

Amberley Village
Long-Range Planning Committee
2010-11

Report and Recommendations to Council

April 11, 2011

Executive Summary

Drawing on and elaborating the work of several previous committees, the Long-Range Planning Committee that met in 2010-11 focused exclusively on economic development, specifically at the North Site and Amberley Green, both of which are owned by the Village. Undertaking this study in a spirit of optimism about the Village and its potential, the Committee brought awareness of emerging trends in the areas of urban planning to the project. Together, the North Site and Amberley Green represent tremendous opportunity for Amberley to generate needed revenue while also raising its profile and enhancing residents' quality of life.

Committee members were:

Jon Chaiken (Chair)

Peg Conway

Chuck Kamine

Bill Lennard

Andy Radin

Scott Wolf

Andy Young

Jim Rulli, resident and volunteer facilitator

Meetings were conducted from September 2010 to March 2011 and included substantial input from community planning resources. A number of residents also participated in Committee meetings. Before finalizing this report to Council, the Committee held a public meeting to present recommendations to the public and to solicit comment which has been incorporated.

This report provides background on both properties and the previous work of planning that has been conducted, describes the LRPC/2010-11's process and outlines its recommendations for both the North Site and the Amberley Green.

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I. Background and Site Descriptions

A Long-Range Planning Committee was established in 1997 by Amberley Village Ordinance 33.04. With the Vice Mayor serving as Chairperson and subject to approval by Council, the Committee is made up of six additional members consisting of the immediate past Mayor of Council, one current member of Council, and at least four residents of the Village.

The Committee's general purpose is make recommendations to Council for action in the areas of land development, inter-governmental issues, financial management, ordinances review, communications, personnel, schooling, recreation, and any other areas pertaining to long-range planning for the Village.

In 2008-09, under the LRPC chaired by then-Vice-Mayor Merrie Stillpass, a Vision Plan was adopted that established a framework of sustainable goals, objectives and strategies based on three primary pillars: Environment, Economy, and Community. The three Pillars were intended to work in concert with one another as guides for decision making that would add value to Amberley as a whole. (See Appendix A.)

Since that time, financial issues facing the Village, especially deficit budgets, have grown in significance as the larger economic downturn progressed around the country. Additionally, the Amberley Green is financed through short-term notes; to secure long-term financing requires a clearer vision for the property's future. Recognition of these realities provided important context for the work of the present LRPC when it was convened by Vice Mayor Jon Chaiken in the fall of 2010. Focusing on the Vision Plan's Economy pillar in light of the Plan overall, the Committee developed its recommendations for the North Site and Amberley Green.

North Site

Formerly the Amberley Swim Club, the North Site is a Village-owned 27-acre parcel just north of the Ronald Reagan Highway on the west side of Ridge Road. It is considered to be a prime economic development opportunity because of its central location in the region and highway visibility. Current zoning is Residence B (half-acre lots). Access may be an issue for some users. The Village's maintenance facility is on a portion of the site and could be relocated if necessary, which is a consideration for evaluating development options. Economic conditions slowed efforts to develop this property. The most recent LRPC's work has reinvigorated the Village's approach to this piece of land.

Amberley Green

Amberley acquired the former Crest Hills Country Club, located at the southwest corner of Ridge and Galbraith Roads, in the fall of 2008, settling a disagreement between the previous owner and the Village as to the best and most appropriate use for the 133-acre site. This unique property is a key parcel in the Midwest because of its size, beauty and location.

In the course of legal proceedings, it was re-zoned Residence A (one-acre lots). Soon after purchase, it was renamed "Amberley Green," and attention was turned to determining its future use. To that end, a 16-member Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) was established in March 2009, to be chaired by Scott Wolf, a resident and member of the Village Planning Commission/Board of Zoning Appeals. Despite the economic climate, over the next nine months the group reviewed a litany of options, ideas, financing constraints and proposals. At the conclusion of their process, they submitted 10 recommendations to Council. (See Appendix B.)

II. Process

On September 1, 2010, the Long Range Planning Committee convened to continue the discussion and refinement of possible options for Amberley Green property and the North Site. The CAC report, the 2009-10 LRPC Vision Plan, and reports previously commissioned by the Village were distributed to Committee members. They provided a baseline of information to facilitate the work of the current LRPC as well as to spur new ideas yet to be considered by this group.

Several meetings were held throughout the fall and winter of 2010-11. The work of the Committee was supplemented by a fall-quarter University of Cincinnati Site Planning Studio and Seminar and a World Town Planning Day Charrette held on November 10, 2010. The research and ideas generated by these outside groups were presented to the LRPC for their use and consideration. Resident Jim Rulli donated his professional services to assist with meeting preparation and facilitation.

Brainstorming and Visioning

The LRPC reviewed the recommendations made in the CAC's Final Report, and the group participated in a "red-light/yellow-light/green-light" exercise that sorted out ideas that were no longer to be considered from ones that would remain under consideration for Amberley Green.

Ideas rated as "red-light" were the Amberley Green as park, an 18-hole golf course or 90 one-acre lots for residences. They were determined to be fiscally impractical which was corroborated by the CAC's recommendations. Further discussion included reusing the former clubhouse and maintaining it at a minimum level for now to prevent potential water and mold problems.

The "green-light" was given to the concept of mixed land uses on the site. A corporate campus with an institutional, corporate or research facility/office user would help generate revenue, keep open space and park land, and could possibly have residential, agricultural and culinary uses.

The types of possible land uses that could work with one another as "mixed-use" components of the Amberley Green property were generated by Committee members in a brainstorming session and are listed below:

- Agriculture
- Restaurant
- Educational
- Conference/Event Center
- Lifestyle
- Bakery/Coffee Shop
- Small Commercial Campus
- Park as a percentage of the property
- Energy Generation

- Arboretum
- Sculpture Park
- City Center

To further develop their ideas, Committee members researched and brought visual images from magazines, the internet, or other sources to illustrate concepts, which helped to further refine the list of land uses. The list of potential land uses was consolidated into four major development components:

- Agricultural – e.g., organic local food/community based
- Institutional campus - ideally a health related research or office facility employing high-salaried professionals
- Residential
- Town Square/Civic Space – including restaurant/coffee shop meeting area, perhaps an amphitheater and the current building as an event center

Along with these specific land use components, the importance of preserving and protecting environmental features at Amberley Green was discussed. These might include views from particular locations on the site, stands of trees, topography, etc. Additionally, the desire to create connectivity within the site and to existing neighborhoods was emphasized.

In regards to the North Site, previous studies, including documents outlining site accessibility issues, market research and discussions with developers, were reviewed. Residential and high traffic volume commercial developments were given the “red-light” and not recommended.

It was suggested further that discussion occur to work with Reading to create a Joint Economic Development District (JEDD) and marketing strategy. The “green-light” was given to post a For Lease or Sale sign (by owner) or hire a commercial broker to market the site to a high-end office developer.

Consultation with Outside Resources

UC

Juliana Sarmiento, adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati’s College of Design Architecture Art and Planning, used Amberley Green for her fall-quarter Site Planning Seminar and Studio analysis. Through a series of assessments and working with the four land use concepts, plus considering green space and connectivity, the students prepared maps, graphics, text, and examples of their findings along with a suitability analysis and master plan document for review. The UC Studio and Seminar presentation was held on campus December 10, 2010. The data analysis and materials were given to the LRPC and Amberley Village for their use.

WTPD

Amberley Village hosted American Planning Association’s Ohio-Cincinnati Section World Town Planning Day 2010 on November 10. Coordinated by Todd Kinskey and

his staff at Hamilton County Regional Planning, more than 90 professional planners, students, local officials and residents looked at sites around Amberley that included Amberley Green, North Site, and the vacant Losantiville School property. The concept of connectivity also was explored.

Charrette participants were assigned to working groups based on professional skill, knowledge and area of interest with the goal of having multi-disciplinary teams. The event is intended to encourage creativity and thinking "outside the box" while balancing suggestions with sound planning principles. The UC student analysis work was instrumental in providing base information for WTPD groups about Amberley Village and especially the groups working on Amberley Green.

The all-day event concluded with a presentation by each team of their ideas to community leaders in Council chambers. The documents and final report are posted on the website:

<http://www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov/hcrpc/wtpd/Amberley%202010/WTPD%20Final%20Document.pdf>

Two separate groups at WTPD worked independently on the Amberley Green site, applying the same land use concepts and underlying themes as the UC students. Both groups focused on sustainable plans and aligned their recommendations for Access, Agriculture and Institutions to the Community, Environment and Economy Pillars of the Vision Plan. They envisioned Amberley Village as a leader of sustainable policies and environmental conservation in the region with a research institute exploring the possibilities of cutting edge environmental technologies, building practices, partnering with academic institutions, creating new revenue streams and increasing connectivity.

The WTPD group assigned to the North Site created a phased plan intended to achieve income for Amberley Village. They recommended developing the North Site so that it will showcase the Village as a sustainability-driven community. The previously inaccessible area should be made reachable to the community members. The developments built on the site should give both residents and commuters a reason to visit the site and invest in their local economy. Through the use of phasing, these results can be achieved even in a slow economy. Potential funding sources were also discussed.

The WTPD group examining connectivity throughout the built environment looked for opportunities to create Village-wide connections to recreational amenities and Village centers to enhance social opportunities, interaction with nature, health and safety and environmental stewardship. Connectivity increases the quality of life by creating safe transportation choices other than the automobile which are attractive to young families, active seniors, and anyone concerned about healthy living and enjoying their community through physical activity. Connectivity also advances competitive status relative to other communities.

Refinement

The work of the UC students and the WTPD groups affirmed the Committee's overall vision for both sites and identified particular attributes and limitations useful to further planning. The Committee met several more times to discuss the reports and formulate its recommendations.

A public meeting was held on March 2, 2011, at Adath Israel, at which the Committee presented its recommendations in a slide presentation and engaged in discussion with residents. More than 150 people attended the public meeting. Varied concerns were expressed, along with general support of the plan. The Committee met another time to review the March 2 notes and to fine-tune the recommendations on the basis of resident comments.

III. Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations consist of general items that apply to the development of both properties, and these are described first. They are followed by specific recommendations for each site reflecting the intent of enhancing the Village's economic base as indicated in the LRPC 2008-09 Objectives and Strategies matrix for the Economy pillar, in concert with maintaining the Environment and Community pillars.

General Recommendations Applicable to Both Sites

1. Zoning

It was noted that both the North Site and Amberley Green locations likely will require a change in zoning, which will involve the Planning Commission and require public education. Other discussion included the timing of zoning changes for both properties, ideas about what "development ready" might mean or include, and the possibility of a Planned Unit Development overlay that would provide a loose framework. The LRPC recommends that professional assistance be engaged to explore rezoning options.

2. Organizational Infrastructure

Additionally, the awareness emerged that new organizational infrastructure would be needed to support moving forward with economic development on these two sites, and creation of a non-profit development corporation was discussed. The LRPC recommends that professional assistance be engaged to investigate the creation of a non-profit development corporation.

3. Ecological Principles

The Committee's specific recommendations stem from strong commitment to the Vision Plan created by the previous LRPC. On the basis of Amberley's Vision Plan, two key principles that reflect the Environment and Community pillars should form the basis of any proposal to development of both the Amberley Green and the North Site:

- *Sustainability* refers to the use of strategies, practices and design elements in the areas of hydrology, vegetation, materials and health and well-being that contribute to or maintain ecological balance.
- *Connectivity* provides environmentally friendly options for circulation on the site and where possible, connects to existing neighborhood destinations. The ability to travel safely on foot or by bicycle within a park-like environment is desired.

4. Financial Parameters

Current estimates indicate that annual revenue of at least \$450,000 total needs to be generated from development at the Amberley Green and North Site. The LRPC recommends that detailed financial projections be conducted as part of the evaluation of any proposals for development at these sites.

5. Public Input

The public meeting on March 2 indicated strong resident interest in plans for these two properties. The LRPC recommends regular communication and engagement with residents on these matters.

North Site – Specific Recommendations

The LRPC recommends that Council direct the Land Development Committee and the Village Manager to engage the assistance of outside professionals and pursue the leasing/sale of the North Site for development of light industry/office use. Specific steps should include:

- Interviewing several brokers to understand what is needed to make the property most competitive for leasing to a developer (e.g. traffic, electrical upgrades).
- Preparing descriptive materials to promote the property.

Amberley Green – Specific Recommendations

The LRPC recommends a mixed-use development at the Amberley Green encompassing four concept categories that will maximize economic benefit to the Village while also providing value to residents. Only a leading-edge, well-integrated development is worthy of this unique site.

The varied concepts of the Committee’s recommendations stem from a single, holistic vision of health – fiscal, personal, communal, and environmental. It is assumed that the Village would retain ownership control of the property as it is developed.

The Committee recommends that Council and the Village Manager pursue development options incorporating the following four concept categories.

Institutional/corporate – Envisioned as a high-revenue-generating entity such as a health care/research/educational facility or a corporate office, this aspect of the recommended development plan is foundational to the other concept categories. Amberley Green’s beauty, location and size represent a unique opportunity for the right user. A national search should be undertaken to identify potential tenants. Evaluation of proposals should include a traffic study to gauge impact on nearby residents.

Agricultural – The movement toward regional food economies is gaining momentum nationwide, and Amberley Green offers tremendous potential to capitalize on this trend to the benefit of the Village. This concept category could begin with vegetable gardens/farmer’s market but also offers the possibility of expansion to include partnerships with food service businesses, as well as educational and other entities, to create a multi-faceted operation, depending on how the institutional concept category is developed. Basic agriculture is a flexible use relative to other uses and therefore can be pursued immediately. This concept also supports the civic/community category. The soil condition is an area of concern, given its prior use as a golf course. Appendix E contains the results of a soil study conducted on the property in 2011.

Community/civic/green space -- Areas and/or facilities in which the community may gather should be included in any development plans. Since they may be stand-alone or integrated with the other categories and may be publicly or privately owned, this concept category is the most flexible of the four. Cultural or educational programs could be part of this category, and it should be incorporated with the emphasis on connectivity.

Residential – Compact housing styles that would appeal to mixed-demographic groups are envisioned. Application of the sustainability principle in regards to building materials and other environmental considerations, as well as connectivity, should be emphasized. This concept category needs to follow after the institutional/corporate category is fulfilled.

Long Range Planning Committee
 March 2, 2011
 Public Input

	Resident	Comment
1.	Ron Levin	Part of original group that didn't want development What is to keep AV from getting into legal problems like before is a concern Encourages connectivity
2.	Willard Vaughn	Resident 4 years. Told there'd never be sidewalks. Avid walker What is change in attitude—likes direction
3.	Brenda Schonfield	Feasibility of windfarm? Interested in topic
4.	Charles Fixler	Ridge Rd. between 4 & 6 traffic problem No mention of traffic @ AG site already problem
5.	Ray Warren	AG interest 150,000/yr. Long term loan \$400,000/yr. Would proposals cover carrying costs? Ground analysis for chemicals? Why is there a need to rezone now, wait for developer
6.	Diane Levine	N. Site more valuable—should do this 1 st (applause)
7.	Tracy McMullen	Infrastructure and services on AG costly Level of surety that development will cover expenses
8.	Don Hordes	Missing small tasteful commerce area in AV. Maybe wine & cheese type shops; pro connectivity
9.	Louis Wolf	Albert Lane's letter—what did he suggest?
10.	Dave Phillips	Neighbors leaving AV—downsizing; include senior housing in plan
11.	Tom Brown	Access at N. Site RFP/RFQ—package to select developers. Let market dictate what should go there
12.	Kathy Wise	Commendation to all who worked on this –dreaming big! Keep most sustainable & long-term well being Residents willing to pay increased taxes to keep green Nature learning center idea Include riding barn
13.	Robert Maltz	Idea of world class research facility—why not at edge of Village?
14.	Miriam Bernstein	Count the number of people who are not living here because they moved to Blue Ash. Would like to have seen AG developed for residential
15.	Nancy Goldstein	Has had water problems from AG Pay special attention to water flow Meisner had a good plan Pro golf course
16.	Karry Lipps	Concern about traffic House close to street
17.	Bonnie Burke	Fought hard for property Long term solution: look how many buildings are vacant Retain control over land? Do it at N. Site Would like sidewalks on main roads

		Keep AG green Why did you move to AG Pro sidewalks; pro senior housing
18	Tom Neuman	Attended many meetings—impressed by concern for control. AV would control each phase Did good job with concepts, needs tweaking
19	Jack Rubenstein	Concurs with Tom AV 1 acre zoning AV controls what someone would build Conceptually presentation good, optimistic Has anyone talked with real estate expert? When would this occur?
20	Mike Prager	Financial projections, including tax abatements, would be helpful "tool box" ? Timing?
21	Wendy Saunders	So impressed with thought out, well balanced presentation Did a lot of research
22	Ronna Willis	Heard a lot of concerns about common space. Will residents be able to have input with plans?
23	Brenda Schonfield	Been to all "these" meetings Committed to saving green space Previous cost of housing in plan--\$500K/new house; sell old house for \$200K
24	Karen Friedman	Looked at number of homes for sale in AV—39 listed with agents Moved here for green space
25	Tracy McMullen	Has idea—how do I submit it?
26	Bill Doering	Wanted info on UC studies
27	Mike Thompson	Huge turnout, great job LRPC coming to an end Framework—concrete proposals Public input—time horizons? Advertise zoning meetings (include case detail)
28	Ronna Willis	Better job at re-stating residents want to be involved and part of the process
29	Scott Lipps	House between the 2 development sites close to street
30	Albert Lane	SEE SEPARATE NOTES