

MARIEMONT PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING HELD APRIL 18, 2012

The Mariemont Planning Commission met on Wednesday, April 18, 2012. Mr. Stich called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. Present were Mr. Savage,, Mr. Sturtz, Mr. Miller, and Mayor Policastro. Also in attendance was the Building Commissioner, Dennis Malone.

Mr. Sturtz moved, seconded by Mayor Policastro to approve the minutes as written for the meetings of February 15 and March 7, 2012. On roll call: five ayes, no nays.

The only request was from request from Mr. Rick Greiwe of Greiwe Development Group, 9355 Holly Hill, Cincinnati, OH 45243, for approval of the traffic circle and associated roadway realignments proposed at the intersection of Madisonville Road, Murray Avenue and Plainville Road.

FINDING OF THE BUILDING COMMISSIONER: The Mariemont Code of Ordinances Section 55.3 "Street Lines" provides that "The Village Planning Commission is empowered to make from time to time plans for the location of the proposed lines of a street or streets in any portion of Mariemont, and to make from time to time plats of the areas or districts thus planned, showing the location of such lines. The Commission may transmit to Council any such plat, together with estimate of the period or periods within which the land shown on the plat as street location or locations, should, in its opinion be acquired for street purposes"

Building Commissioner Malone explained that when the agenda for the meeting was posted, the request was for a yes or no vote from the Planning Commission to allow for a roundabout. Since the posting of the agenda, it was determined that the commission is in need of a lot more science from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) regarding the proposal. Instead of voting tonight to approve the request for the roundabout, we will be voting on the following: "The Mariemont Planning Commission authorizes the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) to study road improvements in the Murray and Plainville right-of-way and will participate in the ODOT design process that will evaluate the use of a roundabout to improve traffic flow, promote economic development, and meet Federal and State standards for vehicular and pedestrian safety." Mr. Malone said the purpose of this is that there has not been a formal study to determine the need for the roundabout in the first place, and/or to document it with traffic studies. That is what ODOT is in business to do. What we are going to be looking for the Planning Commission to do is rule on if we should move ahead with a study from ODOT before we proceed to an actual vote by the Planning Commission to recommend approval or disapproval of the proposed roundabout.

Mr. Stich asked if Mr. Malone had accurately stated the purpose of this meeting and that the Planning Commission would not be voting to approve or disapprove a roundabout, but rather voting to request a study or not. Mr. Greiwe said it was correct.

Mayor Policastro said we need a lot more information. He said he would write a letter to ODOT asking for a study to include a citizens-first impact study. It needs to take into account the school zone, parking on both sides, and will it be pedestrian-friendly in this walkable village for seniors, children, handicapped, and our blind citizens. How would the crosswalks work, and can we go immediately to a 20-mile-per-hour speed limit sign coming out of it. It also needs to address concerns from the Fire Department that our ladder truck won't be able to get through. Mayor Policastro said he has been working with Kim Beach and OKI and ODOT on a bike path that would extend from Fairfax. The study needs to detail where that bike path would come into play. We need to know who will maintain the landscape as he has read that the cost would be about \$100,000 annually. We are going to lose approximately \$250,000 per year from the inheritance tax and we need to look at every penny. Another question he has is who will police the area. Building Commissioner Malone had said it could take a year

to a year and a half to construct the roundabout. Where will the police need to be and will we have to hire another police officer. We need an environmental study. There have been gas stations, dry cleaners, car repair shops located there and we need to see what the EPA has to say. What other costs would there be to the Village? We have two school drop-off areas and that needs to be in the traffic study.

Mr. Greiwe said the Mayor had identified some very good issues and he expects more issues to be brought forth. He said that a year ago, this idea was rejected by the Village. What he hopes to accomplish is to explain what roundabouts are and why they are being used by cities and states all around the country. He also wants to present a new concept that moves the roundabout farther north. Many of the concerns the Village had a year ago had to do with it being in the Village. He wants to show how it has changed to address some of the Village's issues, but not all. There are still some safety issues that need to be worked out. This is about whether or not the Village wants to enter into a study process with ODOT and spend some time to look at all these issues and come up with a more refined plan that will hopefully meet those issues.

Mr. Greiwe showed a video that explained exactly what roundabouts are and how they are used. The position presented in the video is that roundabouts provide a slow and smooth movement of traffic, improved traffic flow, a 40% reduction in accidents, and positive public opinion after the roundabout is in place.

Mr. Greiwe said this is just the first step of this process. If the Village agrees to participate in the process, one or two people would be appointed to be on a review team that would include ODOT, Columbia Township, and engineers assigned to the job. The review team would take the list of issues identified by the Mayor in his letter and make sure the design addresses those issues. If they don't, then the roundabout can't happen. If they do, then we will be bringing this design back to the Planning Commission to review the more detailed plan. It's called preliminary engineering. If the Village signs off on the preliminary engineering, then you move onto the next phase which is construction. He further explained that the financial partners in this proposal had been put in place over the last year. Those partners include Hamilton County Engineer Ted Hubbard, who is part of the Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District (TID) that has been studying how to move people through the Eastern Corridor. The second partner is ODOT. They have to hire engineers and they have the money in place to do this preliminary engineering study. The next partner is the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Council of Governments (OKI). They are the ones that dole out all the federal and state gas tax money. OKI has allocated 1.7 million dollars to build a road. They allocated it last year to build the roundabout, but when the Village rejected that proposal, the funds went back into the bank. Columbia Township Administrator Mike Lemon is the next partner. He has been very successful in revitalizing Madison Place and has secured funding for moving utilities underground and for new streetscaping and he wants to keep the money from OKI for a roundabout at UDF if it cannot happen in the Village of Mariemont. The final partner is Mr. Greiwe's company. ODOT likes to do projects that generate economic development. This kind of transportation improvement should generate development, not just a road.

The new plan does address some of the concerns from a year ago when the proposal was first made and rejected. The first change is that it doesn't use any of the park lands. In fact, the Village of Mariemont actually gains park land. The second point is the Village didn't want the roundabout to touch the Historic District and neither does ODOT. The new plan takes care of that. The next point was whether the roundabout would be safe for pedestrians. The nice thing about the crosswalks in the roundabout is you only have to look for traffic from one direction, which makes them safer. The crosswalks have to be studied to be placed correctly. The next issue was the bike path. Mr. Greiwe acknowledged that at this point, they don't know where the bike path would go. Deciding how the intersection comes together will help to determine that. The final issue was whether or not emergency vehicles and fire trucks could get through. Mr. Greiwe stated that ODOT cannot build something unless it meets federal standards, so if it is designed by ODOT, it will work. The school zone is not anywhere

near this and the school has said they are going to move the sidewalks toward Wooster Pike when they complete the new addition.

Mr. Greiwe showed a drawing of where the new apartment development could go along the northwest and northeast borders of the roundabout. If ODOT funds the roundabout, he would be able to acquire the land and develop it. The land to be developed includes the sites where Ritze's is located, the Garner site, the Daniel's site, Dimitrio's site, and Joe Woeste's family's site. He has already done the environmental studies on Phase I and part of Phase II, and there is nothing of any concern to ODOT as long as construction does not go deep into the ground. All the buildings he would construct would be slab-on-ground buildings with surface parking and no basements. The plan calls for 110 apartments, with 5000 square feet of retail space with apartments above. It would help to complete the Madison Place plan, which should stimulate more investment in the area. ODOT has the money to help acquire some of this land. Greiwe Development would put a portion in for the land, ODOT would put a portion in, and Columbia Township Trustees would contribute the rest through Tax Increment Financing (TIF).

Mr. Greiwe said it is his opinion that the roundabout would improve traffic flow, stimulate more economic development for Columbia Township, create more retail sales for Mariemont, beautify the gateway into the Village, and it would be at no cost to the Village as it would all be funded by ODOT, OKI, transportation improvement and TIF funds.

Mr. Greiwe showed a video from CNN regarding the conversion of many intersections in Carmel, Indiana, to roundabouts.

Mr. Stich introduced Hamilton County Commissioner Todd Portune and County Engineer Ted Hubbard.

Commissioner Todd Portune said he serves as the Chairman of the Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District (TID). Mr. Hubbard is the Secretary of TID. The purpose of the TID is to improve traffic infrastructure in an area in such a way as to promote investments for economic development. The Hamilton County TID has not taken a position with respect to the whether the roundabout is a good project or a bad project and he is not at the meeting to offer an opinion. He is only here to clarify what the role of the TID is in this process. The TID has worked with Columbia Township on this issue to provide them with information and to identify funding for the study and review of this project. The TID would also assist the Village in any way that the Village would like them to.

Mr. Stich said that it has always been a part of the TID's culture to listen to public input and allow the public to have their say and express their views on issues. He asked if Commissioner Portune could explain how that process typically works.

Commissioner Portune said that the TID has an open public meeting every month. Anyone who wants to get on the agenda for a meeting can do so by contacting him or Mr. Hubbard, including this issue. He wanted to reiterate that the TID has not taken a position on the proposed roundabout, but they have done work to facilitate further review of it. They see that as part of their role.

Mayor Policastro said we have streets adjacent to the proposed roundabout that have issues and he asked if the study can include those areas. Mr. Hubbard said the study would use House Bill 114 funding that has been assigned to a roundabout in this general area. That funding would have to be used to study the vicinity of Plainville. If the adjacent streets are too far from that general area, ODOT may not be willing to include those streets.

Mr. Hubbard said roundabouts are just one tool in the toolbox when talking about improving intersections. They do have potential for benefits in the right spot. They can calm traffic, they can

improve traffic flow, and they can reduce accidents. They also have impacts. The challenge of any community is to weigh if the benefits are worth the impacts. The TID wants to be a facilitator in this project. It is extremely important that all the communities involved are engaged in the process. We have to work on this collectively. This matter is on the TID agenda.

Merritt Collister, 3886 Settle Road, Mariemont, OH 45227, explained that her house is on the corner of Settle Road and Murray Avenue and is bordered by Fairfax, Hamilton County and Columbia Township. Since Fairfax put up the barricades for the Wooster Pike construction, Settle Road has been really impacted. Settle Road has always had a massive amount of cut-through traffic going at high speeds. She is neither a proponent nor opponent of the proposed roundabout. Her concern is that with Fairfax narrowing down the lanes on Wooster Pike, there is a bottleneck right at Wooster Tavern and everybody cuts down Settle Road. The roundabout would be great if people would stick to using Plainville Road to get to the roundabout. Right now, Settle Road has an enormous amount of through traffic and speeding. She is concerned what the impact of the roundabout would be on the side streets. There have been a lot of close calls on the street with bicyclists almost being hit by cars.

Mr. Hubbard said if the roundabout is designed correctly, it should not divert traffic onto other streets. Councilman Jeff Andrews said one of the questions we would want to have answered in the study is if the roundabout does its job in improving traffic flow, would it cause traffic to use Plainville and take that traffic off the side streets. Mayor Policastro said this is one of the issues on the adjacent streets he mentioned earlier that he would like to see included in the study. Commissioner Portune said that is the kind of answer TID should be able to help get an answer to. ODOT could be petitioned to expand the study to include this issue. If that cannot be done, then TID could address that issue.

Jerry Vianello, 6570 Wooster Pike, Mariemont, OH 45227, asked if the TID knows what percentage of traffic heads south to Wooster Pike as opposed to the square. Mr. Hubbard said that information will be included in the study being done for the Eastern Corridor. Mr. Vianello said his concern would be how to slow down traffic as it heads into the school zone. Mr. Hubbard said the engineer will have to look at the traffic patterns to make sure the roundabout functions properly and that is part of the work that has to be done.

Jane Coffee, 4315 Joan Place, Mariemont, OH 45227 said she is very encouraged by what she is hearing. She often uses the intersection where the roundabout is proposed and it always worries her the way it is now. She has dealt with roundabouts in other communities and countries. Once people get the hang of it, it is such an ease to move through. You eliminate the care of stop lights, so you save money that could be used to take care of the landscaping. She encourages the Planning Commission to take the next step.

Mr. Miller said it is important to remember that the merits of the roundabout are not the topic. If we choose to go ahead, there will be many in-depth studies that will give us a lot more information. We need to take advantage of Commissioner Portune's presence and Mr. Hubbard's presence and direct questions to them that they would have the answers to.

Mr. Stich said we are not here to discuss the merits of a roundabout but rather to discuss the merits of discussing a roundabout. The question is should we let ODOT do its job which would include a time for concerned citizens to come to a public forum, discuss their concerns, and talk to those who are going to be doing the study. We need to look at this as a process. We are a long way from making a decision about the roundabout. The Eastern Corridor project is a good example. He said he first heard about it in 1999 and it has been a lengthy process that has been full of input from citizens of the community. The roundabout is a microcosm of that and will be conducted in the same way, which is people will have an opportunity to come in and have their say. We are a long way away from voting on whether we are going to approve the roundabout or not.

Mel Martin, 5435 Kenwood Road, Cincinnati, OH 45227, said he is a former member of the Hamilton County Regional Planning Commission. Years ago, the Village of Mariemont went to the Hamilton County Commissioners and asked to purchase the railroad right of way. The Commissioners referred it to the Planning Commission, which studied it and recommended for it, because we believed that Mariemont would do a better job of maintaining the property than the railroad or the county could. However, there was a caveat that there be provisions for a bike path if and when the area was developed. He said he wanted to make sure the bike path is included in the study and the plan. Mayor Policastro said we have been working on a bike path in that area.

Aileen Beatty, 6757 Murray Avenue, Mariemont, OH 45227, said she wants to make sure parking is included in the study plan because parking is at a premium in the area. It looks like the new proposal takes away parking spaces in favor of the bike path. She said she is a proponent of the bike path, but not over parking for the residents. She wants to make sure alternatives for the location of the bike path is part of the study. Mayor Policastro said that will be in the letter to ODOT. We are working to put the bike and walking path in the boulevard on the Mariemont side. Mrs. Beatty said that is not what the drawing shows. Mayor Policastro said that is why we need the study to make sure we get everything right. Mrs. Beatty said she is in complete favor of the study.

Commissioner Portune asked for clarification that the Mayor will be compiling correspondence that will detail all of the traffic and transportation modality issues that the Village would like to have added to the study. Mayor Policastro said if that is what this committee wants him to do, then he will write the letter to ODOT. Mr. Stich said the study would not be the end of it. If ODOT comes back with a plan that raises additional issues, people would have an opportunity to discuss those issues.

Councilman Andy Black asked if the ODOT study says the roundabout is not going to work, will they have alternative suggestions for that intersection that they may perceive as a viable alternative to a roundabout or is the study just going to be focused on if the roundabout will work or not. Mr. Hubbard said ODOT would probably give us options. They will give us the specific reasons the roundabout would not work and then they usually give some sort of recommendation as an alternative. Mayor Policastro said even if we cannot do the roundabout, he would love to see that area cleaned up. He asked Mr. Hubbard if there would be monies for that. Mr. Black asked if that money was specifically allocated for just a roundabout. Mr. Hubbard said the application is for a roundabout. If we find out that we had a failure, we could then approach ODOT to see what options are available. Commissioner Portune said the roundabout is what the House Bill 119 Funding application was predicated on. What has surfaced this evening is that there are other direct and indirect traffic issues related to this proposal. It is incumbent on us to engage ODOT and get a clear answer from them if we can use this study to address those other related traffic issues so there is a comprehensive assessment of what the traffic picture in Mariemont and other communities is going to be as a consequence of a roundabout being done. TID will advocate for the study to include those other issues. If ODOT says they will not allow those issues to be part of the study, TID has to help the Village, Columbia Township, the City of Cincinnati, and Hamilton County take up these other issues. It is TID's job to be a positive influence by helping all the communities of Hamilton County realize their traffic enhancement goals in ways that benefit the local communities. We will work with you to take up those issues if this study cannot include them. Mr. Hubbard said he agreed that the Village has raised issues that need to be included in this work effort. If we hit a fatal flaw in this process where the application is no longer what it was originally meant to be, and we have to look at something else, you may have to go back to ODOT to get their blessing so we can change the plan and do something else.

Michelle Decamp, 6734 Fieldhouse Way, Mariemont, OH 45227, said she is a Mariemont resident and business owner. She sees clients from Indian Hill, Kenwood, Sycamore Schools areas, and all over Cincinnati. One of the biggest concerns she hears from her clients is how unsafe the intersection

is at Plainville. There have been several near-misses for accidents there. She asked Mr. Hubbard if they can do a projection of traffic flow. Mr. Hubbard said one is going on right now for the Eastern Corridor. Mrs. DeCamp said the numbers can differ depending on what time of day and what day of the week the study is done. She asked how they could get an accurate number. Mr. Hubbard said they use the OKI regional model to determine what the projection traffic volumes are which helps their consultants determine what type of improvement might work and what benefits those improvements would deliver. It is not an exact science, but you do see trends on how traffic patterns shift if one improvement is made versus another. That helps to determine the effectiveness of the improvement. For the roundabout, we will need to be more specific. We will have the general information available, but the engineers are going to have to look at more detail in that specific area to see how it will perform. If the delay at the intersection drops, people take less risks so there would be fewer accidents and they won't avoid the intersection. The time of day, the day of the week, and the time of year the study is being done is all evaluated in the model.

Police/Fire Chief Rick Hines said he does not have the number for near-misses at that intersection, but he can provide the number of actual accidents there. Safety Committee Chairman Wolter asked him to do a five-year study of that intersection. According to auto accident records, we have had six accidents there in the last five years or an average of 1.2 per year. They were all fender-benders with no injuries. There will not be high-impact accidents at that intersection because of the stop signs. Those are real numbers. Mr. Miller asked if the letter from the Mayor to ODOT should include that type of information. Mr. Hubbard said the Mayor should feel free to do so. He asked if there had been any pedestrian accidents and what type of auto accidents had occurred. Chief Hines said there were no pedestrian accidents and the auto accidents were mostly angled impacts.

Councilman Dennis Wolter asked what the time frame is for construction to actually begin on the Eastern Corridor project. He said when it is completed, it should alleviate a lot of the Village's traffic problems. Mr. Hubbard said the studies of the Little Miami River and how it meanders have been accepted. Commissioner Portune said there is additional work to be done, but all the studies should complete this year. That will lead to the final design and construction should then begin as early as 2014, but it is more likely going to be 2015 or 2016.

Councilwoman Denise McCarthy asked what the time frame would be for getting the study from ODOT for the roundabout issue. Mr. Hubbard said it would be about a year or less. She said the Plainville Road and Murray Avenue intersection has been like it is now for many years and has always been a problem. She wondered why we are choosing now to have a study for safety and why we had to do a study instead of just going with the suggested improvement. Mr. Stich said the roundabout is a relatively new concept.

Jim Bowling, 7 Albert Place, Mariemont, OH 45227, if there is to be no cost to Mariemont, who is going to fund this project. Mr. Greiwe said there are four sources of funding. One is the land budget for his apartment project, the second is a TIF from Columbia Township, the third is bond money for his apartment project, and the fourth would be funds from ODOT. Mr. Bowling asked who would actually own the property. Mr. Greiwe said his company would own the property where the apartments would be and ODOT would own the right of way. Mr. Bowling asked if that meant public money was going to be used for Mr. Greiwe to buy the property. Mr. Greiwe said public money would be used for the right of way acquisition.

Mr. Stich said this meeting was for the limited purpose of deciding whether or not we are going to authorize ODOT to do a study on the roundabout and we should call the question on that issue. The question is whether the Planning Commission in accordance with its authority under Section 55.03 of the Mariemont Public Works provisions of the code should authorize the Mayor to write a letter indicating our support or participation of the study.

Mr. Miller moved, seconded by Mr. Sturtz to approve the authorization for the Mayor to write the letter to ODOT. On roll call: five ayes, no nays.

Mr. Stich asked if there was any other business. Stan Bahler, 6965 Crystal Springs Road, Mariemont, OH 45227, said the letter the Mayor is to write sounds like it is coming from the Village of Mariemont, which has an interest here, but a bigger interest is Columbia Township and the developer. He said he hopes they are included in the letter so that it is worded in a way that everyone's interest is expressed. He feels there is an obvious intent to muffle this proposal from Mariemont, so all the interested parties should have a say in how the letter goes forward. Mayor Policastro said all the interested parties should feel free to call and ask questions.

Ann Dewert asked that a copy of the letter be sent to owners of the properties that are adjacent to the project. Mayor Policastro said he will be glad to do that.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mr. Dick Savage, Secretary