

RICHLAND TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MAY 14, 2008

A meeting was held by the Richland Township Planning Commission on Wednesday, May 14, 2008 at the Richland Township Hall beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Members present: Nick Westra, Chairman
 Wanda Hinklin, Secretary
 Walter Calhoun
 Greg Jensen
 Norman Lovan
 David Wendzel

Members absent: Trudy Luedeking

Also present was Township Planning Consultant Russell Wicklund and approximately 4 members of the public.

CALL TO ORDER AND REVIEW OF MINUTES

Chairman Westra called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 p.m. Commissioner Hinklin moved that the minutes for the April 9, 2008 meeting be approved as written. Commissioner Calhoun seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously. Chairman Westra then explained the process for opening and closing the public hearings in advance of any formal action to be taken by the Planning Commission.

PUBLIC HEARING – SPECIAL EXCEPTION USE – ACCESSORY BUILDING

Chairman Westra opened the first public hearing related to a special exception use application for an accessory building proposed to be constructed between the street and the house. The applicant, Mr. Bowers of 10956 Interlaken, then reviewed his request, indicating his desire to replace his existing accessory building with a new larger (30' x 60') building in the same general location. He indicated that the building would be designed to match the house (not a pole building) and would include heat but no plumbing. He also added that the foundation wall along the west side would have a jog in it in order to reduce the span for the 60' length. His purpose is to store old cars and other accumulated possessions.

The Chairman asked for any public comment, with no response from the audience. He also asked if any written comments had been received, with Commissioner Hinklin indicating that there were no written comments submitted. The Chairman then closed the public hearing and asked the Planning Consultant to provide a brief overview of the standards for consideration of a special exception use. Planning Consultant Wicklund responded as to the issue of compatibility and that the Planning Commission

could impose conditions related to their approval of the request or base any denial on the general standards listed within the zoning ordinance.

Commissioner Hinklin inquired as to the distance from M-43, with the applicant and Commissioner Jensen commenting that it was more than 200 feet from the road. Mr. Bowers also added that there were pine trees planted along M-43 that serve as both a visual and noise barrier. Commissioner Calhoun moved that the special exception use be approved based upon the screening and distance from M-43, the design and construction similar to the house and the minimal impact on any adjoining residences. Commissioner Wendzel seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING – SPECIAL EXCEPTION USE – ACCESSORY BUILDING

Chairman Westra opened the second public hearing on a special exception use application for a proposed accessory building larger than what is allowed under the zoning ordinance. The applicant, Mr. Kuhn of 10063 N. 32nd Street, then reviewed his request, indicating his parcel was approximately 2.5 acres with 320 feet along M-43 (N. 32nd Street). His desire is to store vehicles in the new building as the existing barn is not suitable for such purposes. He added that he has an older farm house and the barn and would like to build an accessory building that generally matches the look of the house, with vinyl siding and a shingled roof.

The Chairman asked for any public comment, with no response from the audience. He also asked if any written comments had been received, with Commissioner Hinklin indicating that there were no written comments submitted. The Chairman then closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Hinklin then asked about the size of the building and whether this building could be attached to the house. Chairman Westra asked about the location and explained the concerns related to the size of the building in relation to the house and the large barn that is counted toward this total. He added that the applicant must give us reasons for disregarding the ordinance requirements. Mr. Kuhn indicated that that attachment to the house would be difficult and that the barn is not suitable for storage purposes.

The Chairman then asked about whether there is level ground and any screening from the road. Mr. Kuhn replied that it is generally level ground with possibly a 6-foot slope to the back and some fruit trees. He added that there is a 10-15 foot maple tree between the road and where he wants to locate the building. Commissioner Jensen indicated that he believed the length of the house and the location of the proposed building would not detract from the appearance of the property and understood the need for such building even with a large barn on the site. Commissioner Wendzel agreed with Commissioner Jensen based upon the perspective of the barn and the location on the site and that no opposition existed from adjoining residents.

Commissioner Wendzel moved that the special exception use be approved based upon the desire for preservation of the barn and the nonfunctional nature of the garage and that if screening were added between the new building and the road that it would be an acceptable location. Commissioner Calhoun seconded the motion, indicating that 2-3 ornamental trees or shrubs would be sufficient to cut the visual of the length of the building facing M-43. Planning Consultant Wicklund requested, before the vote, if this was acceptable to Commissioner Wendzel and he indicated he preferred evergreen for year-round screening. Commissioner Calhoun concurred with this and the screening was indicated as utilizing arborvitae or similar evergreens for screening purposes. The motion passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION OF DRAFT SIGN AMENDMENTS

Chairman Westra then asked Planning Consultant Wicklund to review the draft sign amendments. The Planning Consultant indicated that he had modified the organization of the provisions in concert with comments from the Township Attorney, better defining temporary signs and listing exempt signs under the permit procedure. He indicated that there were several policy issues that should be addressed. The first related to electronic billboard signs, with billboard provisions generally not proposed for change. Commissioner Hinklin indicated that she believed there was only one billboard in the Township and did not desire expanding the provisions. The other commissioners concurred with this position. The Planning Consultant then talked about the standards for removal of temporary signs, with the commissioners indicating support for the 24 hours after a household event, and about political signs. Planning Consultant Wicklund then indicated a change in size for political signs within agricultural and residential districts within 50-feet of a state trunkline. Commissioner Hinklin indicated she believed that we have no control over the size of political signs. The Planning Consultant commented that he understood this concern but that we need to provide guidance on this issue, with larger signs permitted in commercial districts or along state trunklines.

Commissioner Wendzel then asked about directional signs. Planning Consultant Wicklund then read the definition in the proposed ordinance and most were satisfied that this covered a range of similar-type signs. Commissioner Hinklin indicated that she had concerns related to size and location. Planning Consultant Wicklund indicated we could provide for directional signs under exempt signs, establishing a size and location so as to not have too large of directional signs along the roadway. The commissioners concurred with this approach.

Commissioner Jensen indicated he was concerned about an existing multi-use development that may not have much frontage and wondered what could be done in those cases. Planning Consultant Wicklund indicated that we allow for up to 100-sq. ft. for multi-use free-standing signs in commercial and industrial districts and they would need to coordinate their signage between the owner and tenants, that such configuration is not the most marketable due to lack of exposure for any permitted wall signage.

Commissioner Wendzel agreed and commented as to a similar situation at Gull and Sprinkle Roads where many businesses are tucked into areas that can't be seen from the road. Commissioner Calhoun moved that the draft sign amendments, with the addition of directional signs under exempt signs, be scheduled for public hearing at the June meeting. Commissioner Jensen seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Ms. Carol Leeson asked about the issue of political signs and how long can they stay up. Planning Consultant Wicklund read the provisions that the timeframe is seven (7) days after the election, which would probably be the general election even if people have dropped out along the way.

OTHER BUSINESS

Commissioner Hinklin indicated that several other issues are now pressing. She stated that wind energy provisions should be added, that we should review motocross facilities and look into the outdoor furnace issue. Planning Consultant Wicklund indicated he could provide them an example on wind energy he worked on for another Township and that his experience with motocross was a possible amendment for "commercial outdoor recreation", likely as a special use in the agricultural districts due to the need for large parcel size. He also indicated he had discussed the outdoor furnace issue with Attorney Sparks and they agreed a general ordinance would be a better approach, with the smoke issue most closely linked to nuisance considerations.

Commissioner Hinklin also indicated that Attorney Sparks had mentioned the new Michigan Planning Act at the Township Board meeting and this would require additional work for the Planning Commission down the road. Planning Consultant Wicklund then gave a brief overview of the new act, indicating the Planning Commission involvement with capital improvement programming (for Townships owning or operating public utility systems) and holding the initial public hearing for new subdivisions. He also explained the 5-year review requirement remained the same but that the terminology of "master plan" must now be used.

General discussion then followed about the need for better enforcement and oversight on approved site plans, with Commissioner Hinklin indicating the dumpster issue at the shopping center at M-89 and 34th Street. Planning Consultant Wicklund added that these are zoning ordinance violations when development conflicts with the approved site plan.

There being no other business, motion by Mr. Calhoun, seconded by Mr. Lovan to adjourn the meeting at approximately 8:15 p.m.

Wanda Hinklin, Secretary
Richland Township Planning Commission