



The City of Brecksville

Resident Recommendation Committee

Valor Acres

Central School

September 26, 2019

Brecksville City Hall, Council Chambers

Committee Attendees: Committee Chair Andrew Van Nort, Ray Andrews, Holly Little, Hishue Mahalaha, Paul Meler, Michael Paskert, Susan Schindler, John Syrone, Frank Talerico, Nancy Woelfl, Michael Young, Meredith Gunzler.

Guests: Council President Mike Harwood, Councilperson Dennis Rose, Councilperson Lou Carouse, Councilperson Kim Veras, Councilperson Petsche, Dominic Sciria, Planning Commission.

Committee Chair, Andrew Van Nort, welcomed and thanked everyone in attendance. He explained the committee's goal is to get together and discuss and get to a general idea of what can be done at Valor Acres and what can be done at Central School to make the community better, but not overwhelming. He said we all love the community we live in now, and do not want a Strongsville or an Avon or Westlake. We want to be Brecksville. We want to get an idea of what the residents want to see in the downtown and at Valor Acres.

Mr. Van Nort said last month we had a brief presentation from Kevin DiGeronimo on Valor Acres. They are finishing up demolition and asbestos remediation, next month the smoke stack is scheduled to come down. The committee also heard from Joe Balog of the Dalad Group. They own the property to the west of Valor Acres and along 77, as well as a small piece along the north making an "L" shape. Mr. Van Nort said the initial thoughts of the Dalad Group are to possibly put a gas station right by the highway and some residential along the north property. They would like to work with the City and the DiGeronimo Company in developing the sites cohesively.

Mr. Van Nort told those in attendance, at the last meeting we briefly heard about Central School and the zoning that is currently there. We discussed a few possibilities for retaining a portion of the building versus demolishing the whole thing once the City takes possession of the building. The first thing that will be done is a study to determine the condition of the structure.

Mr. Van Nort said the committee ended its last meeting with a pretty lengthy question and answer, and opinion session. He said tonight we can rehash some of those opinions and discuss them a little further and at the end of the meeting we have a survey that we would like the committee members to take. This survey is just to get a general idea from the committee about how they feel on a few initial topics. The committee will be meeting again on October 9th and we will discuss the results. A committee member asked if it would be appropriate to take the survey home to ask others how they feel. Mr. Nort said you can ask your neighbors, there is also a place on the survey to fill things in too and write in your own comments. By not giving the survey to others does not mean that they do not have an opinion. This survey was just kind of to see where the committee members stand right now, some initial thoughts to help lead discussions. Also, we have a lot of people in attendance and that is a lot of people throwing out ideas at once. So we do encourage you to talk to your neighbors and bring those ideas back.

At this time Mr. Van Nort opened it up to the committee to discuss Valor Acres. He asked the committees feelings on all office space, or hotel or a gas station. A resident asked who would take the lead on the Miller Road interchange project. Mr. Van Nort said the City made an application to TRAC and they were scored very highly and it is likely ODOT will fund the project. The City of Brecksville will be in charge of the design process and ODOT will be in charge of construction.

A resident said she was not able to attend the last meeting, but she would like to encourage everyone to be open to the idea of proposals that do not require all or any of the Central School building to be saved. She believes developers should have the option to come in and propose what they would do with the property as a clean slate. She said she understands the attachment people have to the building, but the kind of development people are looking for may not happen if the City requires some or all of the building to remain. Mr. Van Nort said he agrees also, the City would like to guide the developer in a general direction because we don't want a bowling alley or a night club. Councilperson Carouse said Valor Acres was zoned office laboratory, it was not zoned retail. A few years ago the voter approved an overlay to that property. This overlay allows for other things to be considered besides just office laboratory. These things would have to go before the Planning Commission and Council in order to be approved. Regarding the Central School property, the discussion we would like to have here is what the Planning Commission and Council should present to the voter on how this property will be zoned. He said to the resident regarding making restrictions to a developer, we wouldn't do that, we would hear what the developer had to say.

A resident said since we are now discussing Central School, his understanding is that the City will also be acquiring the property at the bottom of Stadium Drive, he said the City should be looking at this as a big picture and a combined effort since it is less than a quarter mile away. He said the second thing he would like to bring up is he does not know how much the baseball diamonds behind City Hall are used, and it is his understanding with the project up at Blossom they will be used less, he would like to know what the plan for them are. Council President Mike Harwood said no, the diamonds behind City Hall will not be used less, they will continue

to be needed and used. Councilperson Carouse explained that the City will still have commitments to keep the Stadium Drive property a field usable by the School District. By the City owning the property we can put investments into the property to make it more usable for recreation purposes.

A resident switched back to discussing Valor Acres and said the way he sees it is that the VA is not being built for the residents of Brecksville. It is to attract people from surrounding areas and business in the south end. For example they want restaurants but at 5:00 most of those businesses are closed and he does not believe there are enough residents in the City to support those restaurants staying afloat. We will have to attract people from other areas. He also said the residents said they don't want entertainment and loud clubs but if we put a hotel in there they will have entertainment and they will have a bar and large rooms for weddings. Councilperson Carouse said your point is well taken, however, it is not planned on being a destination location. The amount of retail and restaurants are going to be minimal.

A resident said in a drawing he saw about Valor Acres, there was a building planned for the corner of Parkview and Brecksville Road and what looks like an exit on either side of the building. He said he lives three doors down from that corner and a building there will make it virtually impossible to get in and out of Parkview and if a traffic light goes in it will make the congestion even worse. He said a main reason they moved here was because Brecksville is not a bustling city and this is going to make it busy. He suggested only having entrances and egresses on Miller Road or further down Brecksville Road by Lubrizol. Councilperson Carouse explained the drawing the resident saw was purely conceptual, any of the concerns he had would be addressed during Planning Commission once a building had been proposed. The resident asked how to become involved in voicing opinions when the time is right. Council President Harwood said it is good that the resident is here voicing his opinion and bringing this subject up and also told the resident that if there were to ever be a building proposed in that area the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning will send out letters to any effected resident. Those meetings are public. The proposed building would have to come in front of Planning and Council President Harwood is on that Commission, and if any variances are needed it would go in front of BZA which Councilperson Rose is on that Commission, both of which are here this evening and hearing your concerns. Councilperson Rose said the agendas for both Boards are on the website. He said Planning and Zoning take the neighbors thoughts and concerns into their decisions. He informed the resident there will be plenty of notice, and to keep an eye out on the agendas and announcements via the website and e-mails. Chairman Van Nort said he spoke with Kevin at the end of the last meeting, he is looking at beginning his submittals to the City sometime in March.

A resident stated that the business district in the south end is very piecemealed together. She would like to know if Valor Acres will be a piece by piece development or if there is one design and planning firm for this development. Council President Harwood said there is one design firm for the whole development, there will be a master plan done for the site, but the development is phased into at least two to three phases. For example the first phase will be the phase closest to Miller Road. Mr. DiGeronimo was being very honest with everyone about the

remaining phases, until they have their partners or interested companies, that overall lay out could change. However, there will still only be one design firm for all phases. The Dalad property is also trying to incorporate development of their property at the same time to try and encourage cohesiveness in design. Mr. DiGeronimo has indicated that the design company will be retained for all phases. A few residents asked who the design firm was. Council President Harwood said he will collect the information and let everyone know at the next meeting.

A resident stated that at the last meeting Mayor Hruby suggested that Old Town formulate a group. They did so and met for the first time before this meeting. They discussed what they wanted in downtown. She would like to just state what was said at the meeting. We do not want apartments or condos. We would like to create a historic single family home area. Sue did a lot of research and has pictures of folk Victorian homes that they envision in this area. Housing developments show a strong sense of place. They suggest doing the whole property in homes, however, if people vote to keep the main section of the school, we suggest an arboretum, venue for auctions, fundraisers, new Center for the Arts, add cooking classes, art classes, and dance classes. Chairman Van Nort said hopefully at the next meeting or so we can have something set up to see what R8-A lots would look like on that site, and how many houses could fit. If there are businesses along 82, he envisions more specialty shops, like boutiques.

A resident asked if the zoning will need to be changed if the building is all raised to put single family homes there. Chairman Van Nort said right now the property is zoned Community Facilities, so yes, ultimately the voter will have to agree to an overlay agreement or zoning change. Councilman Carouse said that is ultimately what we are trying to figure out here in this group, we want to see what should be recommended to the voter and what uses would be included in that recommendation. The resident asked what R8-A means. Council President Harwood explained R8-A gives you building dimensions on a plot, rear yard, front yard setback, etcetera, and must be single family detached, it also determines density. Chairman Van Nort said R8 it's self could be semi attached.

A resident asked if the property with a house on it is part of the deal with the City. Council President Harwood said no, it is not. Some people refer to it as the Comstock property.

A resident stated that if we are to put houses along 82 the City should be very picky about the style that is built there. They should match the style of Old Town, not modern with the garage in the front or the first thing you see. This space will be a focal point as people drive into town and they should represent Brecksville. Councilman Carouse said there is currently a design criteria for Old Town. Council President Harwood said it is like an Architectural Review Board, the house that is in the back, not the one under construction now, went to that board and they approved their architectural style.

A resident asked if houses are approved to be built on this property, will it be a complete planned development, not house by house. She said if it was a planned development you could have more control over what goes there and what style. She said she read the draft master plan, but only focused on things that had to do with the Central School/Downtown area. She

said it sounded like people want a nice entry way into Brecksville, and we have done that with the trees, and the flag on Highland and 82. Council President Harwood agreed that a plan development works better for this type of project and does allow more control, it will have to be put before the voter to decide what goes in there.

A resident asked if there has been discussions on putting an exit ramp directly on the property of Valor Acres. Council President Harwood said there is discussions of ramps now. Currently, 77 is part of the package that is being widened through ODOT, not through the City. He said the Valor Acres property does not go to 77, the Dalad property is between them. The resident asked if Parkview goes all the way through the Valor Acres property. Council President Harwood said actually the Dalad property has a strip that runs along the north end of the Valor Acres property that is zoned residential currently, you could call it a buffer.

A resident brought up one entrance to Old Town again, and another resident said no. Chairman Van Nort said it does not sound like everyone agrees with you, he said he understands his concerns. Another resident said she understands it is a pain, but even with the school no longer there, two accesses are still need. She said it will add ten minutes onto the trip if you live in that neighborhood. Also, no speed bumps.

A resident said she is getting confused, and asked for clarification. She said at the last meeting it sounded like what the zoning was for Central School was so pivotal because the businesses that are already downtown could start adding apartments up above them. Council President Harwood said no, it does not rezone the business properties, only the Central School property. Chairman Van Nort said he believes what she is referring to is the last meeting they discussed if the City gives it an overlay district and you put townhomes in, Old Town could have an argument of allowing attached multifamily homes, and that is something the residents mentioned not wanting. Council President Harwood said nothing is ready for the ballot yet. We need to wait till the property is taken over, studies and tests are done, and a development plan is done. The resident said so all of this is premature. Council President Harwood responded yes, nothing is confirmed or being presented. This is to get ideas of what people would like to see in this space. Chairman Van Nort said we are trying to get a handle on the subject now so discussions are not arising in April for the May ballot. This will give us time to discuss and think what is best for our area. Council President Harwood reiterated the only property being rezoned by voters would be the Central School property. Council wants to know and learn what the residents want so when developers come in to present their thoughts for the property, we already know what you as a resident is looking for. This information and feedback you are giving is very important. There was a gentleman at the last meeting that stated the City could just use the code to stop development, and that could not be further from the truth. He said if there was a land attorney in the room he would tell you the same thing. There have been Land Attorneys who have sued the City and the City has lost. If a developer owns a piece of property, they have the right to develop it to our code. Again, Council is trying to get the information from the residents so when a developer comes we know what the people want to see and can go with a developer that has the same vision as the residents. He said again, that step is a while off.

A resident asked if they could walk through the steps to get a rezoning on the ballot so everyone can understand. Council President Harwood said historically it has been approached by a developer coming in and saying are you for a development like this and then it is sole put on the ballot by those people. He also said by the time Planning Commission and Council come out in favor of or passing something is when the voter has already approved the issue on the ballot. Council person Carouse said they can also, through the Planning Commission and public opinion, request Council to pass putting an issue on the ballot, it can also be done that way. Council President Harwood wanted to clarify Council is not approving a development, they would be approving putting an issue, in this case rezoning of Central School, on the ballot to be decided on by the voter. Councilperson Rose said what is important here is that for both Central School and Valor Acres, the City is the property owner. If the school had decided to try to sell it to a developer, that developer could have said we are going to put on the ballot to build all town houses there, and all they would need is signatures to get it on the ballot. That can't happen because the owner is the City. He said the only way it will get an approved zoning change on the ballot is through the recommendations and approval of the voter. Councilperson Carouse said that was the intention of the City on obtaining Central School, to have control of the development.

A resident said he is an immigrant and moved to the City about ten years ago. He said he is fascinated with the City and finds Brecksville to be the pinnacle of the American experience. It is very hard for him to find anything out of place in this town. He said frankly he is finding it hard to say what could make an almost perfect city better. He asked, as we think about the path forward, what exactly is it that we are looking to approve upon. He said is it that we want young families, vibrancy in our retail, multi-family units, sales tax, white collar highway jobs, do we want entrepreneurs, startup companies, maker spaces where people come and tinker with things and create. He said he is just curious because all those would make our community better but lead down different paths or lend itself to focus on different things. Chairman Van Nort said that is what this committee is trying to do. We are trying to decide and have those conversations about what path we want. For example we know through discussions, and it is what Kevin is doing, we want to see higher end retail at Valor Acres and a nice five star hotel. Our houses go on the market and fly off so do we have room in the City for another housing development. This is all what we are trying to do here.

A resident recommended everyone read the draft Master Plan, she said it will address a lot of what we are discussing her and what people are looking for. She thought it was great.

A resident asked if we could zone the Central School property in different ways, for example housing in the back and community space in the front. Council President Harwood said there are different ways to do that through an over lay, but it is one piece of property.

A resident asked for clarification on when the City would sell the property to a developer. Chairman Van Nort said the City would not sell the property till after the rezoning and after it was developed. Councilperson Carouse said for example where Heinen's is was zoned

residential. The City put it on the ballot to turn it into the retail it is today, but only with a site development plan. We did not put it on the ballot for retail with the thought that anything could be built there. We did that to protect the City. We are looking at the same thing here. Council President Harwood said we are trying to find the best possible thing for Brecksville. The misrepresentation of facts has been amazing. For example the e-mail he received about a bank closing and turning into a marijuana store. By our code, that could never happen. What people publish without the correct information or without asking has been outrageous. We are hoping to clarify these and inform the residents while hearing what they would like to see or envision for our City.

A resident asked if the City envisioned the cluster homes being built on Snowville as they are now when the City put it on the ballot to rezone that. Council President Harwood said they came to the City with a concept, that concept was for empty-nester type homes. The resident said is that working out though, aren't all the homes over \$600,000.00. Council President Harwood said he doesn't think they are that much, but he knows that they are going to begin the second phase already and they are selling very quickly. Councilperson Carouse said an interesting thing happens when developing and building your own home, for example across from St. Basil was supposed to start in the \$175, but after all the add-ons to make your home bigger and better the price goes up. The price going up is due to the individuals wanting extras in their homes, and the market driving that, not the developers cost.

A resident thanked the committee for holding these meetings, and she knows people are busy but suggested that as people are coming in and out of these meetings to maybe have visual aids or meeting minutes so we are not doubling up on discussions. She was informed that the minutes from the meetings are and will be posted on the website.

A resident said that she has little kids at home and what happens at Valor acres is very important to her because right now she spends all her money in Macedonia and Fairlawn because there are no shops here. She said if you want money to stay here you are going to have to build gas stations, you are going to have to build restaurants and you are going to have to build some kind of retail where young families can run and pick up things for their kids. Councilperson Carouse said there is a lot of shopping around Brecksville. She said she loves living in Brecksville but would like some modern conveniences. Councilperson Carouse said the City does not make any sales tax money, the only money the City sees from retail is income taxes from employees.

A resident said that people should be paying attention because there has been TIF funding that has taken money away from the schools. Council President Harwood said that is not true at all. She said it is part of the development funding devise which most big developments use but the amount that is used for the TIF funding which then capped the amounts that then goes to the schools.

Council President Harwood said back to the woman in the back, he asked if she was here when DiGeronimo presented last meeting, and she said yes. She said when he talked about retail it

was music to her ears, she was very excited. She understands the resistance to change but a little change would be nice. Councilperson Carouse said that the lack of box retail is by design, the City does not want the traffic or the nuisances that come along with it.

A resident asked to go back to the TIF funding discussion. She said that advertisement for Valor Acres says that TIF funding has been approved. Council President Harwood said that is not true, Council approved CONSIDERING TIF funding, nothing has been approved or agreed to. Councilperson Carouse said DiGeronimo needs that agreement to consider to market that property when they are talking to potential companies.

A resident asked if the TIF has to go in front of the voter. Councilperson Carouse said no, what TIF is is it deals with property tax, it sets a value on the property now and the increment part sets a value on what the property would be worth developed. That additional revenue is what can be allocated to make additional improvements. Councilperson Rose said there will be no development without a TIF agreement. Independence has 35-40 TIF agreements, Strongsville has a hundred, and Broadview Heights has them. Council is going so slow because our community has never had one so we are taking our time to learn about them, but the reality is there is no large scale development without some sort of TIF. Council President Harwood said there have been a few public meetings where the attorneys who are assisting in making recommendations for a TIF have presented on the different types of TIFs and what would be best for our community but there has not been a final presentation or agreement. A resident asked what committee this goes through. Council President Harwood said it goes through the Council Committee of the Whole.

A resident said concerning the Highland School property and the Chippewa School property, that because these two locations are most likely going to be developed residential, we should really concern any economic growth in the City with the two locations of Valor Acres and Central School.

A resident asked if the City owns Valor Acres or the developer. Council President Harwood responded the City owns the property.

Chairman Van Nort instructed the committee that the survey needed to be completed tonight and turned in so that we can discuss the results at the next meeting. The surveys were then passed out to the committee members and the meeting ended.