MINUTES
The City of Crystal Lake
PROCEEDINGS OF THE YOUTH COMMISSION AND CITY COUNCIL
November 14, 2024 Special Meeting
Aaron T. Shepley City Hall, 100 W. Woodstock Street, Crystal Lake, IL

1. Call to Order

Chair Leo Camasta called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. Thursday, November 14, 2024.

2. Roll Call/Attendance

Commissioners Charlie Benton, Leo Camasta, Andrew Cioper, Jackson Lisle, Sunny Tomberlin, and Alyssa (Theo) Johnston were present. Commissioner Lauren Wolfe was absent.

Mayor Haig Haleblian and Councilmember Denise Smith were present.

City Manager Eric Helm, Community Development Director Katie Cowlin, and Deputy City Manager Nick Hammonds were also present.

3. Approval of Minutes from the October 10, 2024 Meeting

Vice Chair Cioper moved to approve the minutes of the October 10, 2024 meeting. Chair Leo Camasta seconded. Upon voice vote, motion passed.

4. Public Presentation

Chair Leo Camasta asked if there was anyone in the public who wished to speak on an item not found on the agenda. No one wished to speak. Chair Leo Camasta closed public presentation.

5. Community Development Introduction

Community Development Director Katie Cowlin introduced herself to the Commission and reviewed her background and role with the City. She detailed the roles performed by the Community Development Department, including permit processing, plan reviews, inspections, and code compliance. Ms. Cowlin discussed the Planning and Economic Development Divisions and their role in supporting a thriving business community.

Ms. Cowlin described the role of a City Planner. Planning and Economic Development are critical to making the City grow and meet the long-term goals of the City Council. She reviewed a presentation covering the 2030 Comprehensive Plan developed in 2012, and discussed the upcoming revisions to create the 2050 Comprehensive Plan.

Ms. Cowlin discussed the importance of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), which is the guiding document for the Community Development Department oversight of planning and zoning. Next, she discussed zoning districts in the City, the history of how the City has developed over time, and the process for developers seeking approval from the City.

Additional duties of the Department were discussed, including GIS mapping, recruiting businesses to Crystal Lake, and the functions of the City's advisory commissions. Chair Camasta asked why the City contacts developers to come to the City. Ms. Cowlin stated that businesses and developers will contact the City, and the City will reach out to potential businesses and developers. These efforts are a critical component of economic development to sustain a thriving business sector.

Ms. Cowlin reviewed the ways in which the City markets, recruits, and supports businesses. City Manager Helm stated that sales tax is very important for the City's budget and revenues. He stated that the City is in competition with neighboring communities to recruit and sustain businesses to bolster sales tax revenues.

Chair Camasta asked if there have been any companies that the City attempted to recruit, but were unsuccessful. Ms. Cowlin stated that this can happen from time to time. Councilmember Smith discussed the history of Steinhafels coming to Crystal Lake. Ms. Cowlin stated that when Kmart left the space, it would be difficult for the City to fill the 100,000 square foot building with another business. The City conducted recruiting visits and developed proposals to attract Steinhafels to the space, and ultimately secured Steinhafels to occupy the site.

6. Community Feedback Impacting Youth

A. Comprehensive Plan, Strategic Plan, and Soliciting Feedback from Youth

City Manager Helm inquired the Commission for their feedback regarding the community. He asked if the Commission members could share their thoughts regarding the City, where they want to live, and what they look for in a community they want to call home. Vice Chair Cioper stated that he looks for a single-family home, close to a school, with businesses within walking distance. Chair Camasta stated that he wants a ranch with numerous acres, potentially a farm with animals. Commissioner Tomberlin stated that she prefers urban areas, with walkability and public transportation. Commissioner Lisle stated that he would prefer a house backing up to a lake or golf course. Commissioner Johnston prefers a large apartment in an urban area with walkability and public transportation. Commissioner Benton stated that she prefers a two-story home in a close-knit community, which she feels Crystal Lake is such a community.

Ms. Cowlin discussed the 2050 Comprehensive Plan and the need to get the Commission's thoughts. She discussed sustainability, LEEDS certified businesses in town, and the conservation concepts for the northwest corridor. Commissioner Tomberlin discussed how she lives next to the Fen and enjoys being near nature. Commissioner Johnston also discussed the importance of living near green space and wildlife.

Mayor Haleblian asked Ms. Cowlin if she sees a trend in the development of fewer large plot residences. Ms. Cowlin stated that big lots are seemingly going away, with many more apartment units developed than single-family homes. She discussed the view of developers who are looking to make the most money from a development, which has recently been apartments or smaller homes close together.

Ms. Cowlin provided an overview of the process for developers to gain City Council approval for a development. Mayor Haleblian and Councilmember Smith discussed the recent Pathway Court development approval. The City Council approved the development after the developer listened to resident feedback and incorporated changes to their concept. Mayor Haleblian stated that the process worked as intended, where the resident support, even though nearby residents did not approve of the development, resulted in the development including a public park.

Ms. Cowlin discussed the legal side of these approvals. The City ultimately may not violate a property owner's rights. If a developer or property owner is in conformance with the UDO requirements, the City cannot deny them permits without a legal basis for doing so.

City Manager Helm asked the Commission for their thoughts regarding Crystal Lake generally. What are things that stick out? What are the things that seem odd?

Commissioner Lisle asked why houses and businesses are so separated. Ms. Cowlin discussed zoning and the historical concept of keeping homes away from businesses and busy streets. She reviewed the development of city planning practices over time. Commissioner Benton discussed a house on the north end of town in unincorporated Crystal Lake.

Mayor Haleblian explained the history of the Coventry subdivision. Originally developed to attract a large number of airline pilots who were relocating to the Chicagoland area in the 1960s and 1970s, the development included split-level and ranch homes. The homes were popular at the time, lost popularity in subsequent years, and are now back in demand as the population has aged.

Councilmember Smith discussed a recent topic regarding accessory dwelling units. The City has historically not allowed accessory dwelling, but more properties have been looking to construct these at their homes. She asked the Commission if they would choose to live in an accessory dwelling unit. Councilmember Smith proposed the hypothetical of the Youth Commission members coming home after college, before they are able to find their own living space, if an accessory dwelling would be preferential. Commissioners Johnston and Tomberlin stated that they like the concept.

Councilmember Smith asked the Commission what types of businesses and restaurants they would like to see come to Crystal Lake. The Commission discussed international food options, such as KD Market. Mayor Haleblian discussed pop-ups and food courts with various international food options.

7. November 19, 2024 City Council Presentation

Deputy City Manager Hammonds encouraged the Commission to discuss together to plan on the upcoming presentation to the City Council at the November 19, 2024 meeting. City Manager Helm stated that the group could prepare a written statement to present at public presentation. The Commission agreed to meet on Monday, November 18, 2024 to prepare a presentation to display during the public presentation.

Among the topics the Commission discussed were the importance of retaining youth in the community, getting input from youth, and showing youth that they have a voice in what is happening in town. Mayor Haleblian appreciated the statement regarding the youth having a voice. He encouraged the Commission on this topic, that youth can funnel their voice through the Commission to enact improvements or changes they envision.

8. Open Discussion

Commissioner Tomberlin inquired about information sharing. She asked about spreading the word about the Commission, specifically at school. School newsletters exist, but the Commission was not confident in the number of readers the newsletter is reaching. Commissioner Tomberlin discussed the potential option to present information during morning announcements. Commissioner Benton stated that the Beardsley Live concept could help to share messaging.

In addition, the Commission could post on Tik Tok. The Commission agreed to place social media discussion as an agenda at a future Youth Commission meeting. The Commission agreed to meet at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, November 18, 2024 to prepare the presentation for the City Council meeting.

9. Adjourn

There being no further business, Chair Camasta moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:32 p.m. Vice Chair Cioper seconded the motion. On voice vote, all present voted yes. Motion passed.