

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
PLANNING COMMISSION
WORK SESSION MINUTES
September 13, 2010
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864-1198
853-4560, Town Hall Room, 7:00 P.M.**

APPROVED

PRESENT: Chair Reicosky, Commissioner Jackson, Commissioner Honicky and Commissioner Beyea
ABSENT: Vice-Chair Deits, Secretary Goldsberry, Commissioner Jorkasky, Commissioner Goodale and Commissioner Wilcox
STAFF: Principal Planner Gail Oranchak

1. Call meeting to order

Chair Reicosky called the regular meeting to order at 7:10 P.M.

2. Approval of agenda

Commissioner Jackson moved to approve the agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Honicky.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried.

3. Commercial Planned Unit Development Round Table Discussion

A. Welcome by Chair Reicosky

B. Topic introduction by Commissioner Beyea

C. Discussion

- What is the purpose of the ordinance?
- Will developers use the ordinance?
- Use of the ordinance depends on whether it is attractive to developers. One benefit is a shortened time frame.
- Trying to streamline the process to bring commercial development, to get the storefronts full
- One option shorten the process
- The ordinance provides another option for developers
- Addresses things that are currently illegal--walkable, pedestrian friendly. No means without variance process.
- The Zoning Ordinance does not fit the goals of the Master Plan; it does not permit development without variances have too to initiate process to allow walkable, green process without getting multiple different variances.
- Large amount of vacant commercial space. Without some incentives investment will go elsewhere
- Opportunity for flexibility while not compromising the needs of the community
- Along Grand River lots are undersized, there is no room for setbacks and still develop without going to Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)
- Tradeoff setbacks in exchange for amenities
- Protection for neighbors comes from setbacks
- Don't agree with the need to eliminate the Zoning Board of Appeals. Ordinances allows eliminate of public hearings at ZBA and Planning Commission.
- If no ZBA have a second public hearing after the meeting with neighbors for input on amenities.
- No notifications until at Planning Commission; none for neighborhood meeting.
- Want to see report of developer/neighborhood meeting

- Site Plan public hearing are open to the public
- Discrepancy with notification process. Notices by e-mail included in first statement.
- Limited opportunity for neighborhood to comment to the Planning Commission
- Concerned about the Planning Commission voting the same night.
- Suggestion to have a member of Township Board and/or Planning Commission to attend the neighborhood meeting.
- Community team of planning staff, Planning Commission and Township Board member. Details of make-up of group not identified. Object to create Win-Win.
- Township Board is decision-maker, Planning Commission makes a recommendation.
- The requirement for commercial variances due to setback requirements is not unique but occurs throughout the Township, ZBA is not the proper body to approve site plans
- Projects are not built as designed (Meridian Stratford Place berm)
- Site plans are revised or amended after the initial approval
- Neighborhood should sign-off on the developer/neighborhood meeting
- Planning Commission attempted to develop mechanism to get better input from neighborhood earlier in the process
- ZBA has not been used in accordance with state law.
- C-PUD is a tax gimmick; purpose to fill 250,000 square feet of vacant commercial space and get back on tax rolls.
- Obligation to show the system we have is broken
- C-PUD is contract zoning. Trade off for amenities.
- Fast track for development
- What is the purpose of large front setbacks? Change the ordinance to fit the situation.
- Is change necessary?
- Impacts of changing demographics, where and what people want to buy, impact on Meridian Mall from Eastwood, Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA) Grand River/Michigan Avenue major transportation project, How to address changing needs and stimulate economic growth in the area.
- 80 percent of commercial variance in the last ten years have been along Grand River Avenue
- Responsibility of local government to protect citizens
- Lansing Urgent Care at Grand River and Montrose. Existing building with variances already in place. New use in existing building. Abuts commercial and office zoning.
- Zoning Board of Appeals is making decisions on major commercial development rather than the Township Board. Is that appropriate?
- Possible use of existing building for medical marijuana facility next to Towar Baptist Church. Concern they won't have a chance to have their say. Problems with these facilities being abused. Location is a concern. Neighborhood wants to be heard. May not require any review by public bodies. Want vacant suites filled with our partners not with uses that disrupt the community.
- Developer/neighborhood meetings more affective with members of Planning Commission and Township Board present
- Planning Commission should not adopt or deny the same night it appears on a Planning Commission agenda.
- Too much discretion for amendments. Lists major which must go back to the original decision-making body, everything else are minor amendments. Need rules in the ordinance to protect about excesses.
- Applicants can appeal a Planning Commission decision. Other aggrieved persons as defined in the ordinance may appeal a decision.

- Township Board gave specific instructions to the Planning Commission to create a commercial planned unit development ordinance.
- Concern for future of commercial areas in Township. Responded well in the past to the preference for auto-dependent commercial development. Preferences have changed. Without additional tools we will be overlooked in favor of other communities in the region. This ordinance alone will not take us to a place we want to be in the future. A plan is needed for the redevelopment of the mall, other specific commercial areas and adjacent residential areas.
- Possibly identify which commercial areas this ordinance applies to.
- It is the Planning Commission's job to recommend changes to the ordinance. Along with a new C-PUD option for commercial areas it would be wise to consider more pedestrian-friendly and amenities that developments in other communities allow.
- Approval of this ordinance puts the burden on residents. Scary to hear can't let auto-dependent development fail. What are we going to do when the economy gets back on track. We're not going to be in this situation forever. Not a problem we have to fix certainly not something that needs to be jammed down the throat of the residents.
- Doing something new is a good approach
- Some potential for a positive outcome such as a meeting between developers and residents with public officials, perhaps an informal public hearing
- The first item #4 on Page 4 is too general. It does not specifically say who a change to a condition of C-PUD approval.
- Comparison of Meridian Township commercial development to Delta Township. Delta illustrates what happens when a community does not have the rules we have.
- Summary: Do not eliminate the ZBA, add additional opportunities for public input, consider the timing of meeting announcements, applicants will have a choice between a traditional development approach and the C-PUD, invite representatives of the Township Board, Planning Commission and staff to the neighborhood/developer meetings, expedite an accurate report of what was told and said at the meeting, agreements such as acceptance of amenities are part of the public record
- Empty storefronts are a problem throughout the Township. Grand River Avenue has its own particular set of circumstances such as a history of small lots. It may be necessary to view different areas of the Township separately.

4. Public remarks

5. Adjournment

Chair Reicosky adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:55 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gail Oranchak, AICP
Principal Planner