

**STUDY SESSION**  
**Comprehensive Plan Update**  
CITY HALL, Fifth Floor  
6801 Delmar Blvd., University City, Missouri 63130  
**Monday, July 10, 2023**  
**5:30 p.m.**

**AGENDA**

**1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

At the Study Session of the City Council of University City held on Monday, July 10, 2023, Mayor Terry Crow, called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

In addition to the Mayor, the following members of Council were present:

Councilmember Stacy Clay  
Councilmember Aleta Klein  
Councilmember Steven McMahon  
Councilmember Jeffrey Hales  
Councilmember Bwayne Smotherson  
Councilmember Dennis Fuller

Also in attendance were City Manager, Gregory Rose; City Attorney, John F. Mulligan, Jr.; Sarah Kelly of Planning Next; Peggy Holly, Chuck Gascon, Patricia McQueen, and Ellen Hartz of the Planning Commission.

**2. CHANGES TO THE REGULAR AGENDA**

Mr. Rose requested that Item K (2); U. City in Bloom Agreement, be moved from the Consent Agenda to the City Manager's Report.

**3. COMPREHENSION PLAN UPDATE**

Mr. Rose stated for several months the Planning Commission, consultants, and staff, have been working to update the Comprehensive Plan. Council received an update on the activities regarding the plan and is being asked to receive a second update tonight.

Ms. Kelly, of Planning Next, stated her firm has been honored to work closely with the Planning Commission and staff on the Comprehensive Plan process. She stated they are at a very exciting moment in the process where they are about to launch their second round of public engagement and move forward with drafting the plan document. The presentation was then turned over to Ms. Holly.

Ms. Holly stated she has had the honor of chairing the Planning Commission on this magnificent journey and phenomenal learning experience that every Commissioner has been involved in, starting with the Visioning process in 2022.

She stated the first thing they heard from the community was that they were very proud of their community. They are enthusiastic and love living here. However, what they also heard was that the City's history has left their community with two significant issues that need to be addressed in this Plan.

**1. Historic discriminatory practices in housing and real estate**

- University City is home to just over miles of the Delmar divide. The legacy of this history shows up throughout the City with significant differences in its demographics as you move from north to south. These historic practices have created significant barriers to equity of mobility.

## 2. Flood Prone areas from the River des Peres and Engelholm Creek

- Over decades the City has permitted development, both residential and commercial in these areas
- This resulted in residents and businesses being closer to the water and flatlands subject to flash flooding
- Increased impermeable surfaces unable to absorb the surges that occur with flash floods
- Lower assessed property values for owners that are the least able to afford the impacts of flood damage

Ms. Holly stated while these are not the only things the Plan will address, they do represent two of the biggest issues heard consistently from the community.

Using that as a foundation, Ms. Kelly stated what they are trying to do through this Plan is frame it in terms of opportunities to address some of the City's challenges.

### Guiding Ideas

The Comprehensive Plan is an opportunity to:

- Manage a smaller population while improving the quality of life for the community
- Address unequal access to University City's different neighborhoods and improve the diversity of housing choices
- Address impacts of segregation and improve freedom of movement
- Share a vision for the physical environment of flood-prone areas
- Make it easier and safer for people to move through the City without a car
- Improve access to retail, services, and amenities in neighborhoods where they are lacking
- Commit to a long-term strategy for maintaining parks and open spaces
- "Make space for everyone" in a diverse community where everyone is valued
- Define a mutually beneficial and equitable relationship with Washington University
- Build a framework to coordinate with the schools to strengthen our community and make opportunities for youth central a top priority
- Recommit to transparency and cooperation in University City's government

Ms. Kelly stated these were foundational ideas that have developed for the Plan and the specific actions that Chuck will talk about are built on these ideas.

### What We've Heard

#### **From the Community:**

- More than 520 people participated in workshops, online activities, paper surveys, or focus groups
- Overall representation was similar to the City except for people aged 25-34, who were underrepresented; *(a detailed summary can be found on the consultant's website)*
- Most people heard about We Make U City through word of mouth and city communications
- The goals and objectives were generally popular and well-supported
- Respondents like the sentiments of the Vision Statement but do not feel the City is currently living up to that vision
- The Round 1 Summary Memo contains more key takeaways

Ms. Kelly stated that they feel really good about where they are and will continue to spread the word over the next two months.

### **From Council in one-on-one interviews - Flood Prone Areas:**

- The City should take proactive measures
- New development should generally be discouraged in flood-prone areas and open space should be introduced in strategic locations
- Needs vary depending on the location of flooding
- Must address the “other side of the equation” of affordable housing
- Collaboration with MSD is critical
- A chance for community building

### **Housing Vacancies:**

- Start where there is momentum
- Look at other successful models (e.g., Hawthorne School).
- Focus on home ownership and owner occupancy
- Identify opportunities for selected increases in density
- Coordinate with Housing and Third Ward Revitalization Task Force

### **Mixed-Use Areas:**

- Neighborhood activity nodes should be encouraged
- There is a lack of nodes in the Third Ward, but Olive Blvd. can serve a similar function
- Small, lower-cost gestures to improve pedestrian and bicycle access should be pursued
- While some of the Loop’s development is out of City control, some strategic actions can be taken
- Signage and other ways of differentiating areas are needed

Mr. Gascon stated there are two important pieces to think about when interpreting these recommendations because they are still sorting out the best way to organize and communicate all of these goals:

1. They are multi-dimensional action items; some complement one another; some have costs or problems associated with them but will have another action item to offset that issue, and some action items can be applied to some of the other goals.
2. Try to get through all the goals and then step back with the objective of visualizing the total picture.

### **Key Recommendations**

#### **Goal A: Preserve and Enhance Great Places**

Maintain existing character, while encouraging creative development, and building resilient, vibrant places.

### **Key Actions**

1. Update the zoning code to support the implementation of this plan.
2. Remove barriers in the zoning code and specify form-based standards for the development of duplexes, triplexes, and other forms of “*missing middle*” housing.
3. Prioritize City control of vacant parcels when possible. Use the City’s Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) (or a similar mechanism) for acquisition of vacant properties.
4. Promote green reuse strategies for utilizing vacant parcels in partnership with existing organizations and programs (e.g., MSD, Missouri Botanical Garden, and U City in Bloom).
5. Update the Urban Forestry Strategic Plan to include a citywide tree planting plan.



**Vacant lot utilized for a stormwater management**

### **Goal B: Advance Shared Prosperity**

Support and expand a diverse local economy, quality education, and a strong workforce that improves opportunities for all residents.

#### **Key Actions**

1. Promote opportunities to achieve home ownership
2. Focus development energy to create catalyst areas.
3. Pursue targeted development strategies for the International District on Olive to align with the Economic Development Strategy.
4. Partner with entities that can help expand access to credit in historically redlined areas and areas that are still considered "riskier" investments today.
5. Develop a transparent policy for providing municipal incentives such as Tax Abatement and TIF that are consistent with the goals of the comprehensive plan.

### **Goal C: Connect Community**

Invest in community connection to increase mobility options, improve social cohesion, and encourage civic involvement.

#### **Key Actions**

1. Identify low-cost improvements at key locations which are currently unsafe for those getting around without a car.
2. Complete the Centennial Greenway as a fully contiguous trail through University City.
3. Coordinate with MODOT to reconfigure Olive Boulevard to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety.
4. Create a youth involvement initiative to empower University City's youth in conjunction with University City schools, churches, and other community organizations.

### **Goal D: Leverage Assets**

Capitalize on University City's diverse cultural, historical, and physical assets while investing in new amenities.

#### **Key Actions**

1. Modernize and clarify historic preservation objectives and guidelines.
2. Update the University City Parks Master Plan to include a maintenance management plan for parks, prioritizing strategic investment in maintenance, programming, and naturalized spaces.



### Natural play spaces promote sustainability

3. Celebrate the City's history and diversity through parks, historic preservation, and public art.



### A "Cultural Wall" celebrates the city's history and reconnects neighborhoods

#### Goal E: Strengthen Livability

Enhance neighborhoods as the building block of the community and center of day-to-day life and provide community members with a choice in where they live in the City.

#### Key Actions

1. Focus growth around existing neighborhood activity nodes (*areas that already include a mix of commercial and/or mixed-use development*).
2. Promote neighborhood activity nodes in parts of the city where there are not many currently (*including the Third Ward or locations along Olive Blvd. that are accessible from the Third Ward*).
3. Encourage the use of Low Impact Development (LID) strategies to reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality.
4. Take proactive measures to address flood-prone areas and properties impacted by flood inundation.
- 5.



### Low-Impact Development strategies in a roadway median

## Goal F: Improve Collaboration

Prioritize commitment to action through responsive governance and strategic partnerships to realize the community's vision.

### Key Actions

1. Collaborate with neighboring communities to strengthen connections and advance shared development opportunities along borders.
2. Establish a more deliberate partnership with Washington University focused on strategic, mutually beneficial developments and investments in the Loop.
3. Conduct an audit of internal City communications and prepare a strategy for improvements to find an easy way to engage with everyone in the community.
4. Create a forum for regular communication among boards and commissions to address long-term issues that impact multiple boards or commissions.

Absent Wash U's land use decisions their long-term vision about what they view their student body and community to look like is very consistent with U City's view regarding the need for a diverse and vibrant community.

Councilmember Clay stated he thinks a price per square foot delineation would be instructive and give greater clarity when looking at property values for single-family homes.

Mr. Gascon stated they have three or four maps that basically show the same picture, and when plotted by household income you get a map that looks essentially the same as this one. So, price per square foot would be another way to plot it, but basically, they convey the same point that there are pretty stark differences across the community.

Councilmember Clay asked if there was a breakdown by ward of the citizens who participated in the first round of this process? Mr. Gascon stated except for people aged 25-34, who were underrepresented, based on age and income, participants were equally representative of all wards.

Councilmember Smotherson posed the following questions to Mr. Gascon:

**Q. Where in the packet would you be able to find an interpretation of Olive being the City's future commercial retail district and the steady promotion of large and small developments? Because I think these are two very important factors for our future.**

**A.** *The character and land use map; which is in the packet and/or online, illustrates that the western border of Olive has been designated as a commercial activity district consisting of big box retail, and as you move further along Olive the activity nodes are your large and small developments.*

**Q. That seems to be in the around 1-70 and Olive, up to McKnight and Woodson. But there is another large area between McKnight, Woodson, and 82nd Street, that needs to be developed, that does not seem to be illustrated on the map?**

**A.** *The one thing they are still working through is how to tie the Comprehensive Plan to the Economic Development Strategy (EDS). So, in no way is this Plan supposed to replace that strategy, it will be incorporated, and the Plan will have explicit references to the EDS.*

**Q. Another thing I think will be important is connecting the golf course, which is less than half a block from Olive, to the development on Olive.**

**A.** *I think that is starting to show up, but it needs to be explored in more detail.*

Mayor Crow thanked everyone for all of their efforts. He stated he has been on Council a long time and has never seen a Planning Commission that has put in the hours that this Commission has; not just with this Plan, but all of the City's development projects. So, he knows his colleagues would agree that this Commission is doing an incredible job.

Mayor Crow then posed the following questions to Mr. Gascon:

**Q. Can you tell me what strategic actions might be inferred by this statement, "While some of The Loop's developments are out of the City's control, some strategic actions can be taken"?**

**A.** *The way the City's Zoning Code is structured is that each building has certain parking requirements. That could be modified to permit shared parking, remove minimums in some areas, or in other areas, City developments of parking structures. Entry-ways into U City is another one because something interesting they learned is that people don't know where the City's boundaries are.*

**Q. I think the use of limits has always been a confusing issue. Olive being walkable, is not what the State wants, they want traffic to flow fast. So, establishing a partnership with MODOT to reconfigure Olive Boulevard and improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety might be a hard sell. The City has never had a level of interaction with the State regarding walkability that has ever come back with anything other than "This is a major thoroughfare designed to get people in and out".**

**A.** *We are starting to make some progress with understanding what can and cannot be done, and staff should be credited for doing a lot of that legwork. But the other piece of this goes back to the fact that the built environments for U City, and in general, the St. Louis Metropolitan area, were created for a lot more people than we have now. So, when putting this plan together, we thought, "How do we take the land that we have now and make it desirable for the population that we have now"? So, while it is correct that the original design of Olive Blvd was for a major thoroughfare, there are just not that many people coming and going anymore. And we think we can use that to say, "We're not trying to bring in another 30,000 people to double the population, we want to create a built environment on Olive Blvd that the people who are here can live and enjoy". That's the way we have to think about this in the long term.*

**Q. Are we talking about the population or traffic flow on Olive?**

**A.** *U City was built for a population of roughly 60,000. We now know which corridors have a higher traffic flow and which flood-prone areas should not be developed for heavy traffic flows.*

Councilmember McMahon posed the following questions to Mr. Gascon:

**Q. I'm assuming that since Peggy's husband is on the Stormwater Task Force you've probably had some communications with these folks in that regard?**

**A.** *Yes sir. We've presented a preliminary draft plan to the Task Force, as well as all of the Boards and Commissions, and will be meeting with them to get their feedback.*

**Q. I think the studies indicate that U City already has an increased amount of impermeable surfaces that have made it difficult to absorb much of the water received in flash floods. So, what is the plan for discouraging or prohibiting development in flood-prone areas? Because I can envision there being issues when you've got folks that own property in these areas that want to improve its use.**

**A.** *We have a couple of flood maps that don't match up with where some of the flooding has occurred. So, we have layers that kind of determine the different susceptibility, and we're starting to work through a menu of possibilities for how some properties can be mitigated. Maybe it's tied into a tax policy; for example, here are the incentives to get that partnership because it presents positive benefits for the entire community. Or it may be in certain areas that yes, this section is too problematic. So, while there may be some of that, on a Comprehensive Plan level it's really about saying here's the big picture, here's the menu of options for everyone to consider and determine the best path forward.*

Councilmember McMahon thanked Mr. Gascon for his answer which really made a lot of sense and stated you guys make our job easier because you do such good work.

### **Next Steps**

- 1. Round 2 Engagement**
  - Build off the Community Vision 2040 process and Round 1

- Focus on key actions that will be most critical to the Plan
- Provide an opportunity for the community to give input on draft actions and Future Character and Land Use Map
- 2. Revise Actions and Future Character and Land Use Map
- 3. Conduct Commission and Council updates
- 4. Prepare draft plan

#### **Future Schedule**

##### **In-Person Open House**

- July 19, 3 pm-7 pm (drop-in event)

##### **Virtual Open Houses**

- July 25, 12-1 pm
- July 26, 8-9 am
- July 29, 9-1 pm

##### **Online and Paper Surveys**

- July 19-August 21

##### **Road Show**

- Centennial Commons
- Public Library

##### **Various Pop-up Events**

#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Crow stated Council looks forward to working with this team again, as it moves forward in this process, and adjourned the meeting at 6:16 p.m.

LaRette Reese  
City Clerk, MRCC