

Springfield Township
Planning Commission – Business Meeting
Minutes September 20, 2010

Call to Order: Chair John Steckling called the September 20, 2010 Business Meeting of the Springfield Township Planning Commission to order at 7:30 p.m. at the Springfield Township Civic Center, 12000 Davisburg Road, Davisburg, MI 48350.

Attendance:

Commissioners Present:

Ruth Ann Hines
Bill Leddy
John Steckling
Neil Willson
Dean Baker
Roger Lamont

Commissioners Absent:

None

Staff Present

Mike Trout, Supervisor

Consultants Present

Dick Carlisle

Approval of Agenda: Approved.

Public Comment: None.

Consent Agenda: Minutes of the July 19, 2010 meeting.

Commissioner Baker moved to approve the minutes of the July 19, 2010 meeting as presented. Support by Commissioner Lamont. Vote on the motion: Ayes: Leddy, Steckling, Baker, Willson, Hines, Lamont. Nays: None. Absent: None. Motion Carried.

Public Hearing: None.

Old Business:

1. Sign Ordinance Overview-discussion.

Supervisor Trout stated that a full copy has been provided to each Commissioner as well as an example of another community's Ordinance. He questioned Mr. Carlisle how much consolidation and correction would take place when the Ordinance was codified.

Mr. Carlisle stated that the codification process will not make substantive changes. He stated that they will codify to make sure that it is consistent with

State law which there is no issue with. He stated that they will point out ambiguities and/or conflicts with other sections, but he said there will not be a lot of change with the codification process.

Supervisor Trout stated that the Commission was not making any progress with the temporary sign issue and he felt that if they went back to the Sign Ordinance and allow more, the issues of temporary signs could be addressed. He also stated that they could clean up some issues that need to be fixed; some titles of individuals needs to be corrected. He stated that he was not sure how we should proceed. Perhaps we should have Carlisle Wortman do a full write up and recommendation on the issue and changes. He stated that he looked through the Waterford sign Ordinance that was provided, and they do not allow temporary signs or animated signs. He stated that maybe the Township wanted to look at allowing changeable or LED signs. If these were allowed, then businesses could use this type of sign for a temporary sign. He wanted to get the thoughts and feelings of the Commission to create a Sign Ordinance that is easily enforceable, but still business friendly.

Commissioner Hines stated that she read the minutes and she questioned how they could get signs that were easily read driving down Dixie Highway. She stated that she was pleased to see the speed limit issue addressed at the last meeting and how we should have different standards based on the speed limits of the area that is being considered. She stated that there should be different provisions for Dixie Highway and Downtown Davisburg. She stated that on Sashabaw Road, the signs are low to the ground and difficult to read while driving. She stated that the Ordinance should be business friendly and consumer friendly.

Commissioner Steckling stated that the Commission needs to come up with ideas to give to Mr. Carlisle for his review. He stated that he agrees with the speed limit suggestions and he is a proponent of electronic signs. He stated that this allows the business to put current messages up and it eliminates the need for temporary signs. He has seen them in other communities and he stated that they can be tasteful. He stated that it will probably be a controversial thing because in the past, this idea was not embraced.

Mr. Carlisle stated that this Sign Ordinance does not need to be applied Township wide. He stated that the biggest area of concern is Dixie Highway. This is the area with the highest speed and the highest concentration of business. The character of this area might justify creating different sign regulations from Downtown Davisburg. He stated that an interesting approach was used in Northville Township. He stated that he was an expert witness on a sign case in this community. He stated that this community has sign zones that are based on the character of the area and the speed limits on the roadways. He stated that it is complicated, but he could see applying the same overall organization to Springfield Township. He stated Dixie highway has similar character all along it. He stated that maybe the approach should be more geographic specific. He stated

that the sign districts should recognize the context of the area in which they are being erected. He stated that maybe we should concentrate on this more than the actual zoning districts.

Commissioner Steckling stated that he thought it was a good idea.

Commissioner Hines stated that then they could have temporary sign provisions that are Township wide.

Mr. Carlisle questioned Supervisor Trout on the effectiveness of temporary signs on Dixie Highway.

Supervisor Trout agreed that they were ineffective.

Mr. Carlisle stated that these temporary signs ended up being cluttered and you cannot see them anyway. He stated that the permanent sign regulations should be loosened up, and the temporary sign regulations be tightened up on Dixie Highway.

Supervisor Trout questioned if this would be part of the overlay.

Mr. Carlisle stated that this could be added to the overlay district. He stated that they should create a relationship with size of site and size of the sign. He would not recommend 20 or 30 foot pylon signs, but perhaps a site that has 500 feet of frontage could have a decent size ground sign compared to a site with 100 feet of frontage. He stated that this larger parcel would be entitled to a much larger sign. He stated that perhaps they should have a graduated type of criteria for this.

Supervisor Trout stated that there are also two highway interchanges. Businesses are trying to attract people driving down the highway as well. He stated that within the proximity of Holly Road and I-75 and Dixie Highway and I-75, perhaps make other recommendations in this area. He stated that looking at the speed and the size of the lot makes a lot of sense.

Commissioner Hines stated that Kroger and the small party store should have different signs.

Mr. Carlisle stated that it fits in with the Dixie Corridor overlay study in looking at Dixie Highway as a geographical unit and thus should have sign regulations that apply to that entire area. He questioned if it should be the same north of Davisburg Road since the uses out there are typically smaller.

Commissioner Steckling stated that we should have a master list of all of the businesses up and down Dixie Highway and contact them. He stated that he would like some feedback from them. He stated that he would like their input during the process.

Mr. Carlisle stated that the area that the businesses would not like is eliminating temporary signs all together. He stated that the businesses are struggling. He stated that temporary signs are ineffective on this major roadway with high speeds. He stated that the merchant believes that it draws attention to their business and what the Commission will hear from the business owner is that they cannot afford a bigger sign or a new LED sign. He stated that they should look at a phasing in approach.

Supervisor Trout stated that the Dixie Corridor plan is updated however; this has not been presented to the business owners. He stated that they should invite the business owners to a meeting, maybe just a study group meeting. He stated that we do have a list.

Mr. Carlisle stated that one thing he tried to do in Independence is to get the business community to agree on an organized approach to temporary signs and have them be a uniform type design. He stated that this was a failure.

Commissioner Lamont stated that each business wants their own branding for signage.

Mr. Carlisle stated that the businesses resorted to homemade signs that were not costly.

Supervisor Trout stated that the banners seem to be professionally done and fairly uniform. He can think of 2 or 3 up right now. He stated that if these were allowed, maybe that could be the uniformity that we are looking for.

Mr. Carlisle stated that the problem is legislating good taste.

Commissioner Hines stated that she does not understand the appeal of temporary signs. She stated that she does not use these temporary signs to shop for a car or choose a party store.

Commissioner Wilson stated that they are also used to advertise pricing.

Commissioner Lamont stated that the businesses use these temporary signs to compete with each other and he stated that this is the layered, temporary sign look that they are trying to avoid.

Mr. Carlisle stated that he revamped a sign ordinance for a community that was pretty antiquated and provided more opportunity for the businesses but yet maintained the tastefulness. The only way that they would approve this sign ordinance was if all signs came through the Planning Commission. He stated that this is an option. He stated that this could be part of the site plan but could also be a separate application which the Planning Commission would have to approve.

Commissioner Steckling stated that, for example, if this was in our Ordinance, if Hosler wanted to change the sign, they would have to bring in the application and get it approved by the Planning Commission.

Mr. Carlisle stated that this was not his recommendation for this community; however they are still doing it.

Commissioner Steckling stated that he was not excited about this.

Supervisor Trout stated that we should make our Ordinance clear enough so that people know what they can and can't do. He questioned if we could address the Downtown area the same way; for example to promote awning signs.

Mr. Carlisle stated that this Downtown area needs a specialized approach.

Commissioner Steckling asked Mr. Carlisle if he had enough information to start and would he totally replace what they already have.

Mr. Carlisle asked if there was a problem beyond Dixie Highway, the I-75 interchange and Downtown Davisburg.

Supervisor Trout stated that the other area that needs to be addressed is the industrial parks.

Mr. Carlisle stated that he did not think that the industrial areas were a problem. He stated that he felt that they were only talking about three areas. All 3 are distinctly different in terms of character so it would work out well to customize the sign regulations as to the character of the area. These areas would be designed to speed limits and character of the different areas.

Commissioner Hines asked if they would have separate sign requirements for, as an example, a condo entrance sign.

Mr. Carlisle stated that he would keep the sign ordinance in place and have an overlay sign provision for the 3 distinct areas.

Commissioners confirmed that they liked this approach.

Commission Baker stated that another use was brought up, the temporary signs for churches that were using other buildings for their display. This was Divine Mercy who is using the elementary school on Davisburg Road for worship and the temporary signs were not approved for them to place them out every weekend.

Commissioner Lamont stated that this is how the temporary sign discussion came up. Then it became temporary for commercial and temporary for non-profit. He

stated that the Commission had a great deal of discussion, but not a lot of agreement on what they have seen in writing.

Supervisor Trout stated that for non-profit groups, in the sample ordinance, they are treated separately. He stated that the part that he liked was that they had a clear purpose and intent. He stated that they should promote safety, but also business activity and the consumer's ability to locate. He also stated that he liked the clear definitions as part of the Ordinance. He stated that this is helpful.

Mr. Carlisle stated that he had enough information to go forward. He stated that the numbers will have to be approved by the Commission when he comes back to them.

Supervisor Trout asked how other communities were addressing the LED signs.

Mr. Carlisle stated that most communities are not addressing this issue. He would state that 1 out of 10 has actually amended their ordinance to accommodate LED signs. He stated that they do have language if needed. He stated that the models that he has are from the sign makers.

Mr. Carlisle indicated that he understands the issues now and is able to put together a model for the Commission to look at.

Supervisor Trout stated that they should involve more people in the decision making.

Commissioner Lamont stated that the last paragraph in the existing sign Ordinance stated that any preexisting sign became compliant with the passage of the new Ordinance. He wanted to make sure that we don't go ahead and approve what was out there when we go forward. He would like this language looked at.

Supervisor Trout stated that it would have to say "any conforming sign" that meets the requirements of the prior Ordinance.

Commissioner Steckling stated that the Ordinance states that "the existence of any sign made non-conforming by the adoption of this ordinance shall be allowed to continue but should follow the provisions of section 16.01; all non-conforming existing signs must comply with the maintenance provisions of paragraph 7 b of this section." He stated that he will look for a draft next month.

New Business: None.

Other Business:

1. Priority Task List/CIP-discussion.

Commissioner Steckling stated that there are several things on the priority task list that have been there for awhile and his suggestion is that either move on them, or move them off. Since there is not a lot of activity at the present time, this is a good time to clean up things and get ready for the onslaught that will hopefully happen. On signs/temporary signs, he stated that the Commission is moving forward on a different direction. On safety paths, he asked Supervisor Trout what he wanted to do with this.

Supervisor Trout stated that this was not an ordinance amendment. It really belongs somewhere else. He stated that we have been rolling out our pathway plan and Neil Willson attended one of the school open houses and another one was coming up this week.

Commissioner Willson stated that he and Chris Benedict were at Springfield Plains Elementary on Thursday, September 16th. It was the first of two opportunities that they have had to get to each school. It was parent orientation night and they were set up in a hallway with a large map of the proposed plan on an easel and then they had handout information that Chris had prepared. He stated that it was interesting that parents came right over to the table when they saw the map and they had an interesting conversation with 40 to 50 different couples. He stated that this was the first time that it has been shown publicly and it was met with approval by the young parents. He stated that they set up a sign up sheet and had 32 people sign up. He stated that after the regular orientation was over, they stayed for an additional 45 minutes. He stated that there is intense interest. He stated that they need the cooperation of both schools for the safe routes to school program which is the federally funded program which funneled 6 million dollars into Michigan last year through the various schools. He stated that they were there pitching that program and gauging the level of interest of parents and it is significant which they were pleased with. He stated that Davisburg Elementary was coming up this week and there was also a PTA meeting at each school later in October which they were planning on doing a slide presentation in front of the whole group. He stated that they have everything in place except for the funding.

Supervisor Trout stated that they are developing the Safe Routes to School plans for each of these schools. He stated that we can gain help with letter writing, calls to State representatives and other elected officials that we will identify as key. He stated that this is a good response. The bad thing is that we are a couple of years away from having a millage proposal. He stated that may be there are other things we could do like a private foundation, or fundraising campaign. He stated that the Township Board is also looking at the intersection improvements. He stated that it was important to get the schools involved.

Commissioner Willson stated that this was a group with an intense interest in the project, but they did not exhibit any negative feelings toward a millage.

Commissioner Steckling stated that from a Planning Commissioner perspective, there was probably not a lot more that they can do.

Supervisor Trout stated that they needed to look at the further out phases of this. If the Clarkston to Davisburg artery is the main artery, how do we start to branch off from this to connect to other things? He stated that it is important to show the big picture. He stated that he wants to keep it on the list so that the Commission can continue to receive updates because it is very important.

Commissioner Steckling stated that he would rather take it off so it is not a carry over and if they need to do something, they could bring it back. He stated that it is not something that they need to be working on.

Commissioner Steckling stated that administrative amendments to site plan review is an area that he would like to see something done with. He stated that they have talked about it for a number of years, and have still not reached a resolution. He stated that this is a good time to do it because the lack of activity. He stated that they will have to go through the whole process again unless they come up with a way to regulate it.

Supervisor Trout asked if this relates to specific sections of the Ordinance or the entire site plan approval process or to process minor changes.

Commissioner Steckling stated that he would like it to cover everything.

Commissioner Hines asked if it would cover if a site plan was approved, but not completed, they would not have to start the whole process over again.

Commissioner Steckling stated that the church is a good example. If they had pulled the permit, they would have a year, maybe two years to complete the project. But, once they go beyond that they have to go through the whole process again. He stated that if the zoning has not changed and if there have not been any other changes there should some abbreviated review.

Mr. Carlisle stated that the way to do this is give the Zoning Administrator the option to refer to the Planning Commission if there is a question on the extension. He stated that this is not unreasonable; most projects cannot get financing in one year. He stated that we should be able to provide extensions administratively.

Commissioner Steckling stated that changes need to be addressed too. He stated that he would like to have discussions about where the administrative line is; there should be some changes that should be able to be granted with administrator approval. He stated that this is a perfect time to do it.

Supervisor Trout asked if the provision we have for an existing structure that would have an increase or reduction to the existing structure of 1000 feet or more of 10% was standard.

Mr. Carlisle stated that he could not say it was standard, but is not unusual.

Supervisor Trout stated that it was for existing uses more than proposed uses that we are talking about. He stated that maybe we should look at certain square footages requiring a full site plan, but maybe there is a scale where other things could be administratively handled, basically for the smaller types of additions. He stated that maybe we should establish certain criteria that they would have to meet to be approved administratively.

Commissioner Steckling asked the Commission if they wanted to have Mr. Carlisle look at this.

Supervisor Trout stated especially for existing use. He stated that to make someone put all of this information together for a small project, this would be a large cost.

Commissioner Steckling stated that if the Commission approves a subdivision today and if they put only one house in, they have locked the plan in. But, if you have a commercial development and they are in the same situation, they have one year. He questioned churches in office zoning.

Supervisor Trout stated that this would be addressed during the codification. He stated that we could take it off.

Commissioner Hines stated that it was important to define where places of assembly can occur.

Commissioner Steckling stated that they have discussed this before.

Supervisor Trout stated that medical marijuana has come up in several communities. It has come up in the zoning ordinance of different communities. The provisions of the home occupation are examined. He stated that it was possible for caregivers to band together and start dispensing. He stated that it is a poorly written law that law enforcement and prosecutors are having trouble interpreting as well as communities. He stated that if it was an ordinance amendment, it would start at the Planning Commission level. He stated that the Township Board had decided to wait a month.

Commissioners discussed the topic of medical marijuana and how it has appeared as a topic in several publications.

Commissioner Steckling stated that they should put this topic on the list.

Supervisor Trout stated that we have received information from the County. He stated that they need to be careful with this subject.

Mr. Carlisle stated that they have some information that they can provide the Commission.

Commissioner Steckling asked about the Downtown Davisburg plan that appears on the list.

Supervisor Trout stated that they had started to work on this. The Township has formed a Davisburg Action Committee to look specifically at the sewer and the proposal that is out there, as well as alternatives. He stated that this Committee would be ideally suited to look at some other issues. He stated that they need to know from the business owners what they want the town to be. He stated that out of the central business district, we also have to include some homes which may be ideal for office usage. He stated that this was an important area and hopefully the Committee will be available. He stated that we need a representative from the Planning Commission to sit on the Committee.

Commissioner Hines stated that she will be on the Committee. She asked about times for the meetings since she would only be able to attend meetings in the evening.

Commissioner Steckling asked about the Dixie Corridor study.

Mr. Carlisle stated that this is finished.

Supervisor Trout agreed.

Mr. Carlisle stated that he presented this to the Township Board two months ago and the ideas were well received. He stated that they could ask for formal adoption. He stated that maybe they should have a public hearing about it first.

Supervisor Trout stated that they should have a public hearing first to gain feedback from the business owners. He stated we could hand out invitations and publish it in the paper.

Commissioner Steckling asked about the Dixie Davisburg intersection.

Supervisor Trout stated that the intersection improvement was going to happen. He stated that the southwest corner is being looked at. He stated that he wants a drawing, or schematic for this corner and we will look at this closely for costs and ideas. He stated that it was important to have a sitting area, but perhaps a sign also. He stated that the party store owner has talked to him several times about doing more.

Commissioner Steckling asked in terms of the Planning Commission, what could they do.

Supervisor Trout stated that he would like them to look at the plan.

Commissioner Steckling asked the Commissioners if they wanted anything else added. He asked about Occupancy Permits which is present on the list.

Supervisor Trout stated that he wants to leave it on. The packet is complete that will be handed to prospective business owners. He asked if the Commission should look at the lumberyard property separate or with the Davisburg plan. He stated that they need to know how it fits into the big picture. He asked if they should look at that site specifically for some alternatives for use.

Mr. Carlisle stated that they should have the Davisburg Action Committee look at this issue.

Supervisor Trout agreed.

Commissioner Lamont asked if they needed to find out the outcome of the sewer issue to determine how much of the lumberyard property might be available.

Supervisor Trout stated that he wanted to make sure that the lumberyard property appeared on the list.

Supervisor Trout stated that he is updating the CIP. He stated that this will go through the budget process and revisions have been made. He stated that there is not a formal adoption requirement. He asked if there were size requirements for a municipal water and sewer program to be included.

Mr. Carlisle stated that there was not a size requirement, if you offered it; it should be included in the capital improvement plan.

Public Comment:

Diana Walls, 627 Broadway, Davisburg asked about the new sign ordinance. She wondered if there was a grandfather clause. She asked if sandwich boards would be allowed.

Commissioner Steckling stated that he did not know since it was still in the planning stages. He stated that the Downtown area would be looked at as a geographic entity because of its unique needs. The other two areas would be Dixie Highway and I-75 and Holly Road. He stated that the Commission has asked the planner to come up with thoughts and suggestions and this will be addressed. He stated the specifics are not decided.

Supervisor Trout stated that he would prefer that the sandwich signs are not allowed. He would like to make it consistent.

Commissioner Steckling stated that this language will come up at the public hearing. He stated that this will be the time for public input.

Diana Walls stated that the like and the desire was to get swing signs, perpendicular to the building. She stated that the business owners could not agree on an era that they wanted to emulate. She stated that they wanted to have the signs much more visible.

Supervisor Trout stated that the Planning conference was coming up in Michigan. All Commissioners had been provided with the information. He stated that the Commissioners should let him know if they wanted to attend. He also stated that he is in the process of filling the empty Planning Commission seat.

Adjournment:

Commissioner Steckling adjourns the meeting at 8:37 pm.

Erin Mattice, Recording Secretary