

**Van Buren County Planning Commission**  
**Thursday, April 27, 2006**  
**Human Services Building**  
**801 Hazen St., Paw Paw**  
**6:30 PM**

**Minutes**

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

**Members in attendance:** Jeff Radtke, Scott Cedarquist, Kurt Doroh, Jerry Campbell, Connie Selles, Kelly Getman-Dissette

**Absent:** Jim Ray, Celinda Gilmore, Pam Stermer, Dan Gehl

Public present: Lisa Phillips, Porter Township Planning Commission

Agenda: Approved on a Doroh, Cedarquist motion.

Minutes of March 22, 2006 – Approved on a Campbell, Doroh motion.

Public Comment: None

**Reports:**

County Commissioner – No report.

Southwestern Michigan Commission (SWMC) Representative – Radtke reported that the Pokagon Band is now a voting member of SWMC. SWMC is also partnering with the Department of Human Services, Community Mental Health, the Continuum of Care, and the Human Services Collaborative Council to write a 10-year plan to end homelessness in the county. This project is supported by a \$10,000 grant. Finally, because SWMC now contracts for fees, new staff has been hired, so the Commission is seeking a larger office space. There are several locations available in the Benton Harbor area.

LPB – Cedarquist reported that a second PDR application was submitted. There was discussion over how to handle discretionary points in a consistent way. A third application was received, but it was late. If, for some reason, the first two applications do not work out, the third will be considered this year. Otherwise, this application will be held over for next year. Fundraising is still an issue. In addition, the LPB discussed the contaminated soil on the Stein property in South Haven Township and whether or not this property qualifies for Brownfield redevelopment.

Local Visits – Cedarquist noted a second report on the Hartford Dairy that revealed E. coli upstream of the farm, but also cites the farm as a significant contributor to the contamination in the stream.

Planning for Prosperity Land Use Summit – Selles and Getman-Dissette attended a Land Use Summit in Lansing on March 27<sup>th</sup>. Selles reported that a \$25,000 grant proposal, written by Marcy Colclough of the SWMC on behalf of the local “prosperity team,” for a green infrastructure plan was successful. Colclough has applied for additional grant funding (the county planning commission (CPC) supported this application via a resolution last month), and award announcements are expected in June.

Selles noted that conference attendees included professionals, local planning commissioners, and even supervisors/managers who might not normally be concerned with land use. Selles also mentioned that the Planning and Zoning Center is now housed at MSU. Finally, Selles explained that she felt that the role of the CPC was frequently misunderstood and wondered whether there was training specific to county planning commissions.

**Unfinished Business:**

*South Haven Township PUD Amendments*

Ryan Servatius, Chair of the township planning commission, sent a letter addressing the CPC questions from February as well as a copy of the *South Haven Area CHAT Report*. A letter will be sent to the township acknowledging receipt of the information. If the township still seeks CPC input on the PUD amendments, they should contact Getman-Dissette.

*Antwerp Township Zoning Amendments*

Dan Ruzick, Antwerp Township supervisor, contacted Radtke to express his disagreement with the CPC decision regarding recent township zoning amendments. Ruzick highlighted sections of the packet and mailed them to Radtke. Radtke invited Ruzick to the meeting, but Ruzick did not attend. No letter asking for a CPC response was sent with the packet.

**New Business:**

*County Comprehensive Plan update: set public hearing date*

Cedarquist moved (seconded by Doroh) to hold a public comment period and a public hearing on June 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:30 p.m. at the Human Services Building on Hazen St. in order to receive comments on the County Comprehensive Plan. The regular June meeting will be held following the public hearing. Motion approved unanimously.

*Select nominating committee to elect new Vice-Chair*

Campbell, Selles, and Cedarquist were selected by Radtke as the nominating committee for Vice-chair. After some discussion, Cedarquist was nominated and accepted the nomination. Campbell moved (seconded by Selles) to nominate Scott Cedarquist as Vice-Chair. Motion approved.

*Porter Township Master Plan: review for PDR*

The Porter Township Master Plan was reviewed according to the criteria found on page 11 of the County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Ordinance (FOSPO). These criteria are also listed below along with CPC comments. Lisa Phillips, township planning commission, was present to address CPC questions.

*A. A township must provide a future land use map indication the preservation area.*

This is included in the Plan.

*B. A township must explain the techniques/strategies they will use to preserve farmland in the designated preservation area, in addition to being eligible for the PDR program. Furthermore, if dense development has already occurred in the area, what measures will a township take to discourage future development in that area?*

Preservation techniques are discussed in several places. Page 12 addresses why farmland preservation is important in the township. Pages 14 and 15 discuss additional techniques, including limiting gradual subdivision of large parcels, carefully siting developments that conflict with farming, setting large lot sizes (40 acres) for farms with one dwelling unit, and the utilization of agricultural buffers.

While the Land Use Plan does not refer to cluster development, Phillips explained to the CPC that cluster/open space developments are allowed by the zoning ordinance, which is also in the process of being updated.

*C. A township must include language indicating why farmland should be preserved. (This can come from community surveys, economic benefits etc. The County plan will also include much of this language and date on behalf of the townships.)*

The Plan describes very well the importance of farmland preservation in Porter Township, including references to agriculture as an industry, the County Comprehensive Plan, the Right to Farm Act, the significant landowner participation in PA 116, the desire to preserve rural character, and supportive public opinion. Should the township so desire, language from the County FOSPO could be included as a more recent reference to the countywide dedication to preservation efforts.

*D. The plan must include a description of how and why the preservation area(s) was/were selected.*

The township Plan offers a paragraph on why land was selected, but does not define where the preservation area is. The CPC suggests that a description of the preservation area could better defined. Perhaps the township could reference the future land use map in the text.

*E. Describe process used to prepare the element and the involvement and participation of local units of government within the county, farmland owners (producers) and the general public.*

The Porter Township Plan does this with references to the County Comprehensive Plan, landowner agreements, and a public survey. On CPC member suggested that the Plan explain why a more recent public survey was not conducted. Phillips explained the reasoning to the CPC at the meeting, but members would like this information included in the Plan. In addition, Phillips indicated that a public hearing was held to discuss the plan.

*F. Zoning and implementation considerations: What is the zoning in the preservation area? Is the current zoning consistent with the recommendations of the master plan and towards preservation?*

On page 7, agricultural land is defined as a zoning district. Again, Phillips noted that the zoning ordinance is under review to ensure it is up to date.

*G. Other suggestions/Comments*

The CPC noted that the sections on Conservation Land and Lakes and Streams refer to the preservation of other natural features. The County FOSPO also seeks to preserve open space and natural features, so the CPC would like to commend the Township for these additional conservation efforts.

Overall, the CPC was impressed with the Porter Township Land Use Plan. Upon the addition of the paragraph referenced in point D. above, and the official adoption of the Plan by the Township, the CPC would be pleased to include this plan in the county preservation program.

*Smart growth scorecards*

Selles suggested that the CPC develop and utilize a “smart growth scorecard” in order to more consistently evaluate township master plans and zoning amendments. The EPA’s website ([www.epa.gov/smartgrowth](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth)) has several example scorecards that we could use. It would also be important to incorporate the review criteria from the county planning act. All agreed that this was a good idea that should be pursued. Members agreed to look through the scorecards and pick a few to build upon. Getman-Dissette will research whether there are any other counties in Michigan who have utilized similar tools.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be on May 24<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 in the same location.

**Adjourned at 8:50 p.m.**

Submitted by Kelly Getman-Dissette.