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Village of Romeo Parking Task Force Meeting

Wednesday, February 25, 2025– 7:00 p.m.

361 Morton Street, Romeo, MI 48065 South Meeting Room

MINUTES

Roll Call: 7:06 p.m.

Present – (DDA) Hutnick, Stevens, Osebold (BOT) Parker

Staff - Kay Pochert, Executive Director

Public - Paul Bowers, Dan Griffin, Betty Cassidy, Sharon Smith

Absent - Lee, Kare, Edwards, Bartholomew

- **Employee Parking Issues:** Employees park in customer areas, blocking access. Proposed permits may regulate this and free up space.
- **Underused Lots Potential:** Churches and organizations can partner for parking agreements. Bailey's lot suggested for employee use, benefiting maintenance funds.
- **Parking Studies Insight:** No severe parking shortage found; it's a management issue. Better signage and navigation systems will guide visitors to open spots.
- **Parking Structure Development:** Proposed two-story structure with 80 spots aims to improve downtown. Collaboration needed for grants and long-term management.
- **Community Attitudes:** Residents prefer small-town feel, causing friction with proposed developments. Businesses desire better parking support for customer attraction.
- **Tactical Improvements:** Small changes like repainting can add 6-10 spots. Temporary lots from demolitions can ease congestion, but are not long-term solutions.

Notes

Downtown Parking Challenges and Employee Parking

Management

The core parking issue in downtown Romeo stems largely from employee parking displacing customer spots, requiring a coordinated management approach.

- **Employee Parking as Primary Concern (01:03)**
 - Employees often park in front of businesses, blocking customer access and causing frustration.

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- A proposed downtown parking management program would introduce permits or stickers for employee vehicles.
- Shared parking treated as a downtown-wide resource, rather than business-assigned, could optimize space use.
- Council and board control over parking would help balance customer access and employee needs.
- **Utilization of Underused Lots and Alternative Parking (04:40)**
 - Churches and other organizations have large parking lots unused during weekdays, presenting opportunities for employee parking agreements.
 - Bailey's parking area behind Main Street could serve as employee parking, requiring employees to walk to work.
 - Such arrangements could raise funds for parking lot maintenance and support a sustainable parking ecosystem.
- **Parking Studies Indicate No Absolute Shortage (06:05)**
 - Historical parking studies have not shown a severe shortage, but rather a management problem.
 - Parking availability fluctuates during the day, with empty lots during some hours and full lots at peak times.
 - Improved signage and parking navigation systems are being developed to direct visitors to available spots.
 - The key issue is employee parking in customer-designated areas, which complicates access.
- **Policing and Enforcement Challenges (14:27)**
 - Enforcement of employee parking restrictions is difficult as police resources are limited.
 - Current ordinances restricting employee parking are either inactive or hard to enforce practically.
 - Business owners are encouraged to self-police employee parking to free up customer spaces.
 - Without enforcement, paid parking or permit systems may have limited impact.

Parking Infrastructure and Redevelopment Opportunities

Long-term parking solutions focus on new parking structures and redevelopment of underutilized properties, but require collaboration and council support.

- **Proposed Parking Structure Development (14:04)**
 - Developer presented a plan for a two-story parking structure with **80 spots** and retail space on Lafayette.
 - The structure would address parking gaps and help revitalize a deteriorated block near Peach Festival.
 - Collaboration with the Village is needed to secure grants and manage the facility long-term.
 - Zoning and planning commission approval would be required, but no rezoning needed if usage fits CBD standards.

- **Potential Redevelopment Sites and Property Consolidation (19:36)**
 - Several candidate sites include the lot behind People's Driven, the Blocks Cleaners area, and the corner near the gas station.
 - Demolition of old buildings could create temporary or permanent parking lots, easing current congestion.
 - Some properties are brownfields, making them eligible for state grants to offset demolition and redevelopment costs.
 - Alley closure could expand parking structure size, but requires village cooperation and possibly property swaps.
- **Historical Attempts and Political Barriers (40:17)**
 - Past redevelopment and parking plans were repeatedly shot down by council or other boards.
 - Longstanding local politics and resistance have stalled progress despite clear need and developer interest.
 - Current village financial constraints limit direct investment, emphasizing the need for private-public partnerships.
 - Developer stressed importance of council buy-in and collaborative mindset to move projects forward.
- **Incremental Redevelopment Approach (31:11)**
 - Suggested tackling redevelopment corridor by corridor for manageable progress.
 - Starting with high-impact areas like Locks Cleaners for temporary parking improvements.
 - Success in initial areas could build momentum and reduce resistance for further development.
 - Integrating historic design elements in new construction is critical to maintain village character.

Operational and Regulatory Considerations

Effective parking solutions depend on clear regulatory processes, collaborations, and realistic operational plans.

- **Planning and Approval Process Clarity (59:53)**
 - Planning commission handles site plan approvals; council involvement is limited unless variances needed.
 - Property vacations and alley closures require council approval.
 - Pre-application meetings with planning board members are recommended to gather feedback early.
 - This process can streamline approvals and reduce risk of outright rejections.
- **Leasing and Enforcement on Private Lots (13:01)**
 - DDA could lease private parking lots to regulate usage, including restricting employee parking.
 - Private lots can post “no employee parking” signs, unlike municipal lots, allowing better control.

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- Enforcement mechanisms remain a challenge without active policing or towing enforcement.
- Paid parking systems require active management and penalties to be effective.
- **Temporary Solutions and Liability Management (01:02:27)**
 - Demolishing obsolete buildings for temporary parking is feasible but requires liability and maintenance agreements.
 - Village leasing lots from owners could transfer liability and enable better oversight.
 - Demolition timelines can be executed quickly but must consider brownfield soil remediation.
 - Temporary parking needs to be balanced with future redevelopment plans to avoid wasted investment.
- **Operational Challenges of One-Way Streets and Parking Ordinances (25:03)**
 - Potential conversion of some streets to one-way could increase parking spaces but requires county and state approval.
 - Current village ordinances may not fully support angle or diagonal parking; amendments may be needed.
 - Enforcement of time limits and parking passes is currently inconsistent.
 - Improved signage is a low-cost measure supported by participants to direct traffic and reduce confusion.

Community and Business Perspectives

Community attitudes toward growth and parking influence project feasibility and require sensitive handling.

- **Diverse Resident Preferences on Growth (41:58)**
 - Many residents prefer maintaining a quiet, small-town feel rather than a bustling urban center.
 - Some oppose commercial developments in residential areas, reflecting concerns over noise and traffic.
 - Balancing historic character with modernization is a key tension in planning discussions.
 - Developer and business owners recognize these concerns and seek collaborative solutions that respect community values.
- **Business Owner Challenges and Frustrations (40:17)**
 - Business owners face frequent pushback when proposing improvements, causing frustration and withdrawal.
 - Lack of council support has stalled many projects, impacting economic vitality and property conditions.
 - Businesses want better parking to attract customers but struggle with employee parking habits.
 - Some owners are willing to invest millions but need clear political backing and streamlined processes.
- **Public Engagement and Participation Issues (28:09)**

- Public and business owner attendance at meetings is low, limiting input and consensus-building.
- Open meetings and invitations exist but community apathy or distrust reduces participation.
- Inclusion of business representatives on DDA or planning boards could improve dialogue and buy-in.
- Better communication and outreach could foster more collaborative environments.
- **Parking Behavior and Cultural Norms (17:16)**
 - Many visitors and residents do not mind walking a few blocks to destinations if parking is available.
 - Employee parking in prime spots is seen as the largest barrier to customer access.
 - Paid parking without enforcement risks deterring visitors and hurting local businesses.
 - Encouraging businesses to manage employee parking is critical to improving overall parking availability.

Short-Term and Tactical Parking Improvements

Small-scale changes and temporary measures are viewed as necessary stopgaps while long-term plans develop.

- **Adding Parking Spaces via Repainting and Direction Changes (01:24:45)**
 - Repainting lines and converting some streets to one-way could add about **6 to 10 spots** with minimal cost.
 - Such measures are seen as quick wins to relieve parking pressure.
 - However, these small gains do not solve the fundamental employee parking displacement issue.
 - More substantial infrastructure or management changes are needed for lasting impact.
- **Temporary Lots from Demolished Buildings (10:05)**
 - Demo of two buildings near dealership could create a temporary lot to ease congestion.
 - These lots would offer relief but are not permanent solutions.
 - Village must decide on level of investment for these temporary improvements.
 - Coordination with property owners and liability issues remain to be addressed.
- **Improved Signage and Parking Navigation (07:23)**
 - Better signage to direct customers to underused parking lots is underway.
 - This helps visitors find spots and reduces perceived shortage.
 - Clear signs can reduce dangerous maneuvers and honking on busy streets.
 - Signage is a relatively low-cost, immediate step to improve user experience.
- **Parking Passes and Permit Systems (03:07)**
 - Discussed idea of employee parking permits or stickers to regulate who parks where.
 - Permit systems could prioritize customer parking in prime areas.
 - Requires enforcement strategy and cooperation from businesses.
 - Could generate revenue to maintain parking infrastructure if implemented effectively.

Action items

Unknown / General Board

- Arrange meetings with planning commission members and building department to discuss conceptual parking structure plans and gather feedback before formal submission (01:00:00)
- Pursue demolition of two vacant buildings near dealership to create temporary parking lots with minimal improvements, coordinating with village for potential lease agreements (01:02:27)
- Evaluate current employee parking patterns to quantify how many employees park in public lots during business hours for better parking management strategies (01:03:56)
- Improve signage and explore amendments to parking ordinances to allow one-way streets and angle parking to maximize parking efficiency (01:26:45)
- Coordinate with the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) for collaborative projects involving parking and redevelopment to leverage available funds and grants (01:28:09)

Business Owners / Developers

- Submit detailed redevelopment plans including parking structures alongside multi-story buildings to village planning authorities (59:53)
- Explore potential property acquisitions or swaps with the village and private owners to consolidate land for parking and mixed-use development (20:59)
- Investigate and apply for brownfield redevelopment grants to assist in demolition and site preparation costs (35:06)

Law Enforcement / Village Officials

- Consider targeted enforcement actions such as ticketing vehicles that overstay time limits in key parking areas to discourage employee parking in customer spaces (01:17:16)
- Reassess the feasibility and enforcement mechanisms of paid parking zones for downtown lots, weighing operational capacity and community acceptance (01:06:41)