

Chair
Adam Bertram
Vice-Chair
Bruce Keilen
Secretary
Tim Fair
Commissioners
Steve Musselman, Trustee
Dale Dailey
Marsha Zimmerman
Steve Gobbo
Abby Lorenzen
Kristen Krol



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Township Planner
Tory Niewiadomski

Township Planner
Brett Wittenberg

Recording Secretary
Linda K. Parkinson

**PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
MONDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2014
7:00 p.m.**

The regularly scheduled meeting of the DeWitt Charter Township Planning Commission meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chairman Bertram.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag was said by those present.

ROLL CALL by Secretary Fair.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Zimmerman, Krol, Lorenzen, Bertram, Musselman, Dailey, Fair.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Gobbo and Keilen.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA **Fair moved to approve the Agenda as presented. Supported. MOTION CARRIED.**

APPROVAL OF MINUTES **Dailey moved to approve the minutes from the September 2, 2014 Meeting as printed. Supported. MOTION CARRIED.**

CORRESPONDENCE: Katherine Draper, Executive Director, Susan Moriarty, Research Associate and Jaechoon Lee, Research Associate of the Greater Lansing Housing Coalition provided a presentation regarding Fair and Affordable Housing Initiatives: The Next Five Years.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None.

NEW BUSINESS:

I. Landscape Ordinance Discussion

Township Planner Brett Wittenburg briefly reviewed staff's report dated October 2, 2014 advising staff wishes to have a discussion with the Planning Commission related to landscaping and screening standards. Recently there have been a couple of Site Plan Reviews before the Commission that have generated a lot of dialogue related to landscaping and screening requirements.

Wittenburg noted the current Zoning Ordinance does not address fencing regulations for non residential properties. An exception would be for auto salvage yards which would require a privacy fence. Staff would like to take the opportunity to discuss/review the intent of landscaping regulations and the context in which staff evaluates landscaping, screening and fencing.

Wittenburg went on to advise the objectives and primary functions of landscaping are both utilitarian and aesthetic in nature.

Utilitarian aspects are as follows:

- a. The screening of lighted areas and unattractive features.
- b. The prevention of glare from buildings, cars and other sources.
- c. The control of air pollution by the absorption of noxious gases and release of oxygen.
- d. The reduction of noise and stabilization of soils.
- e. Decreased wind velocity and increased surface water retention.
- f. The definition of access and circulation.

Aesthetic aspects are as follows:

- a. The enhancement or the focusing of attention toward a feature (building, main entrance, sign, etc.).
- b. The provision of visual relief from monotonous features such as building walls, large parking lots and streets.
- c. The adding of natural color and the attraction of wildlife.

Wittenberg advised in reviewing landscape plans staff evaluates how the plan meets the Ordinance requirements, site location, proposed use, adjacent uses/zoning, site features and long term impact.

Wittenberg asked that the Planning Commission provide direction regarding the following items:

- a. Should standards be developed for non-residential fencing?
- b. Evaluating fencing in conjunction with landscaping
- c. Is there a need to evaluate and revise the current landscape requirements?

In closing, Wittenberg provided examples of areas within the Township where various fencing and landscaping have been used.

Fair stated he did not feel the landscaping requirements should be changed. He noted some specific properties that recently went through the Site Plan Review process and each had different site constraints. He feels staff has done a good job of looking at each property and working with the applicant to achieve the intent of the Ordinance.

Musselman agreed and stated the same is true with fencing. It is rather difficult to write a specific fencing requirement for a non residential area.

Zimmerman stated in some cases when landscaping is provided on a site the plantings die and are not replaced. Since the Township does not have the staff to follow up on this it would not make sense to implement more stringent landscaping standards for commercial sites.

Daily concurred with Musselman and Zimmerman. He stated the current landscaping regulations are fairly robust. He would prefer the requirements be kept in place and when exceptions should be considered he is comfortable with staff working with the applicant to reach a reasonable solution.

Bertram stated there are good examples in the Township where the current landscaping requirements have worked well (Mohre Soft Water, Consolidated, Astera Credit Union). If the landscape requirements become more stringent it may deter commercial businesses from coming to the Township. Should the Township decide to amend the landscaping requirements perhaps an enforcement program should be implemented to assure that the vegetation is not neglected and then removed.

With respect to fencing, Bertram he cautioned that requiring elaborate decorative fencing might also deter commercial business from investing in our community. He concurred with other Commissioner's comments that the current regulations are sufficient and staff has done a very good job of working with the applicant on a case by case basis.

Brief discussion followed regarding a recent Site Plan Approval for a mini storage facility.

Lorenzen stated perhaps the Township could simply identify what type of fencing is not allowed.

Brief discussion followed regarding the fact that larger commercial businesses may be detracted from investing within the Township if the S. US 27 corridor appears unattractive.

Further discussion followed regarding the fact that requiring decorative fencing could be cost prohibitive to the applicant.

Niewiadomski stated having some fencing standards would give staff some basis to work off from as a starting point. Staff could then consider a reduction in the landscaping.

Fair noted each property is unique and landscaping/fencing should be considered on a case by case basis.

Dailey stated he has served on the Planning Commission for six years and only recalls one fencing issue. He feels staffs time would be better served on other items than drafting an ordinance that regulates fencing.

Musselman suggested that staff check to see what type of fencing regulations other communities have in place. He noted that DeWitt Township has a goal of maintaining a rural atmosphere both in residential and commercial areas.

Bertram stated it has been his experience that other communities may have fencing requirements. However, they seem to be more stringent on landscaping requirements. He feels the Township's current regulations are about in the middle of the spectrum on this issue.

There were no further comments or questions.

EXTENDED PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS: None.

REPORTS:

I. Trustee:

Trustee Musselman gave a brief report on business conducted and action taken at the regularly scheduled meetings of the Board of Trustees held on September 8, 2014 and September 22, 2014.

Musselman requested an update on the Township's enforcement of the recently adopted International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC), specifically on how many complaints are received, what types of complaints are received and how are we improving the community with the adoption of the IPMC.

Niewiadomski advised that the Chief Building Inspector will be providing a presentation to the Board of Trustees on this issue at the October 27, 2014 Board of Trustees meeting.

I. Zoning Board of Appeals:

Township Planner Tory Niewiadomski gave a report on business conducted and action taken at the September 17, 2014 Zoning Board of Appeals meeting.

II. Committees: None.

III. Staff:

1. Proposed Ordinance Amendment 42.5 – Complete the Streets – Update

Niewiadomski provided a brief update on the progress being made on the draft language of proposed Ordinance Amendment 42.5. In addition, there will be an article published in the November Township Newsletter advising the public of an informational workshop to be held on Thursday, November 20, 2014 in order to receive public input.

DISCUSSION: None.

ADJOURNMENT: **Fair moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 p.m. Supported. MOTION CARRIED.**


Linda K. Parkinson, Recording Secretary


Tim Fair, Secretary