

# Plainwell Public Workshop #1 Meeting Notes

## Plainwell Mill Redevelopment Plan

### Public Meeting

Plainwell Community Center  
Tuesday, November 13, 2007  
6:00 – 8:00 PM

#### Facilitators:

Erik Wilson - City of Plainwell Manager  
Paul Fontaine, Cheryl Zuellig, Steve Buck – JJR  
Jennifer Hale – Weyerhaeuser

The overall goal of the meeting was to update citizens on developments at the Plainwell Paper Mill property, and to get their thoughts and ideas on how civic resources should be utilized on site. The presentation agenda was as follows:

6:00 pm – 6:30: Welcome

6:30 – 7:00: Power point Presentation (Erik Wilson, Jennifer Hale, Paul Fontaine)

7:00 – 7:30: Question and Answer, and 4 Stations: 1. Mill Site History, 2. Mills site Description, 3. Proposed Land Use Vision, and 4. Visual Listen, by land use.

#### A. Citizen questions from Q & A session

1. What impact would any new development on the Mill site have on the overall traffic flow in Plainwell, namely along Allegan Street?
  - a. Concerns: Impact of M-89 Expansion
  - b. Potential to cross the mill race with a road to relieve impact along Allegan
2. What is the feasibility of a successful Mill rehabilitation (Costs vs. Potential Gain)?
3. What methods will be employed to ensure the new development will complement and not compete with the existing downtown?
4. Is there potential for alternative uses, such as senior housing, at the Mill site?
5. How does multi-family housing accommodate the existing residential (namely single family housing)?
6. What will ensure this area stays competitive in the future, what makes it a desirable place that people will want to live, work, and play in?

B. Concept Plan Comments (From Comment Box)

1. Don't unload the entire Mill property or large parcels to an unnamed developer and hope they will follow through with the master plan
2. Push to get southbound exit / entrance ramps, 106<sup>th</sup> Ave to US-131 before the 2012 reconstruction of Allegan Street
3. Bring in businesses that will add jobs
4. Add a skate park that is highly visible to police station
5. Would mixed use zoning allow a piece of the property to be used as an educational campus (Junior College, Intermediate school)?
6. We need indoor / outdoor space for our teens / pre-teens (skate park, ice skating area, bike paths, etc.)
7. Restore the old building and promote the city as a "Tour Stop Destination" with unique shops, restaurants, artist demonstration / sales. Also, senior citizens groups look for a one hour "filler" stop
8. Geocache area set and maintained by the city (talk to Erin @ library)
9. Potentially look to move existing library to new Mill site
10. The historic character of the brick Mill buildings should be preserved

C. Concept Plan Comments (From Station 3)

1. Cut down traffic downtown – on / off ramps (106<sup>th</sup> Ave)
2. Encourage more curvilinear design with less rectangular form
3. Park space throughout design (Ex. Riverside in Chicago)
4. Play off the "Island City" concept (arrow pointing to islands in Kalamazoo River)
5. Greenspace with lots of trees and garden space
6. Expand planning process to include downtown – the ugly backs of buildings
7. Public Performance Area – close to downtown to enhance Island

8. Exchange railroad tracks; put a historical marker on the site about the rail and paper industry
9. Integrate more park space into the plan
10. Seek grant funding from sources such as DNR and MDOT
11. Crosswalks from existing neighborhoods
12. MDOT – new theme lighting and landscaping along M-89
13. Church Street has a lot of cut through traffic; consider a traffic study to know impacts
14. Partner with the state / county to develop
15. Landscaping concepts should be discussed or more open to public depending on the uses of the property
16. Road traffic should be kept simple – it's only 40 acres

#### D. Visual Preference Exercise

Following the presentation, attendees of the meeting were invited to provide comments concerning the Preliminary Plan as well as comment on a series of “Visual Preference” Boards. Each board contained a series of images demonstrating a specific design style in the following categories: Multi-family housing, Commercial typologies, Civic Uses, and Riverwalk styles. Given the visual cue “Can You Envision...,” each participant was given one red and one blue dot per board and asked to place the red dot by which style or typology they could not envision on the Plainwell Mill site and similarly place the blue dot by their most preferred option. Based on these responses, several assumptions were able to be made and will provide guidance as the project proceeds.

1. Citizen Comments on Multi-family Housing Options

a. Not a fan of rental housing

The Multi-family housing options were divided up into 7 categories: Brownstones, Duplex, Loft, Historic Building Reuse, Townhome, None, and Other. The results of the Multi-family Housing exercise demonstrated a strong positive reaction to three styles: Loft, Historical Building Reuse, and Townhome. The Townhome category received all positive responses (10 blue dots), while the Historic Reuse and Loft each had an overwhelming positive majority. Excluding the None and Other categories, only the Duplex category failed to receive a positive vote (12 red dots).



General Findings: Design, materials, and level of construction execution matter, and the creation of a strong front door streetscape – set back from the street. Great enthusiasm was generated at the prospect of living in / near the renovated historic Mill building. Many thought that the buildings in the duplex shot were too close to the street and resembled single family homes.

## 2. Comments on Commercial Options

a. Big bookstore

b. Qdoba

The Commercial Options Board was separated into seven categories: Main Street Style, Big Box Retail, Stand Alone National Retailer, Stand Along Local Retailer, Fast Casual Restaurant, None, and Other. The Main Street Retail style had the overwhelming majority of the positive votes (21 blue dots) compared to the other styles, and also received no negative votes. Conversely, the Big Box Retail and Stand Alone National Retailer categories received all negative votes (24 red dots and 4 red dots respectively).



General Findings: Big box commercial is inappropriate for this location – too close to adjacent residential neighborhoods and the downtown. Clear preference for the Main Street character of retail demonstrates support of Plainwell’s existing downtown.

### 3. Comments on Civic Options

a. Park space

b. Department of Public Safety Building

The Civic Option Board contained seven categories: City Hall, Civic Center, Arts Incubator, Public Works / Safety Building, Indoor Recreational Facility, None, and Other. The positive reaction votes were primarily spread between the City Hall, Arts Incubator, and Indoor Recreational Facility Options. The Indoor Rec Facility received the most positive votes (16 blue dots), while the City Hall and Civic Center received all positive responses (no red dots between the two options). The Public Works / Safety Building received the most negative feedback (16 red dots).

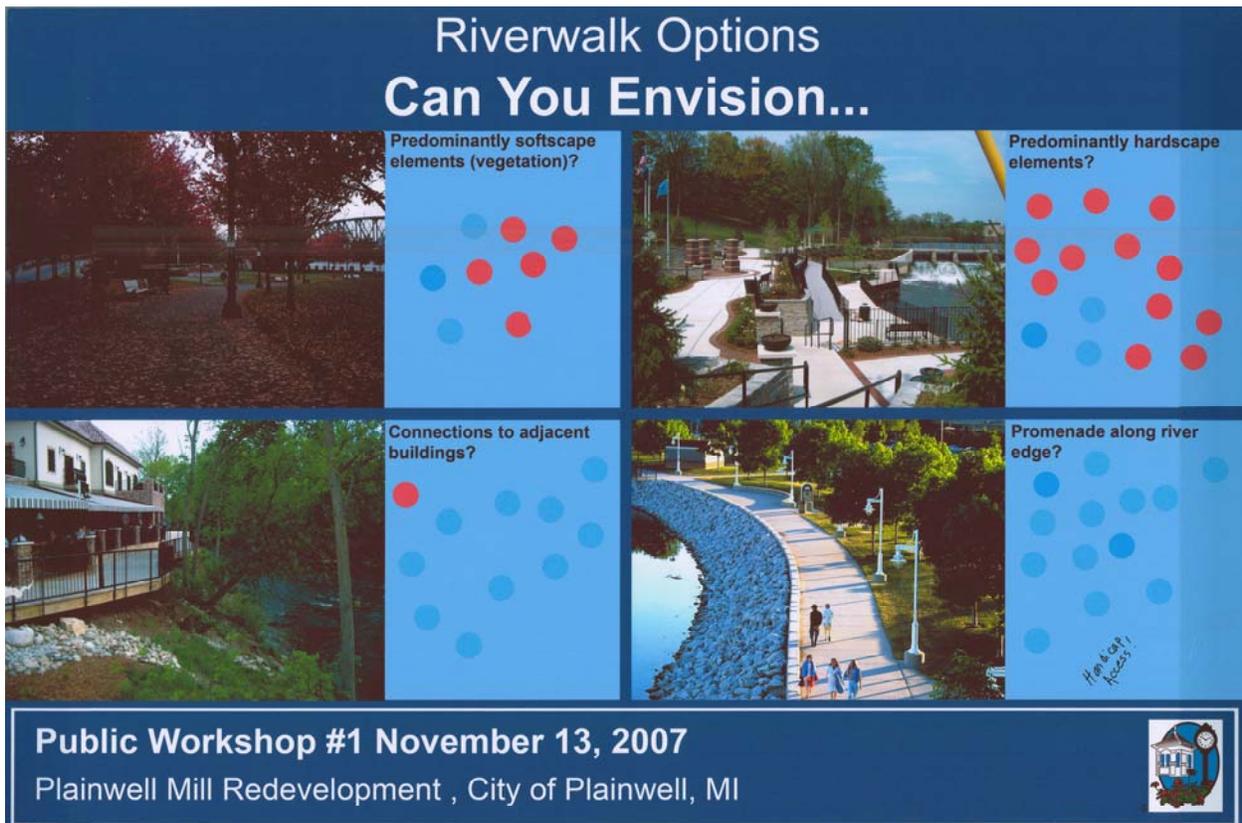


General Findings: Civic resources on the site are strongly supported – and even encouraged, with recreational uses leading the way (Riverwalk / indoor), followed closely by City Hall. This is especially encouraging since none of the reasons as to why moving City Hall makes sense were presented. A strong vote against uses that are not sympathetic to residential uses was captured at this board.

#### 4. Comments on Riverwalk Options

- a. Ensure handicap access

The Riverwalk Option board was divided into four sections, each a unique stylistic option. The sections included: Predominantly softscape elements (vegetation), Predominantly hardscape elements, Connections to adjacent buildings, and Promenade along river edge. The two latter categories, connections to adjacent buildings and promenade along the river edge, received the most positive responses (10 and 13 blue dots respectively). Both the predominantly softscape and hardscape sections received more negative responses than positive.



General Findings: People want to be as close to the river as possible – whether it be on a trail or in a restaurant.