b. Page 10 refers to two items that were low on the priority list: new roads and parking. Yet, a fair amount of space was devoted to parking on pages 15 (Commercial and Mixed-Use Areas), 20 (Zoning Updates), 23, and 34, and as a short-term strategy and again on page 35.
 - c. Overarching Concern: about “how” growth is controlled today and in the future. The concern was developers “buying up” property and not showing deference to the municipality as to character. Is our Zoning Ordinance what we want it to be? This may be why a zoning audit was recommended. Later, during public comment, it was mentioned that our current zoning ordinance has some guard rails, such as Special Use Permits. The conversation also included a brief set of questions about the ZA's development process which is something that the Redevelopment Ready Community Essentials is asking to be documented.
 - d. We could not find any questionnaire responses mentioning how a lack of daycare impacts young families. Empire did have a fantastic daycare center (home-based) for many years. Other, more significant factors may be a driving force.
 - What might be missing?
 - a. The only general comment of missing things is a lack of references to “solutions” that might occur in our surrounding area, i.e., housing development on Benzonia Trail and daycare options growing in Benzie County. A broader discussion of partnerships may have a place in the Master Plan update.

2. Review letter from resident and suggestion. A letter from Frank Clements along with an attachment was received and parts were read aloud. The topic of the letter was the future land use map. Both are attached.
 - a. Consensus was to forward that information to the Planning Commission as part of their deliberation on the draft.
3. Ready to move it forward?
 - a. The consensus was to:
 - i. Ask Brad for numbers versus percentages
 - ii. Ask for clarification about parking
 - iii. No need to have another meeting
4. Public comment
 - a. Concern was raised about the potential “premium paid parking beach revenue” that could be used to acquire and maintain overflow parking areas and manage on-street parking in the Village. The commenter strongly felt that the revenue should be used for park maintenance.
 - b. A reminder that a questionnaire is not a scientific survey. It gauges sentiment. When categorizing or prioritizing “options,” respondents were deciding their priorities in a vacuum without any specifics as to the feasibility of any items on the list. A suggestion for the future would be to offer two questionnaires. The first step is to gauge sentiment and, from those answers, determine the list of items to be prioritized. The phrase “just one tool” is not a strong enough reminder to the reader.
 - c. The images on pages 14, 16, and 17 need to be larger to be usable. As this is one document, readers should not have to go to another site to view them in a larger format.
 - d. Pages 27 and 28 need to be more clearly marked as examples or samples of one of the bullet points on page 26: ‘Create promotional materials for key redevelopment sites following the RRC process.’

Respectfully submitted

Maggie Bacon

Attachment:

Dear Empire Master Plan Update Working Group, I have reviewed the draft 2025 Master Plan. I like the direction the plan is taking and look forward to Wednesday night's meeting to learn more. The plan also appears to align and address most of the issues and concerns the residents expressed in the survey.

The two Catalytic Area studies will be an important step in bringing new development to the Village's vacant parcels, and to attract new developers and investors. These studies will provide the important first steps to our Redevelopment Ready Program.

The Economic Development and Partnerships and Funding chapters are notable for their ability to provide a roadmap to our Council and Village to begin in earnest how to attract new development to our community yet with an eye towards preserving our small town character and thoughtful growth.

However there is one thing I would like you to consider as part of your study and that is the future land-use status of the 13+- acre vacant site on Fisher Road, as depicted on page 45 of the Village of Empire 2019 Master Plan. It is currently designated as Commercial Residential, and Multi-family Residential.

I believe the Village already has enough commercially zoned property and that we need land uses which provide more diverse businesses and jobs than what our current tourist related economy allows.

I propose that your Work Group think about ways the existing land-use of the Fisher Road site can be changed to accommodate a broader range of uses not just commercial and residential, Perhaps it could become another catalyst for change site?

Please see my attached memo to the Working Group for more details on my proposal.

Thank you,

Frank Clements

October 15, 2024

To: Empire Master Plan Update Working Group

(M. Bacon, B.Chase, M. Ellibee, C. Ford, M.Walton, C.Webb)

From: Frank Clements

Re: Land Use/ Zoning Recommendations/ Fisher Road Site

Cc: Sue Palmer, Derith Smith, B. Lonberger, J. Ferrari, E Loud

Dear Master Plan Update Working Group

Background:

Currently Empire has no industrially zoned land available to accommodate any light industrial uses, or other types of non-commercial business uses. This is a concern because Empire needs more diverse businesses and jobs to provide alternatives to our tourist based, one dimension seasonal economy which is primarily retail and hospitality oriented.

Proposal:

I propose the MP Update Work Group think about additional ways the existing Land-Use and zoning of the 13+- acre vacant parcel on Fisher Road can be

changed to accommodate a broader range of uses not just commercial and residential.

The site's current zoning, (MR) or Mixed Residential and Commercial is not its highest and best use, nor is it in sync with meeting today's market needs and demands. I believe this site provides an opportunity to help create a more diversified business economy by designating the 13+- acre site on Fisher Road, to a Mixed-Use/Business/High Density Residential site. (MX/B/R)

What would this new land-use designation provide?

- Space for new entrepreneurial businesses, and start-ups
- Space for light manufacturing, research and development
- Land-uses which are compatible and attractive to a broad range of inventors and developers.
- New jobs with higher pay than commercial retail uses
- Higher land values
- New tax revenues to offset Increased residential property taxes
- Increased Village revenues from water usage
- Land-Uses which provide a more rapid build out than the current land-uses
- New jobs which are less reliant on the seasonal economy
- A project which can be branded and marketed state-wide, not just locally.
- Allows space for expansion of current businesses
- Provides a place for a mix of higher density housing such as duplexes, townhomes triplexes, etc.
- Has adequate on-site room for a central waste water system.

Allowing a broad mix of land uses on the overall 14+- acre site will make the site more attractive to outside investor's and developers but may require more actions on behalf of the Village.

Developers prefer shovel ready sites, however if they are not available they at least expect as-of-right zoning in place which prevents them from engaging in expensive time consuming rezoning to a PUD. A new zoning classification will be necessary, and to be pre-approved.

Developers also look for incentives from the communities they work in, such as tax incentives, or tax abatements, density bonuses, or financial help with infrastructure improvements like street extensions, or water line extensions,

etc. These types of incentives are not unusual for municipalities to offer in today's competitive environment to attract investors and developers to one's community.

Last, this land use concept is compatible to the approach outlined in the Redevelopment Ready Community guidelines which helps communities attract new investors, businesses, and residents utilizing RRC initiatives to make Empire an attractive place that creates places where people want to live, work and invest,

Thanks for your consideration of this important matter to the Village of Empire.

Frank Clements