

**Van Buren County Planning Commission**  
**February 22, 2006**  
**Human Services Building**  
**801 Hazen St., Paw Paw**  
**6:30 PM**

**Minutes**

**Call to Order:** 6:35 pm

**Members in attendance:** Jeff Radtke, Jim Ray, Celinda Gilmore, Pam Stermer, John Lauck, Scott Cedarquist, Kurt Doroh

**Absent:** Jerry Campbell, Connie Selles, Dan Gehl, Kelly Getman-Dissette

**Public present:** Ryan Servatius from the South Haven Township planning commission.

Agenda: Accepted as presented.

Minutes of December 21, 2005 –Amended to specify that Campbell resides in Florida during the winter months. Approved on a Cedarquist, Stermer motion.

Public Comment: None

**Reports:**

*County Commissioner* – Ray indicated that a 25-year lease for the Kal-Haven and Van Buren Trails is expected to be signed in March. Ray noted that he will be unable to attend the March meeting.

*Southwestern Michigan Commission Representative* – Radtke noted that there were 2 vacancies in Van Buren County and 1 in Berrien County. If planning commission (PC) members know anyone who would like to serve as a citizen representative, they should notify Radtke. Also, the Commission will engage in contract planning in order to supplement income due to grant cuts.

*LPB* – Cedarquist reported that approximately 40 landowners attended a PDR meeting that was hosted in January. The purpose of this meeting was to answer questions about PDR and discuss the process for applying to the program.

*Local Visits* – Lauck read a letter from the MDNR, which states that E. coli is polluting the Paw Paw River. Lauck met with an MDNR representative, who advised that without sufficient funding, the MDNR is unable to police the problem. Since then, the MDNR has decided to run additional tests on the river water in Hartford and Watervliet.

Cedarquist summarized 1031 Exchanges, which allow one property to be sold and another to be purchased without taxation. There is currently a time limit to complete the exchange, but there is movement to increase the time limits in order to help prevent escalating property values. Cedarquist also reported on new efforts to build a high-speed railway from Benton Harbor to Chicago. This type of service may increase interest in Southwest Michigan as a homestead location for those who work in Chicago, and could help local economies.

**Unfinished Business:** None

**New Business:**

*South Haven Township Zoning Amendments*

Ryan Servatius from South Haven (S.H) Township was present to address questions from the PC regarding the proposed PUD zoning amendments.

Servatius advised that property values are so high in the S.H. area that the township would like to provide more affordable housing, or homes in the \$100,000 - \$200,000 range. Additionally, the township wishes to ensure that developers do not remove mature trees from sites.

While it is not clear from information sent by the township, Servatius explained that PUD I and II are designed to address ravines. Areas with ravines and other natural features could be preserved by allowing increased density on useable space around the natural features.

Several PC questions arose as a result of discussion. Therefore, Servatius agreed to provide additional information (described below) from the township before the PC decides whether or not to concur with the township decision to approve these amendments.

1. Servatius will provide the PC with a copy of a housing report in the South Haven area, which demonstrates the need for additional affordable housing.
2. Since one of the PUD amendments was designed to suit sites of five acres or more, the PC wondered whether there were any sites like this left in SH Township and if so, where?
3. The PC would like to see the township coordinate with surrounding communities, including the city, in housing and land use planning efforts.

*Village of Paw Paw Five Year Parks and Recreation Plan*

It was decided on a Cedarquist, Lauck motion to send a letter to the village noting that the PC has reviewed the plan and would like the several items kept in mind for future amendments to the plan.

CPC members recall reviewing this document approximately two years ago, and are not sure why the plan is up for review again. The following items of concern were noted:

1. The plan includes a trail connecting Paw Paw and Hartford, but much of this property is owned by the railroad. The CPC encourages the Village to develop a plan to acquire property and/or collaborate with landowners and other local organizations in order to develop safe, useable trailways for Village residents and visitors.
2. According to the Van Buren County Hazard Mitigation Plan, the dam on Maple Lake is one of the most hazardous sites in Paw Paw. Does the Village have a plan to address safety concerns or the potential need for a new dam? (Radtke explained that the dam was repaired in 1992.)
3. The CPC would like to encourage the Village to consider a stronger focus on reducing the sedimentation sources on the inland waterways (including Maple Lake and Briggs Pond), rather than continual dredging. Dredging is costly, and funding sources are limited.
4. The CPC suggests that the Village add a discussion on the Paw Paw River Watershed Management Plan. In 2005, the Southwestern Michigan Commission received a grant from the MDEQ to develop a management plan for the Paw Paw River Watershed. A steering committee

and several subcommittees comprised of stakeholders from local units of government, land and nature conservancies, landowners, and other area organizations meet regularly to work on this effort.

*Bylaws*

Potential changes to bylaws were discussed. The proposed changes would accommodate members who request long-term absences in order to work within a limited budget. However, at this time, PC members agreed not to change the bylaws.

**Adjourned at 8:22 p.m.**

Submitted by Kelly Getman-Dissette.