

**MINUTES**  
**BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP**  
**PLANNING COMMISSION**

**Tuesday, September 19, 2023 --- 7:00 p.m.**

**Big Rapids Township Office, 14212 Northland Drive, Big Rapids, MI 49307**

**I. CALL TO ORDER: 7:00 P.M.**

Chairperson Amanda Wethington called the special meeting of the Big Rapids Charter Township Planning Commission to order at the township offices on Tuesday, September 19, 2023, at 7:00 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL:**

Present: Carman Bean, Zach Cook, Mary Davis, Gordon Oliver, Jeff Oosterhouse, Mark Sweppenheiser and Amanda Wethington. The record shows there is a quorum. Also present: William Stanek, Supervisor and Timothy Kleinheksel, Zoning Administrator and Recording Secretary.

**III. RELOCATE MEETING:**

Because of a large number of people attending the meeting, Mr. Bean made a motion to relocate the meeting to the Township Hall at 14230 Northland Drive. Mr. Oosterhouse supported the motion. The motion passed with seven ayes. Mrs. Wethington recessed the meeting at 7:02 p.m. The meeting was relocated to the Township Hall and Mrs. Wethington called the meeting back to order at 7:07 p.m.

**IV. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:**

Mrs. Wethington asked if any of the Commission members had known conflicts of interest with any of the items on the agenda for this meeting. Mrs. Wethington and Mr. Bean indicated that a conflict of interest existed with the WISE special use permit application and secluded themselves from the meeting.

**V. PUBLIC HEARING SUP23-006 WISE:**

SUP23-006 is an application by WISE to operate a family group home in the Agricultural zoning district at the existing property at 19199 14 Mile Road, Big Rapids Township Parcel # 5405-026-001-001. Mr. Sweppenheiser opened the public hearing at 7:08 p.m.

Ms. Jane Currie, WISE Executive Director, stated the following: the current facility for WISE is a 115 year old home that is worn out and has limited space for the operation; the cost of new construction of a facility would be prohibitive and not be a good option; they are seeking an alternative location with sufficient room, close to town and private, a place to heal; the home on 14 Mile Road fits their needs nicely; not looking to change the appearance of the property, it would have no signage, they want to remain private, the property would be cared for properly;

vehicles for transportation are owned and operated by WISE personnel; the existing septic and water are adequate for the operation; fire code would be followed; a privacy fence is being considered; safety is a priority; they want to remain private and have the appearance of a normal residence.

Mr. Sweppenheiser asked that comments during the public hearing be limited to three minutes. He asked for public comment by anyone in favor of the project.

Sue Johnson – Township resident who lives south of the property on 13 Mile Road - is comfortable with the project and in support of WISE.

Brian Miller – Mecosta County Sheriff – is very much in favor of the project.

William Sell – Big Rapids Department of Public Safety – reported that calls to the existing WISE property were minimal. He is a supporter of the facility.

John Lewis – The facility's residents are sheltering and are no different than those in neighborhood homes; This SUP will not diminish the value of the property; Some of the facility is already ADA compliant with the balance to be brought to compliance; There will be no more objectionable noise than a typical dwelling.

Nancy Baldwin – Appreciates the dedication of the staff and is favorable to the SUP.

Wendy Nystrom – Lives in City of Big Rapids; did not know the location of the existing shelter for 16 years; was appalled at the condition of the current facility; supports the project.

Angie Thomas – Was a shelter kid in the past; people should not worry about residents, they need a place to go, a place to heal; supports the project 100%.

Mr. Sweppenheiser asked for public comment by anyone opposing the project.

Shawn Downey, resident of Big Rapids Township, stated the following: The notice of application states family group home, however that term is not defined in the ordinance; requirements stated on the application were not provided; the existing parcel is zoned Agricultural; the proposed change is more closely characterized to motel/hotel; the proposed change brings the threat of criminal violence, this will diminish the value of surrounding lands; a change to multi-family would increase traffic, we already have dangerous traffic with the apartments located on 14 Mile Road; the water supply and septic are insufficient; the property should be bermed for noise suppression and screened from adjacent homes; this request for a special use is inconsistent with existing zoning and existing use; as an alternative location, 1/3 of student dorm rooms appear vacant, they have city water and sewer and are ADA compliant, security is on site with police minutes away – all paid for by taxpayers.

Patty Downey – Lives in Bluffs; the issue is not if WISE is wonderful; this is not a temporary shelter in the words of Ms. Currie; everyone is wondering who is going to purchase that house; we are told no notable changes will take place, what about fire suppression and septic system; is safety really number one priority?

Andrea Cooley, adjoining property owner, stated that most questions were answered; are they putting a fence up? It will be very defined if a fence is put up.

Jack Cooley – if WISE were to leave, what happens to the property? Does it revert back to Agricultural? Mr. Sweppenheiser stated the SUP would stay with the property if it were to be sold, we are not re-zoning the property.

Mr. Sweppenheiser closed the public hearing at 7:50 p.m.

Nick Bentley – Steve Jones Construction – Septic system has two 1000-gallon tanks, that is more than adequate; fire suppression will be inspected and update as needed; there is no site plan because no work is going to be done to the structure; The entrance to the basement will be updated to ADA standards; traffic in and out is minimal as occupants are not allowed to have a vehicle; no obvious changes will be made to the structure.

Mr. Sweppenheiser asked for discussion/comment from the Planning Commission members. Mrs. Davis asked if occupants would spend time outdoors. Ms. Currie stated they would be required to be within the fenced area to be sure they are safe.

Ms. Jessica Wilson – WISE finance director – The cost of this property is not as much as if we had to build; looking for property that would suffice; we have been looking for 8+ years; grants will help, will be selling current shelter that is 100% paid for; goal will be 5 years to pay off with help of grants; not adding to kitchen, minimal changes to home.

Lenny Schebil – How much are the taxes?

Mr. Sweppenheiser stated this is a time for committee discussion and not a time for questions. Referring to data required, he would like to see a site plan provided by WISE. Mr. Bentley stated that the site plan was not originally required, but could be quickly provided. Mr. Sweppenheiser asked if there are dimensions for the fenced in area. Mr. Bentley said it had been discussed, but not finalized. Mr. Oosterhouse thanked WISE for protecting the interests of the neighbors, our goal is to be sure the SUP protects the neighbors. Mr. Bentley asked if additional hedges would be required. Mr. Oosterhouse stated whatever would make you the best neighbor. Mr. Sweppenheiser stated that there will be no additional public hearings for this SUP. Mrs. Davis clarified that does not mean no one can attend subsequent meetings.

Mr. Oosterhouse made a motion to table SUP23-006. Mr. Sweppenheiser supported the motion and it passed unanimously with five ayes via roll call vote. Mrs. Wethington and Mr. Bean returned to the meeting

**VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Ms. Downey referring to Mr. Schebil's question stated she did not believe the taxes would change. Susan Bean, realtor, stated that taxes change when the property is sold.

**IX. ADJOURNMENT:**

Hearing no further business for the Planning Commission, Mrs. Wethington adjourned the meeting at 8:26 p.m.

**APPROVAL:** Action taken at the regular meeting of October 10, 2023: Motion to approve the Planning Commission minutes of September 19, 2023 by: Mr. Bean. Supported by: Mrs. Davis. Motion carried with seven ayes.

Timothy Kleinheksel,  
Timothy Kleinheksel, Recording Secretary  
BIG RAPIDS CHARTER TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION

October 10, 2023  
Date Approved