

MARIEMONT PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING HELD JUNE 27, 2019

The Mariemont Planning Commission met Monday, May 22, 2019. Mr. Brown called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. Present were Mr. Blum, Mayor Policastro and Mr. Van Stone. Ms. Reed arrived at 5:30. Also, in attendance was the Building Administrator Don Keyes.

Mayor Policastro moved, seconded by Mr. Brown to accept the minutes as written for May 22, 2019. On roll call; four ayes, no nays.

A request was made from the Village of Mariemont to review a new plan for the Murray Ave. section between Settle Road and Plainville Road. The park area between the streets had been laid out and approved with new parking areas installed. The parking area design has been revised and a walking /bicycling path design has been overlaid in the area. This change creates a requirement for the Planning Commission to review the plans for the area again.

Finding of the Building Commissioner:

The property between the two sides of Murray Ave has been laid out to include a walking and riding path, partly for the Safe Ways to School program and partly to provide additional parking for residents of the area. The park area is intended to receive additional trees to complete the design of the Park. Both the Ohio Revised Code section 713.02 regarding Planning Commission powers and duties and the Mariemont code section 151.024 enhancing and extending Planning Commission duties are applicable and enclosed here for reference.

Mr. Brown said there is a correction. This plan is in no way yet associated with an official Safe Ways to School Program. An aspect of the plan however is to create a safer way for children who live on Settle or Homewood to take the path to Plainville on towards the elementary school. He has had conversation with a member of the school board for the potential of grant money for the project. There would have to be evaluations, plans etc. but that would take place in the future. Mayor Policastro said an engineer would have to be hired at an approximate cost of \$5,000.

Mr. Rob Bartlett, 3611 Mound Way, said some people have tried to make this project into a lot of different thing, like a path continuing on past Plainville Road, but the application that was approved by Council and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources does not include anything beyond Plainville Road. It's about installing a multi-purpose path between Settle and Plainville, and at the same time improving the landscaping there. And the key element there is the multi-purpose trail because today we have young children who have to walk in the street on their way to school, which is not safe. And this goes for kids walking to both the elementary School and to the Junior High School. He read into the minutes a letter dated November 15, 2018 from Lance Hollander, Director of Administrative Services for Mariemont Schools: "To Who It May Concern: Please accept this letter of support for the application for the Clean Ohio Trails funding grant for the trail that runs along the Murray Median. As a former principal of Fairfax and Mariemont Elementary Schools and Mariemont Junior High School, and the current Director of Administrative Services for the Mariemont City School District, I believe the trail would contribute to providing a safe path for students to walk and bike between the Villages of Fairfax and Mariemont as well as from Mariemont Junior high School to Mariemont Elementary Schools. Please let me know if you have any questions, or if I can be of further assistance. Sincerely, Lance Hollander".

Mr. Bartlett read a quote from the Council meeting held November 23, 2015 which the Mayor Policastro said "If you look at the logo for the Village of Mariemont the Latin translation

means dedicated to you. As Mayor, I will continue to do everything I can to protect our children". They say actions speak louder than words. There are a lot of people who are going to be looking at the Mayor's actions on this project. The main benefit of this project is providing a safe path for all of the young children who live in that part of town, be it to get to school, to the tennis courts, the Town Square, library etc. This will be a chance for Mayor Policastro to "walk the talk" and support a project that improves the safety of our children. Or not, and leave everyone wondering what it is he stands for.

Mr. Bartlett said he is confused why, from a legal standpoint, this project is being reviewed by the Planning Commission. When he reads the Village's Ordinances that address the Planning Commission, it talks about them reviewing "building structures". What we are talking about is a path not a building structure. There have been at least two other multi-purpose paths that have been installed (one in the South 80 and one along Whiskey Creek) and neither of those ever went in front of the Planning Commission. Also, a sidewalk, which is another form of a path, was installed by the Village near General Short Park, and it never went to the Planning Commission. Why is this project going to the Planning Commission? It seem very inconsistent with how we have done things in the past and almost arbitrary.

Solicitor McTigue said to be honest he has the same type of question. The plan was proposed by the committee and unanimously approved by Council. If Planning Commission wants to put some tweaks on the plans they can do so and Council can discuss. If Council votes consistently they have the ability to overrule whatever Planning Commission decides. There is a paragraph under 713.02 that refers to streets, boulevards, alleyways to be constructed that Planning Commission does get to weigh in on that. In an abundance of caution and to be as transparent as best we can, we are bringing it in front of Planning Commission in the event there are people who have comments that they did not have an opportunity to present previously when the committee met here is their opportunity. The Village has come under fire the past couple of years for not being transparent enough and he presumes it is one of the reasons this is being heard before the Planning Commission. He could make an argument that this has to go before the Planning Commission, however, very candidly, it would not be an argument that he would zealously advocate for. He questions the practical rationale for it because Council has voted to approve it unanimously. It's possible that the Planning Commission should have heard the matter first and then have Council approve.

Mr. Brown said there has been no harm or foul. Solicitor McTigue agreed and suggested the Planning Commission proceed.

Mr. Jerry Vianello, 6570 Wooster Pike, said the Planning Commission met, approved and recommended to Council which voted unanimously on adopting putting the trail in between Settle and Plainville Roads. At the same meeting Planning Commission adopted putting in diagonal parking. It is his understanding that this meeting is to look at plans to switch diagonal parking to parallel parking. Mr. Brown said that is not entirely correct but it is an aspect of the meeting. The new plans do show that the parking has been altered from diagonal to parallel parking, however that was presented at the committee meeting. Mr. Vianello said the Village agreed to do a study for \$40,000. The landscaping was not approved in any prior Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Brown said not entirely and went on to explain that the Village to get the preliminary plan we are presently discussing spent \$18,000. To proceed to the construction documents will require another \$22,000. If the private funding (\$100,000) is successful the \$40,000 could potentially come back to the Village. There is an additional \$41,000 which brings the total cost of the project to almost \$400,000. Within the \$41,000 there is a landscaping budget of approximately \$30,000. It has always been in the original proposal and budget. His position has always been you cannot do the landscaping if the pathway is not built. He wants to raise the

money to build the pathway and get that part of the project complete. The plan for the landscaping will need to be brought forth to be approved.

Ms. Lisa Wharton, 3867 Homewood Road, said she misses the trees and the bushes and longs for them to be restored. Part of living in a community is balancing community and personal wishes. Every morning she has to watch for children walking down the streets and she feels it is important that we do these things. Caring for the children is as important as anything we can do. A path satisfies that. Mr. Brown said the goal is to slowly put the trees back in there. We are creating landscaping opportunities around the pathway.

Mr. Dennis Wolter, 3804 East Street, said he was glad to see this meeting taking place even though it may be in retrospect to truly vet this for the public ear. He served on the Safety Committee of Council for many years and he is excited to have a place for people to walk and ride bikes without being in the street. He worries about what will happen one day on Wooster Pike. He believes this will position the Village better in order to gain more points on grant applications such as Safeways to School. The lighting in the Village is inadequate and when they see the Village is committed towards our young people more points will be added to our score. He is excited to take a barren part of the Village and make it an exciting gateway.

Mr. Blum said his understanding was the lighting was included in the prior engineering design when it was done years ago for the Safeways to School grant. Mr. Wolter said it was a different effort and the time panned out before a plan was put together. It helps with the grant process when they see the Village working on the problem too.

Ms. Avia Graves, 3925 West Street, said she voted her support of this project. She commented that there was some money left over from the Duke project that could be put towards the landscaping. Mayor Policastro said we would if we do what Duke Energy tells us to do.

Mr. Dan Byrant, 6748 Murray Avenue, said he lives in Columbia Township and asked for clarification on the property lines of Mariemont and Columbia Township. Mayor Policastro told him the majority of the green space belongs to Mariemont. He asked for a timeline on when the construction plans will be approved. Mr. Brown said we are in the steps of preliminary plan approval. The next step is the fundraising efforts over the summer months into the fall. At that time we will evaluate where we are with funding as to whether we will proceed with the construction documents. He does not doubt the funding will be raised and the bids would go out the first part of next year with construction to take place March/April 2020. Mr. Bryant said many in Columbia Township have an intense interest in this project going forward. Mr. Brown suggested Mr. Bryant reach out to the Trustees of Columbia Township to see if he can spark discussion of some contribution towards the landscaping which the township would benefit from.

Ms. Suzy Weinland, 3812 Indianview, said she believes this is a great idea to connect the Village. She stressed great importance on a safe crosswalk at Plainville for the kids to take to school. Part of that will be Mariemont and part will be Columbia Township. She agreed to work with Columbia Township to make sure all the crosswalks are done the right way with correct lights and signage. Mr. Brown said there has been discussion about that matter with the chief designer from Choice One and our Village Engineer, Chris Ertel. It will need to be evaluated and studied. There is money budgeted in the project for both signage and crosswalks.

Mr. Alex Peterson, 3901 Plainville, said he is glad to hear a lot of support for this path. It is a biker destination. It can only be a benefit if eventually we have a connection to major bike paths. It will help to boost the culture and the economy of the Village.

Mr. Joe Stelzer, 6609 Pleasant Street, said he understands there will be discussion regarding the multi-use path from Plainville Road to Settle Road. He knows there is some concern in the Village that approving the current proposed path will somehow guarantee an eastern extension of the path. He probably knows more about path development work in this area than most people in the Village and can say he is not aware of any current plans for path development in the area between Plainville and the Library. In fact, he personally asked a former Councilperson several years ago not to hold any meetings regarding additional path development until there could be a full review with input from the Village and its residents of all alternatives east of Plainville. Several reasons he believes the Village should move forward with the proposed plan are:

1. Mariemont received a \$270,000 grant and there is a group that he is part of committed to privately fund raise the additional \$100,000 needed to construct the path. Why would we squander this opportunity at this point in time?
2. The path will add to Mariemont's park space and will be used by Mariemont residents. If you look at the existing path built by Fairfax several years ago and you will see a constant stream of Mariemont residents enjoying the path. Just yesterday he saw a Mariemont family using the path with two small children on bicycles and the youngest child learning how to ride a scooter. The picture would have made a great picture of the image of the pathway.
3. The sidewalks along Murray either do not exist or are woefully inadequate so the path will provide a safe route to school, Village Square and the tennis courts for families on the western side of Mariemont.
4. This plan will correct some of the storm water issues in the area.
5. Most planned communities today contain multi-purpose paths. He has no doubt if John Nolen was planning Mariemont today multi-use paths would be included.
6. Multi-purpose paths are one of the amenities being desired by younger home buyers and studies have shown the multi-purpose paths increase home values in close proximity to the path.
7. The proposed changes to the parking pads will provide safer alternatives than the current configuration.

Finally, 15 years ago there was a lot of negativity regarding the bike trail being extended through Terrace Park. After the trail was built, the residents of terrace Park completely changed their view and now the trail is highlighted to potential homebuyers. There were several people who could not attend the meeting tonight and asked the he pass along their notes of support to Council. He distributed those and thanked Council for their time.

Mr. Stelzer said his understanding is that there is an estimate of \$370,000 (the actual grant amount is \$268, 846). The goal is the fund raising efforts will pick up the balance. Most grants require a match.

Mr. Blum said there are usually project overruns. If we start to give in to putting in trees and everything else will that be covered through the fund raising efforts? Mr. Stelzer said he had the estimate reviewed by people who have built these before and they found it to be reasonable but you can never know for sure until it is put to bid. He said we will deal with issues as they come up. There is no formal plan for the landscaping yet. Once that is put together we could increase our fund raising goal. Mr. Blum expressed concerns with project overrun. Mr. Stelzer said all that is being asked tonight is to approve the plan put before the Planning Commission. We do not have to spend any more money until we know what the fundraising efforts yield.

Mr. Van Stone said Planning Commission is here to approve or not approve the plans before us. Any financing concerns/problems would be the decision of Council. Mr. Stelzer said the formal fund raising will begin after the plan is approved. He has had several positive conversations with large donors. So far he has been very encouraged.

Mr. Dave Middleton, 24 Spring Hill, said he was excited to hear about the landscaping discussion and would strongly encourage that native plants be used for that project.

Ms. Reed apologized for being late and asked if anyone had spoken against the project. Mr. Brown said no one had to this point.

Ms. Mary Ann Schwartz, 6615 Chestnut Street, said she was on the committee with Mr. Brown and Mr. Bartlett. There has been discussion in the Committee meetings about the money the Village would be willing to put up. She said that Mr. Brown and Mr. Bartlett have been doing the majority of the work while she has been recuperating from her back surgery. A lot of what has been discussed this evening was discussed at the committee level. Mr. Brown said Ms. Schwartz contributed quite a bit as well.

Mayor Policastro said he has received many phone calls from residents in the area indicating that they want more parking and asked if it was possible to put in more parking.

Mr. Brown said at the last meeting with Choice One there was a direct discussion about adding more parking. There is the opportunity to place three additional parallel parking spaces at the Plainville end. There is also the potential for three additional spots by Homewood. The expenses would be minimal because they will already have all the equipment available on site.

Mr. Van Stone asked if there had been any issues with the path in Fairfax. Mr. Brown said he had Chief Hines check with the Police Chief of Fairfax who indicated that the trail has not presented problems and has been a relatively safe experience. Mr. Van Stone said the path does not meander much and questioned if it did would it provide more parking and landscaping options.

Mayor Policastro moved, seconded by Mr. Brown to approve the plan as submitted with the addition to approve the potential of up to six additional parking spaces. Mr. Brown asked if the request could be granted with a condition for parking. Solicitor McTigue said the Village can. On roll call; five ayes, no nays. Mr. Brown said if the parking price would come back at an astronomical figure the matter would have to be reconsidered.

The meeting adjourned at 6:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Shelly Reed, Secretary