

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
PLANNING COMMISSION
WORK SESSION MEETING MINUTES
July 27, 2009**

APPROVED

**5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864-1198
853-4000, Town Hall Room, 7:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Chair Wilcox, Vice-Chair Reicosky, Secretary Jorkasky, Commissioners Beyea, Deits, Klemans, Honicky, Jackson, Reicosky
ABSENT: Commissioners Honicky and Domas
STAFF: Principal Planner Gail Oranchak

1. Call meeting to order

Chair Wilcox called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

2. Approval of agenda

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

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 7-0.

3. Public Remarks

Chair Wilcox opened the floor for public remarks.

Ann Alchin, 2227 Hamilton Road, Okemos, spoke regarding the commercial zoning surrounding the Cedar Bend Heights subdivision and support for the current system which benefits the surrounding neighborhood.

Doris Schwartz, 2209 Kent, Okemos, spoke regarding the opportunity afforded to the neighborhood to affect decisions at the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Chair Wilcox closed public remarks.

4. Discussion

A. Redevelopment Zoning

Principal Planner Oranchak summarized the Redevelopment Committee's progress as outlined in staff memorandum dated July 23, 2009.

Commission discussion

- Committee understood the Township Board's charge to focus on commercial redevelopment
- Draft Commercial Planned Unit Development (C-PUD) for projects without a residential component is the alternative to the MUPUD; additional incentive
- No intent to eliminate all regulations but to have them all on the table for consideration
- C-PUD is written as a separate ordinance; it is possible to use it as the overall title and incorporate the MUPUD as one option for commercial development
- Committee considered redevelopment, abandoned properties, an expedited process; greenfield development was not excluded
- Appeal of the PUD is its flexibility to gain something in return
- Purpose and intent section is key
- Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (MZEA) guides the flexible principles of planned unit developments
- Important to reach consensus on the "purpose and intent" section of the C-PUD

- C-PUD adds a third option for developers/property owners of commercial sites; the other two are by-right/SUP and the MUPUD
- Committee findings recognized changing economics and demographics will drive development decisions in the future; the type of development that will be marketable in the future is not the same as the Township has seen in the past 40 years; the mall is in a precarious position; new housing types are needed to attract younger generations as a stepping stone to existing single family homes when they start families; in 1970 one out of every two homes were occupied by families with children; today families with children occupy one out of every six homes
- Sense of urgency expressed by Committee members for the Township to be proactive and put in place options now that will result in a healthy commercial mix when the requests come in.
- The amount of commercially zoned land is limited to small infill sites; practically speaking the issue is redevelopment.
- Bullet #1 in the Purpose and Intent section is meant to apply to redevelopment and development of vacant land.
- There is no reason to exclude vacant commercial land. Existing commercial land must be maximized to avoid spreading commercial to other areas in the Township.
- Discourage the use of vacant commercial land on the outskirts of the Township
- Rezone commercial sites that are not viable for development.
- Viability may be in combination with adjacent site(s).
- Rezoning commercial on the outskirts has merit if a significant amount of acreage exists but the Committee did not find the amount of commercially zoned land to be excessive.
- Areas zoned commercial are supported by the Master Plan and may be developed by-right possibly with the input from the ZBA; offering the third option of C-PUD provides the Planning Commission/Township Board input into the design and the relationship to surroundings.
- Not necessarily too much or too little commercial zoning but do we have the right mix of commercial. Too much strip commercial, enough big box. People are looking for commercial development that is within walking and biking distance.
- Ice cream analogy. Township has two flavors: chocolate (by-right) and vanilla (MUPUD). Basking Robins has 32 flavors. We need to have more “flavors” or people will go elsewhere; it’s the direction the market is going.
- Planning Commission also asked to address “development by variance” issue. The ZBA is the wrong place to review commercial development projects; it’s not administrative or legislative but quasi-judicial. The ZBA is not a planning body. It is intended to offer relief for unique and extraordinary conflicts with the ordinance, not self-created or problems shared by all in a zoning district. If written properly, C-PUD option may eliminate the ZBA as a planning body.
- Second part of the memorandum addresses a larger problem and opportunity. In addition to the C-PUD, engage in a process to “re-brand” the Township’s commercial areas. Building consensus by hearing from all stakeholders—residents, property owner, developers, etc. The Committee is asking to go forward with the C-PUD and also to make a recommendation for the larger initiative which does not have to cost a lot of money.
- Present recommendations to the Township Board to determine if the Township Board agrees with the Planning Commission’s direction
- Ongoing Township Board discussion of changes to the MUPUD. Begun on 7/8 to continue at a future meeting. May have impact on the Commercial PUD ordinance.
- Revise the July 23, 2009 memorandum to: add Phase #1 and Phase #2; identify Committee members; add goal of minimizing impacts on neighboring properties in the first paragraph; what is the Township willing to give and what is it getting in return; comment about the level of relaxation of environmental protection.
- What is expected of an amenity?
- The amenity must fit the project (don’t install a bike rack when a 20’ wall is needed)

- Create categories of amenities
- Use of Township plans and policies for guidance; up to review body to determine if interpreted correctly;
- Require the applicant to explain in writing how the project is consistent with the goals of the Township Plans and policies
- Point system combined with project scale
- Percent of assessed value after project completion
- Written statement from the applicant explaining how proposed amenities are consistent with the project
- Ordinance goals as a basis for amenities
- The ordinance must provide guidance; set a dollar amount for amenities; a percentage of the value-added to the property—one or two percent suggested
- How to get desirable projects; PUD process gives latitude as long as decision are rational and backed-up by goals and policies
- Get rid of “amenity; “ meet certain number of goals
- Still have process, don’t call it amenity: “X percent of project must advance the goals of the Township, “value-added features” is a good term
- What is the Township willing to give for amenities, what is it willing to get?
- Exclude wind energy as an amenity until the Township has an ordinance in place
- Eliminate the “amenities” requirement from the ordinance; no objective standard
- Amenities are necessary; developers will opt for the by-right or variance route if the ordinance lacks appropriate incentives
- MUPUD amenities are broken; opportunity to evaluate, find best practices and fix
- Township goals give direction. Applicant selects the goal—walkability, environmental protection, aesthetics—and proposes the applicable amenity.
- Double-edged sword of a PUD—it is flexible but it must articulate what the Township wants.
- Revise the definition of “amenity.” Replace “aesthetics” with “development characteristics.” Make the developer explain what goals are being met and how they are being met.
- The definition must imply design-oriented attributes such as construction materials, percent of glass, landscaping. Build design attributes into the ordinance rather than through a definition of amenity
- “Amenity means the design characteristics of a development that significantly promote the goals of the Township as defined by the plans, policies, and regulations”
- The applicant may refer to plans either adopted or prepared by the Township
- Percent of project must advance the goals of the Township. Value added to the project is the amenity. Eliminate the term “amenity.”
- Based on the discussion, the Committee is to prepare a new approach to amenities.
- Purpose and Intent: Revise Bullet #4 to replace “developer” with “stakeholders;” add bullet #6, “minimize potential negative impacts of the development on surrounding neighborhoods by the use of the C-PUD design process;” add Bullet #7 “Strive to improve environmental quality; delete Bullet #2 and add “non-conforming” to Bullet #1. Six bullets in all.
- Planning Commission agreed on the Purpose and Intent and on the process for amenities.
- Delete “where public water and sewer are available from the “Permitted Locations” section. Will eliminate use of C-PUD for areas zoned commercial but without public utilities currently—Grand River at VanAtta and Jolly at Hagadorn—if left as is.
- Do not extend PO at this time.
- Simplify the review process; reduce the number of public hearings
- Next step: Committee to work on the amenities piece and address staff comments. Come back to the Planning Commission with another draft. Planning Commissioners are to share comments on the remainder of the draft ordinance with the Committee through staff. Schedule another Planning Commission work session when the Committee has completed its work. More meetings as necessary

- Recommendation from the Chair for the Committee to meet with the Chair of the Zoning Board of Appeals to advise if the ordinance is too complex and will applicants to use the variance process instead of the C-PUD.

5. Other Business

None

6. Announcements

None

7. Public remarks

Ann Alchin, 2227 Hamilton Road, Okemos, commented the Township, not the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), required the clean-up of the Walgreen's site (SW corner of Grand River and Okemos).

Chair Wilcox closed public remarks.

8. Adjournment

Chair Wilcox adjourned the work session meeting at 9:10 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gail Oranchak, AICP
Principal Planner