

MINUTES BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, August 8, 2017 --- 7:30 p.m.

Big Rapids Township Hall, 14212 Northland Drive, Big Rapids, MI 49307

I. CALL TO ORDER: 7:30 P.M.

Chairman Philip Keating called the regular meeting of the Big Rapids Charter Township Planning Commission to order at the township hall on Tuesday, August 8, 2017 at 7:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL:

Present: Philip Keating, Carman Bean, Zach Cook, Mary Davis, Gordon Oliver, Mark Sweppenheiser and Amanda Wethington. The record shows a quorum is present. Also Present: Zoning Administrator and Recording Secretary, Brent Mason and Supervisor Bill Stanek.

III. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

Mr. Keating asked if any of the Commission members had known conflicts of interest with any item on the agenda for this meeting. No one indicated that a conflict of interest existed.

IV. MINUTES:

Mr. Keating asked the Commission to review the minutes of the July 11, 2017 regular meeting. Mr. Bean made a motion to approve the July 11, 2017 minutes with three minor corrections as discussed. Mr. Oliver seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion passed with seven ayes.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Robin Goodwell addressed the Commission regarding SUP 16-002, the Special Use Permit she and her husband were granted for a mini-storage facility on August 9, 2016. She advised that they have not started on the project yet, and would like an extension of the SUP for the Mini-Storage facility on Parcel #54-05-021-006-001. Mr. Keating asked if the extension was required, and Mr. Mason stated that the current language of the zoning ordinance states that if the project is not started within one year, the SUP approval expires. The ordinance language states: "Special Use Permit approval shall expire unless the construction and/or use authorized by the Special Use Permit has begun within 365 days of approval. Thirty days prior to expiration of a Special Use Permit approval, an applicant may make application to the Planning Commission for a one-year extension of the Special Use Permit. The Planning Commission shall grant the requested extension for an additional one year, if it finds good cause for the extension and that the zoning regulations governing the Special Use Permit approval have not changed since the approval. Any re-submittal shall be processed as a new request with new fees." Discussion about the intent of the language "Thirty days prior to expiration" ensued, and a consensus determined that the request could occur anytime within the thirty days prior to expiration. Mrs. Davis and Mr. Bean asked Mr. Keating if the Planning Commission had the authority to act upon this request, and Mr. Keating stated that according to his interpretation of the language, the Planning Commission was authorized to act on this

request. Mr. Sweppenheiser stated that there needs to be an application, and Mr. Mason assisted Mrs. Goodwell with an application for extension. A motion to approve the extension of SUP 16-002 for Parcel #54-05-021-006-001 for one year, through August 9, 2018, was made by Mr. Oliver and seconded by Mr. Sweppenheiser. Mr. Keating asked if there was any further discussion. None being heard, the motion was approved on voice vote with 6 in favor, Mr. Keating, Mr. Sweppenheiser, Mr. Oliver, Mrs. Wethington, Mr. Cook and Mrs. Davis. Mr. Bean voted against the motion. Mr. Mason will send a written verification of the SUP extension to Mr. and Mrs. Goodwell.

VI. DOCUMENT REVIEW:

Mr. Keating asked the Commissioners if they had a chance to look at the By-laws. Mr. Keating stated that he feels it is worthwhile to review the by-laws occasionally, particularly in section 3 regarding the duties of the Planning Commission, especially preparing and updating the Master Plan. Mr. Keating feels that our Master Plan is pretty sterile when you look at the intent of the Master Plan, and seems to be lacking in direction for future growth and development of the township. Mr. Keating is concerned because the Master Plan is always a major topic of discussion from the attorneys at most MTA zoning classes in reference to any decisions that a Planning Commission would make. He continued by stating that our plan may be just fine as it is, but it is good for us to keep in mind that it might need to be changed in order to provide the direction the Planning Commission needs to steer development ten to twenty years in the future. Mr. Keating thinks that there should be more public comment interjected into the plan, even though during the public hearings, no one was present to comment. Mr. Sweppenheiser commented on what the City is doing now with its Master Plan, involving updates of certain sections that reflect changes that have occurred recently. Mr. Bean commented on the current Township Master Plan and how it has relatively little information providing direction for township development. Mr. Keating asked if any of the Commissioners had any more questions or comments about the by-laws. Mr. Keating said the only thing that he had a question on is under the Duties of the Planning Commission, Part D it states the Planning Commission will "prepare an annual written report to the township board of the planning commission's operations and the status of planning activities, including recommendations regarding actions by the township board related to planning and development." Mr. Keating doesn't recall this occurring in the past, and Mr. Mason advised that the last report was in 2014. Mr. Mason presented a draft of a possible format for the 2017 report and a copy of an annual report issued by the Southfield, Michigan Planning Commission. Mr. Keating commented that he liked the format of the Southfield report and the information it provided. He asked to meet with Mr. Mason in the near future for the purpose of working on an annual report format. Mr. Keating asked if there were any more questions or comments regarding the By-laws. Hearing none, he moved on to more discussion about the Master Plan.

Mr. Bean had made comments earlier about our future land use, and that we are mandated to make decisions based on the future land use plan. If the current Future Land Use Map is not how we want it to be, the commission needs to make changes that are representative of the way we would like development to occur. Mr. Mason interjected that he feels some changes might be in order to modify the future land use map to provide more accurately for current land uses that aren't anticipated to change in the next 20 years. Mr. Keating commented on the 2005 Master Plan and on the development of the 2015 plan, which was very condensed compared to the previous version. The feeling

was that the 2005 plan had a lot of information that wasn't necessary and nobody was going to care about. That is why the 2015 plan is so condensed. Mr. Keating continued by saying that he had the sense that the 2005 plan was done more because it had to be done, and not because people wanted to do it, and the 2015 plan was done because it needed to be updated, but there wasn't a great amount of additional detail provided. Mr. Keating would like to see the next revision have more attention put towards the actual plan details with emphasis on what the future will look like and what the regional needs will be. Mr. Sweppenheiser said that it is a good thing to review the plan at least every 5 years, because the township is growing and changing much more rapidly than many rural townships in the area, and we need to be ready to assist with that growth. Utilities, including water and sewer services will help provide for and direct that growth. The topic of east side development was discussed at length. Mr. Bean advised that when he was involved with the County Master Plan, they had no response from the public or the other municipal entities that were notified. There seems to be a general feeling that most people are ambivalent about Planning Commission matters, unless they are directly affected by the issue being presented. Mrs. Wethington mentioned that most of the other townships in the county put an informational flyer in the tax bills and change notices that the Equalization Department prints. She wondered why Big Rapids Township didn't do that in an effort to keep the citizens informed about important issues that could be discussed at certain meetings, or to let them know when different boards meet. Mr. Stanek answered that we do occasionally put flyers in the tax bills and that we do send out a fall newsletter and other notices as needed, but we may not take advantage of that resource to its fullest. Mr. Keating asked Mr. Stanek when his next newsletter would be coming out and Mr. Stanek replied that it would be this fall, possibly early September.

On an unrelated matter, Mr. Keating asked if the Township might sponsor a document shredding day at the township hall. Mr. Stanek thought that a shred day might be a good project to pursue, and further reiterated that the best response the Township receives is from the fall clean-up that we host each September. Mr. Keating mentioned that Lerner Financial is sponsoring a document shredding day on September 23, 2017 at their office.

Mr. Mason asked the Commission to allow him to present some suggested changes for the Future Land Use Map. He presented suggestions that would revert the Future Land Use Map to more accurately reflect the present growth the township is seeing, mostly in taking proposed A-Residential areas and reverting them back to an Agricultural designation that would still allow single family residential use but also maintain the agricultural nature that those areas currently have. We also discussed if there is a need for the Highway Interchange District to be separate from the Commercial District, or would it be acceptable for them to be considered the same commercial zoning district in the future. Mr. Keating asked for members to put together proposals for area changes that might be considered in the Future land use map.

Mr. Keating brought up the CIP Ranking Worksheet for consideration. Mr. Bean said he thought Mr. Mason did a good job with the suggested CIP Ranking Worksheet. Mr. Mason explained to the Planning Commission members how the sheet works and gave a demonstration of the worksheet in action. The planning commission was advised that future items for consideration will be large capital items with a cost of \$10,000.00 or more, as opposed to the previous \$5,000.00 amount, and that the regular operational items of the cemetery and fire department (lawn mowers and SCBA/Turn-out gear) won't

fall under the Planning Commission's CIP approval process. Large cost items like infrastructure improvements, buildings and expensive vehicles will still be evaluated in the CIP.

Mr. Keating asked Mr. Mason to speak about solar farm ordinances and the language that he found during an information gathering search on the internet. Mr. Keating asked everyone to read through the information and prepare to discuss solar farms and the direction we should take at the next Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Keating asked about whether Tesla has reached out to the township since the initial email. Mr. Mason advised that they have not contacted us with any further information. Mr. Keating talked about his belief that electric cars will become much more prevalent with Tesla's latest model, which is much more affordable than their other models have been. Currently, Tesla's production of the new model is behind schedule due to a battery shortage, but when that issue is resolved, there should be many new electric vehicles on the road and the demand for charging stations will increase.

Mr. Keating reiterated the need to revamp the Future Land Use Map, review the solar farm ordinance language and bring those items back to the Commission.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Mason said that the City of Big Rapids sent a letter advising they are using the services of the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission (WMRPC) to help update their Master Plan.

Mr. Keating suggested that every page or at least each section of the Zoning Ordinance and other important documents should have a revision date so that everyone will know which version they have, and when it was last reviewed or updated.

Mr. Bean and Mr. Keating asked how long it might take to finish the sectioning of the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Mason advised that he was approximately half way through, but that it was a low priority project for him. He was asked to forward the electronic document to each member and Mr. Bean offered to assist in creating the sections of the document for ease of use. Mr. Mason did advise that he would attempt to finish the project as soon as possible.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Keating entertained a motion to adjourn at 8:57 p.m. The motion was made by Mr. Sweppenheiser and seconded by Mr. Bean. Motion carried with 7 ayes.

Motion to approve the Planning Commission minutes of August 8, 2017 by: Mr. Bean, Seconded by: Mr. Sweppenheiser. Roll call vote carried with 6 ayes:

Philip Keating, Chairman
BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION

Date Approved