

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
December 14, 2015**

APPROVED

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

PRESENT: Commissioners Cordill, DeGroff, Deits, Ianni, Jackson, Scott-Craig, Tenaglia, Van Coevering
ABSENT: Commissioner Honicky
STAFF: Principal Planner Oranchak, Associate Planner Gmazel

1. Call meeting to order

Chair Scott-Craig called the regular meeting to order at 7:03 P.M.

2. Approval of agenda

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

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 8-0.

3. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Ianni moved to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of November 23, 2015. Seconded by Commissioner DeGroff.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 8-0.

4. Public Remarks

Chair Scott-Craig opened the floor for public remarks.

Leonard Provencher, 5824 Buena Parkway, Haslett, voiced his appreciation to the Planning Commission for its service during the calendar year. He also acknowledged Commissioner Deits' long years of stellar service on the Planning Commission. Mr. Provencher addressed the rationale given at the last Board meeting as to why Commissioner Deits was not being reappointed.

Neil Bowlby, 6020 Beechwood Drive, Haslett, voiced his gratitude for Commissioner Deits' number of years of exemplary service on the Planning Commission. He expressed his views on the Supervisor's decision not to reappoint Commissioner Deits and spoke to the "systematic purging" of Planning Commission members who favor restricted development in the eastern rural third of the township. Mr. Bowlby offered history of the Planning Commission make-up over the years.

Dan Opsommer, 1804 Sherbrook Way, Haslett, conveyed appreciation to Commissioner Deits for his years of service to the Township. He introduced himself as the new appointee to the Planning Commission and offered personal and professional background information on himself and his family.

Commissioner Deits clarified the statement made at the last Board meeting as to why he was not reappointed is "very factually inaccurate" and he has sent a letter to the Board which delineates that position.

Chair Scott-Craig closed public remarks.

5. Communications (None)

6. Public hearings

A. Special Use Permit #15161 (Okemos Road LLC), develop an 8-unit townhouse project at 3698 Okemos Road

Chair Scott-Craig opened the public hearing at 7:13 P.M.

- Introduction by the Chair (announcement of procedures, time limits and protocols for public participation and applicants)
- Summary of subject matter
Associate Planner Gmazel summarized the special use permit request as outlined in staff memorandum dated November 25, 2015.
- Applicant
Matt Hagan, Okemos Road, LLC, 927 E. Grand River, East Lansing, offered history on rezoning efforts of the subject property since last year. He outlined the proposal, highlighting parking, bicycle parking and open space, noting the applicant is not requesting any variances. He designated the building materials to be used and availed himself for Planning Commission questions.
- Public
Leonard Provencher, 5824 Buena Parkway, Haslett, inquired if the existing seven (7) foot pathway would be fully retained at its current location.

Planning Commission discussion:

Commissioner Cordill voiced concern with the bank of parking lot spaces and the garages facing Okemos Road. She suggested some, if not all, of the parking be placed in the rear of the development in an effort to be more harmonious with Okemos Road.

Commissioner Tenaglia asked the applicant why it elected to place the parking in the front.

Mr. Hagan responded it was the desire to have the living area as far off Okemos Road and its noise as possible. He indicated his preference for the units to be near the residential property to the east in order to achieve a more neighborhood feel, and having the balconies and patios face the residential area is preferable than having them overlook Okemos Road. Mr. Hagan believed the greenspace in the rear allows a safe place for children to play.

Commissioner Van Coevering inquired if the units were rentals or condominiums.

Mr. Hagan responded they are rental units.

Commissioner Jackson requested the applicant to answer the question posed by the public regarding the pathway in front.

Mr. Hagan responded he recently discovered the pathway was on his property, indicating he will sign an easement to allow the pathway to remain, if necessary.

Commissioner Jackson asked if the curb cut off Okemos Road is a replicate of the existing cut.

Mr. Hagan replied it is a new one, as the existing curb cut is more in the center of the lot. He noted the new curb cut was placed toward the end of the development in an effort to reduce the amount of noise which will penetrate into the units.

Commissioner Jackson asked why the entrance to the development was not placed off Fox Hollow.

Mr. Hagan responded there is an existing apartment building on the corner, and the subject property is the second lot "in." He stated he approached the apartment owner to see if he was willing to allow the renters to traverse through his lot, but it was not an option.

Commissioner Cordill inquired as to the height of the berm.

Mr. Hagan replied approximately two and one-half (2-1/2) to three (3) feet.

Commissioner Cordill asked about the location of trees which will be planted.

Greg Petru, KEBS, Inc., 2116 Haslett Road, Haslett, stated the idea is to "berm it up" as much as possible to separate the units from Okemos Road. He indicated their intention is to plant deciduous trees along with shrubs across the berm.

Commissioner Cordill asked if the applicant was considering interspersing coniferous trees when the deciduous trees shed their leaves.

Mr. Petru responded he initially included evergreens in the landscape plan, but the Planning staff requested they be replaced with deciduous trees.

Principal Planner Oranchak explained the evergreens can obstruct visibility and can sometimes result in retaining ice on pathways and roadways when they obstruct the sun.

Commissioner Cordill clarified that she was not necessarily considering the evergreens as street trees, but placement further east on the property.

Mr. Petru added he will work with Planning staff to make a buffer of acceptable landscaping.

Commissioner Deits stated he recalled a high percentage of noise from a street is emitted in the first three (3) or four (4) feet off the street. He suggested placement of low lying evergreens underneath the street trees would help obviate some of the street noise.

Mr. Hagan replied if a higher berm is allowed, they will do that to enhance the buffering.

Commissioner Deits reminded fellow Commissioners and the applicant that this type of development was not the Planning Commission's first choice as it is not walkable or a community, and is one of the few pieces of property with multi-family housing within the last 50 years that opens onto Okemos Road. While acknowledging it is not his preference to site this project at the proposed location, that is not a legitimate reason to oppose the special use permit.

Chair Scott-Craig voiced appreciation the applicant has returned with a new site plan and has

not requested any variances. He noted his concern parking in the rear would create additional noise for the residential neighborhood to the east. Chair Scott-Craig stated the excess parking in this instance is probably a good part of the plan. He characterized the traffic study as “strange” in that the number of cars traveling north and south are not anywhere equal. Chair Scott-Craig noted the buildings to the north and south have brick materials and inquired if a brick face could be incorporated into the design in an effort to be harmonious.

Mr. Hagan responded consideration was given to taking the stone around the front door area and bring it out on the garages to tie the development façade together.

While voicing concern with placing housing on a busy street like Okemos Road, Chair Scott-Craig added there are new jobs being created at Jackson National Life and those employees will be looking for housing.

Commissioner Jackson voiced her appreciation the applicant has put together a multi-family unit conducive for families and the layout is different from many of the multi-family units previously brought before the Planning Commission which tend to favor occupancy by students.

Mr. Hagan added he was conscious of the need to market these units to young professionals with children through the use of larger upstairs bedrooms and extra bathroom space which allowed for bathtubs.

Chair Scott-Craig closed the public hearing at 7:36 P.M.

7. Unfinished Business

- A. Zoning Amendment #15080 (Township Board), proposal to amend Section 86-473 Street Trees Principal Planner Oranchak synopsised the changes made which address comments made by Planning Commissioners during the public hearing held on November 9, 2015.

Planning Commission and staff discussion:

- Difference between the timeline for replacement of dead new trees (2 years) and dead existing trees (12 months)
- An existing tree of significant size damaged during construction will take longer to show signs of ill health
- Planning Commissioner preference for a two-year period for replacement of both new and existing trees
- Concern with the level of administrative effort to keep track of the timeline regarding the health of both existing trees and new trees
- Staff would not wait two (2) years for removal if a tree died within the first year
- Newly planted trees tend to struggle a little longer before they really take hold
- Measurement of diameter at breast height takes place approximately four (4) feet off the ground
- Need for the addition of the word “without” before “causing” in B (1) b

8. Other Business (None)

9. Township Board, Planning Commission officer, committee chair, and staff comment or reports

Commissioner Cordill offered direction to staff by indicating there was consensus to move forward with Special Use Permit #15161 (Okemos Road LLC).

Commissioner Deits announced raffle tickets can still be purchased for the Meridian Cares Program, with several prizes from various merchants within the Township. He noted Township residents in need will benefit from the raffle.

Commissioner Tenaglia announced her and Chair Scott-Craig's attendance at the last Economic Development Corporation (EDC) meeting where goals discussed included review of the sign ordinance, a bigger presence for Welcome Week, Haslett Village Square, Celebrate Downtown Okemos Event, more momentum on the Douglas J Redevelopment Project, branding committee for Meridian Township and the formation of outreach committees for their 2016 topics.

Commissioner Jackson articulated her appreciation to Commissioner Deits for his service on the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Van Coevering spoke to her ability as a new Commissioner to rely on Commissioner Deits' institutional knowledge, which will be sorely missed.

Commissioner Cordill added some of Commissioner Deit's tenure was in the capacity as Chair and some was as the Planning Commission representative to various Boards and Commissions where he conveyed the Planning Commission's view and rationale on issues of mutual interest.

Chair Scott-Craig reported Commissioner Jackson and he attended a charrette held at the Forsberg Offices which showed changes which will be made to Okemos Pointe, including changes due to a variety of environmental concerns and changes to the commercial use. He reported on his attendance at the day long Transportation Bonanza #7 last Thursday hosted by the Michigan Association of Planning in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Safe Routes to School.

A. New Applications

- i. Special Use Permit #15171 (Chick-Fil-A), request to construct an 4,730 square foot restaurant with drive-through window
- ii. Special Use Permit #15181 (Chick-Fil-A), request to work in the 100-year floodplain to construct a Chick-Fil-A restaurant
- iii. Special Use Permit #15-70141 (Chick-Fil-A), request for a major special use permit amendment to reduce site area for the Meijer site at 2055 Grand River Avenue

B. Update of Ongoing Projects

- i. Site Plans Received
- ii. Site Plans Approved

10. Public remarks

Chair Scott-Craig opened public remarks.

Leonard Provencher, 5824 Buena Parkway, Haslett, offered his perspective on Special Use Permit #15161 as a long-time cyclist, stating the placement of bicycle parking at the end of the living units is not the most advantageous location, indicating it would be easy to pull in the driveway, cut the bike lock and throw it in the back of a car without being observed. He believed a better location is to place a concrete pad on "the finger of land" in the center of 12 vehicle parking spaces.

Mr. Provencher suggested the use of low boxwoods (one to two feet tall) on the landscape plan for Special Use Permit #15161, as they wouldn't shade much, but would provide sound dampening from Okemos Road and afford privacy.

Chair Scott-Craig closed public remarks.

14. Adjournment

Chair Scott-Craig adjourned the regular meeting at 7:54 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra K. Otto
Recording Secretary