

Van Buren County Planning Commission
May 24, 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, Jerry Campbell, Scott Cedarquist, Kurt Doroh, Dan Gehl, Kelly Getman-Dissette

Absent: Pam Stermer, Connie Selles

Public present: John Lemmer, Chair of the Columbia Township planning commission

Agenda: Accepted as presented (Doroh, Ray motion).

Minutes of April 27, 2005 – Approved on a Campbell, Doroh motion.

Public Comment: None

Reports:

County Commissioner – Ray indicated a local landowner would like to exchange land with the county in order to build a lakefront home in Syndicate Park. However, the county prefers to keep its property.

Southwestern Michigan Commission Representative – No report.

LPB – Getman-Dissette briefly explained the highlights of a presentation made by Dave Yankee of Yankee Appraisals. Yankee explained the “before and after” appraisal process as well as the specific products offered by his firm. Getman-Dissette also reported that the three PDR applicants were present at the meeting. They had an opportunity to ask questions about the program, and they received draft copies of the initial application scoring.

Local Visits – Getman-Dissette attended training for the new Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, PA 110 of 2006. This act consolidated the three former zoning enabling acts into one, and it will take effect on July 1, 2006. The act will require local units of government to make some procedural changes, but nothing has dramatically changed.

Unfinished Business:

Smart Growth Scorecards

While Selles was unable to attend this meeting, she spoke with Getman-Dissette prior to the meeting to express an interest in forming an informal committee to begin working on a Smart Growth Scorecard for Van Buren County. Getman-Dissette and Doroh agreed to meet with Selles to begin some preliminary work to share with the group. Gilmore will e-mail feedback after taking more time to review the online examples that were provided for the April meeting.

New Business:

Columbia Township Zoning Amendments

John Lemmer, Chairman of the township planning commission, began discussion by explaining that the main reason for the proposed changes was to create two agricultural districts: one with a large minimum lot size (10 acres) and one with a smaller minimum lot size (1 acre). A public hearing was held, with no comments received.

The CPC made the following comments regarding Section 3.03 – District A:

- The CPC suggested listing the two accessory building maximum under “permitted accessory uses,” as was done in Section 3.03 – District B, changing the wording to be consistent with the same requirement in District B, and specifying that this limit is specifically for non-agricultural buildings, as farm operations require larger buildings.
- The CPC felt that allowing two 40’ x 60’ accessory buildings (for non-agricultural purposes) might be excessive, but Lemmer explained that extensive public input called for buildings of this size to be allowed.

The following comments were made regarding Section 3.04 – District C:

- The parking requirements could be more specific. As listed, the requirements could present an issue for exceptionally large buildings. In addition, the township may wish to consider different requirements for differing types of commercial establishments.
- The CPC would also encourage the township to consider the use of buffers and other green techniques in parking requirements, as a part of the site plan review process.

Overall, the CPC felt that the changes had been well thought out and voted unanimously (Campbell, Cedarquist motion) to concur with the proposed amendments.

Waverly Township Future Land Use Plan

The CPC felt that the Waverly Township Future Land Use Plan was consistent with the Van Buren County Comprehensive Plan (Ray, Cedarquist motion). In particular, the following comments were observed.

The community vision section is commendable, and the CPC noticed that public input revealed that much of what residents truly value about the township is tied to rural character, recreation, natural features, and agriculture. The CPC was pleased to see that this plan, through its discussion of water quality, protecting wetlands, participating in farmland preservation, and updated zoning (Chapters VI and VII) is compatible with public input. The CPC would also encourage the township to develop a recreation plan in order to guide the development of recreational opportunities in the township.

The CPC would like to make special mention of the township’s stated goal to preserve farmland and open space, as agriculture is an important industry in Van Buren County. This plan clearly recognizes the importance of agriculture in the township as well as strategies that can be used to preserve viable farmland. The CPC would like to encourage the township to complete the identification of agricultural preservation areas and subsequently update the future land use map. This would allow township landowners to participate in the county purchase of development rights (PDR) program for the 2007 grant cycle.

The CPC noted an apparent contradiction in Chapter III: the plan recognized increased development pressure and increasing population, but then stated that the township need not anticipate increased density residential uses. However, overall, the stated goals and objectives

seemed thoughtful and attainable. The consideration of soil types and suggestions to avoid leapfrog development were appreciated.

The CPC also wanted to provide some information that could be included in the plan if the township so desired:

- The plan references the “Paw Paw River Project” (Chapter II, page 4). This project is now funded with a 2-year 319 grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and is a regional effort to create a management plan. The steering and subcommittees meet monthly.
- Chapter VI, page 1 mentions the Township Zoning Act. The CPC would like to remind the township that Michigan has recently adopted a new Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006). This act will become effective July 1, 2006 and will require some procedural changes in zoning matters. The new act can be found online at:
www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2005-2006/publicact/pdf/2006-PA-0110.pdf

County Comprehensive Plan Responses

To date, the CPC received responses to the County Comprehensive Plan from the City of South Haven and from Cass County. The letters were read aloud by Getman-Dissette.

The CPC also received a notice of Intent to Request Release of Funds for the countywide homeowner rehabilitation program.

Discussion of Dual Board/Commission Memberships

Selles expressed interest in reopening discussion on holding office on both the county planning commission and a township planning commission. The CPC reviewed a recent opinion (number 7161, September 15, 2004) issued by the Attorney General (AG), Mike Cox, which states that these two offices “are compatible and may be held simultaneously by the same person.” However, the bylaws of the CPC state that “members of the Commission cannot simultaneously serve on a city, village or township government’s planning or zoning board, zoning board of appeals or hold elected office on a city, village or township board.”

Ray expressed that even though the CPC no longer “approves” township plans or zoning amendments, it is still possible for a perception of a conflict of interest. Members felt it best to avoid any potential conflict of interest or perception thereof. As a result, in spite of the AG opinion, it was the general consensus of the CPC to leave the bylaws as written. Selles will have the opportunity to discuss the issue again should she so desire.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be on June 21st at 6:30 in the same location. A public hearing on the Comprehensive Plan will begin at 6:30 and the regular meeting will follow. Ray and Gehl will be unable to attend this meeting. Campbell will be absent in July.

Adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Submitted by Kelly Getman-Dissette.