

Concord Twp. finalizing plan for growth, green space

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Leaders in Lake County's fastest developing community are finalizing a plan to control its growth in a sustained way and preserve green space as housing development steams ahead, state Route 44 goes through a traffic safety makeover and a new town center takes form.

The Concord Township Plan Update Committee wrapped up final edits to its 62-page document at its last meeting Jan. 29, and in two weeks, officials expect to present the comprehensive plan at a public forum.

Mark Majewski of Northstar Planning and Design led the 12-member committee through its year-long process and will be presenting changes and additions the new plan makes to its 2004 predecessor at the Feb. 16 public presentation. It begins 7 p.m. at the Concord Community Center.

"Most of it is not the kind of stuff that really impacts the overall ambiance of the township," said Majewski at the committee meeting. "This update has been focused on a number of very specific tasks."

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The new plan expands many of the themes in the 2004 plan as well as the 2006 Auburn-Crile Road Business Corridor Study, especially the idea of creating a pedestrian-friendly town center filled with mixed-use zoning and some multi-story buildings.

The town center is positioned at the soon-to-be constructed roundabout intersection at Capital Parkway and Auburn Road. The News-Herald obtained a copy of the draft plan Jan. 29 after the meeting. The draft stops short of making concrete action items on features of the town center, but does suggest such things as:

- Encourage shared parking lots to be built behind buildings and landscaped with trees and vegetation.

- Consider financing the installation and ongoing maintenance of the town center with funding from the Concord-Painesville Joint Economic Development District or a smaller town center district organization.

- Encourage building pedestrian access like sidewalks connecting the town center with the nearby employment centers, such as medical centers and industrial parks.

- Incorporate Western Reserve architectural design features like pitched roofs to buildings in the proposed town center.

- Consider building a larger community center within the town center. The current community center at 7671 Auburn Road was first built as a Boy Scout District Office and committee members generally agreed it has limitations in terms of capacity and parking.

Concord Township trustees have already adopted

two items mentioned in the draft report for the planned town center. At their Jan. 7 meeting, the three trustees established a new zoning district that combines uses such as residential, retail, office and restaurant all in one, and purchased approximately seven acres of land at the southwest corner of Auburn Road and Capital Parkway for nearly \$1 million.

The real estate investment makes the township a "stakeholder in a key development project, or projects" and allows them to set a high standard in architectural style and quality, according to the comprehensive plan.

The plan also identifies other priorities in the township.

Those include its residential districts, traffic safety and development planning for three small business districts outside of the Auburn-Crile Road area. It also includes connecting bike routes between the proposed town center, the Concord Township Hall area and the Johnnycake Ridge Commercial area, as well as connecting Lake Metroparks' Greenway Corridor with Geauga Park District's Maple Highlands Trail.

The draft plan also highlights the need for more recreational facilities like softball fields and a larger picnic shelter.

The draft suggests that township-owned land near its administration office at state Route 608 and Ravenna Road could support this need.

At the meeting, township officials said an online version of the comprehensive plan will be made available on their website in a week or two. After the Feb. 16 public presentation, the 62-page document will need to go through review by the zoning commission and township trustees.