

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
November 24, 2014**

APPROVED

**5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864-1198
853-4000, Town Hall Room, 6:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Commissioners Cordill (6:07 P.M.), Hildebrandt, Honicky, Ianni, Jackson, Scott-Craig, Van Coevering
ABSENT: Commissioners Deits, Salehi
STAFF: Principal Planner Oranchak, Associate Planner Wyatt, Associate Planner Menser

1. Call meeting to order

Chair Jackson called the regular meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

2. Approval of agenda

Commissioner Scott-Craig moved to approve the agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Hildebrandt.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 6-0.

3. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Ianni moved to approve the Work Session Meetings Minutes of October 13, 2014 and October 27, 2014 and the Regular Meeting Minutes of November 10, 2014. Seconded by Commissioner Scott-Craig.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 6-0.

4. Public Remarks

Chair Jackson opened and closed the floor for public remarks.

5. Communications

- A. Dan Kramer, Chairman, Bath Charter Township Planning Commission, 14480 Webster Road, Bath; RE: Date of the Public Hearing on the 2014 Bath Charter Township Master Plan Update
- B. Brian Dale, Chairperson, Okemos Downtown Development Authority; RE: DDA's support of the requested rezoning of the central fire station site

6. Meridian Township Sustainability Assessment – Wayne Beyea, Michigan State University

Mr. Beyea offered a Powerpoint presentation on the summary findings and recommendations for Meridian Township's Sustainability Assessment using the audit tool in five (5) categories: livability, governance, environment, community and economy.

Planning Commission and presenter discussion:

- First steps towards implementation of best practices
- Comprehensive goal statements for the Master Plan as a starting point
- Revisiting of the Master Plan goal statements using the sustainability lens
- Long term v. short term endeavors
- Utilize passion of business, neighborhood and non-profit groups
- Mature trees are an asset which play a key role, but must be weighed against the overall picture
- Many of the recommendations presented focus on the importance of vegetation, including trees

- Importance of maintenance (and the cost involved) in the overall picture of vegetation
- Vegetation has been used to reduce overall infrastructure costs (e.g., green roofs, rain gardens)
- Use of adaptive natural vegetation which requires less cost to maintain
- How to start public/private partnerships
- How to harness the private sector initiative around a few key geographic areas
- Communities which identify and prioritize areas around some key placemaking components can direct and guide redevelopment
- Powerpoint presentation and report will be placed on the Township's website
- Inquiry if other communities are actively working with their utility providers to bury lines
- Public Works assessment with a climate variability
- Incentives to make planned unit developments (PUD) and commercial planned unit developments (CPUD) happen
- How to guide redevelopment to make use of existing retail space
- Inquiry if mixed use should be designated on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) to target development in specified areas
- Identify opportunity for five minute walk areas and focus on those to create public/private partnerships
- Challenges in redevelopment of vacant sites, brownfield sites and grayfield sites
- How to level the playing field between a grayfield and greenfield
- Webinar training online through a link at Tri County Regional Planning Commission's Mid-Michigan Program for Greater Sustainabilities
- Long sitting Planning Commissioner has noted over the years an equalization of the concepts of smart growth, form based code, mixed use and urbanization
- Unifying themes which tie into the concepts of smart growth, form based code, mixed use and urbanization are density, walkability and transit oriented development
- Relationship of flexible space to form based codes
- Form based code takes some of the "mystery" out for the developer and provides predictability
- Many larger communities use administrative review on many form based code components with consensus from the community as to those areas which have been designated for the form based code
- Form based codes need to be cautiously retrofitted into a suburban community such as Meridian Township
- Corridor Design Portfolio will be available on the Land Policy Institute's website

7. Public hearings

- A. *Special Use Permit #14111 (MF Okemos), request for a fast food drive-through window in a new retail building at 2049 Grand River (former Northwest Tire site)

Chair Jackson opened the public hearing at 7:16 P.M.

- Introduction by the Chair (announcement of procedures, time limits and protocols for public participation and applicants)
- Summary of subject matter
Associate Planner Wyatt summarized the special use permit (SUP) request as outlined in staff memorandum dated November 21, 2014.
- Applicant
Steven Alafazan, MF Okemos, 2165 Louisa Drive, Belleair Beach, FL, availed himself for Planning Commission questions on the proposed project.

- Public

Don Davis, 2041 West Grand River Avenue, Okemos, requested the Planning Commission retain the access drive between the subject site and Heat n Sweep, a parcel he owns adjacent to the subject site.

Bill McConnell, 4376 Manitou, Okemos, believed the proposed project is in the tradition of the current style of the Grand River roadway. He stated the proposed project is very different from an expressed vision of what the corridor could be, but a perfect example of what the Township will continue to experience with the current ordinances and plans.

- Planning Commission and staff discussion:

Commissioner Honicky inquired as to why six (6) large trees are shown for removal on the proposed plan.

Mr. Alafazanos replied tree removal along the perimeter is necessary in order to expand the drainage and stormwater system currently on the site as well as accommodate the required parking for the development. He noted the developer is attempting to place as much open space and green space on the property as possible.

Commissioner Honicky spoke to the developer's request for numerous variances, yet none of them would retain the six (6) large trees. He addressed possible placement of a condition in the forthcoming resolution which would save the six (6) trees

Mr. Alafazanos responded that saving the trees in their current location would eliminate nearly an entire row of parking spaces.

Commissioner Honicky asked the applicant for creative ways to save the trees and maintain the existing parking spaces.

Mr. Alafazanos replied they would look at his request but the configuration of the existing parking lot will change when the new building and new parking is situated on the site.

Commissioner Honicky asked the applicant is there was any objection to Heat n Sweep continuing to use the access in the rear area.

Mr. Alafazanos indicated when the title was pulled, there was no recorded easement for the cross access or Heat n Sweep's water line which runs through the subject property. He noted he is currently in the process of having a ten (10) foot water line easement drafted to accommodate the owner of Heat n Sweep as well as creating a cross access easement. Mr. Alafazanos spoke to staff's recommendation to create an access with the Meijer parking lot, noting there is a (3) foot differential in grade and the need for an authorization to cut into Meijer's parking lot to deal with the three (3) foot incline.

Commissioner Cordill noted the applicant is requesting significant variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals as there is not sufficient property to properly landscape the site. She believed the applicant is attempting to place too much on the parcel.

Commissioner Hildebrandt asked the applicant if there was a way to fit the pass through lane, the additional parking, fix the setbacks, provide the four (4) foot wide landscaped areas and the side landscaping without increasing the impervious surface coverage. She indicated there are too many unanswered questions at this time, and could not vote on this project tonight as requested by the applicant.

Commissioner Ianni inquired if there would be any problem/conflict with the Fire Department or Township ordinances if the egress remained on the west side rather than cutting into the Meijer parking lot.

Associate Planner Wyatt responded the Fire Department could not maneuver their fire truck if the egress was placed on the west side. She was unclear if modification of the grading plan by the applicant would allow the egress to remain on the west side.

Mr. Alafazanos addressed the grading plan submitted by the applicant, which shows the grades off site. He explained the elevations on various property lines.

Commissioner Ianni inquired if the grading plan could be changed to make the egress on the west side viable.

Mr. Alafazanos responded he would have to raise the entire site three (3) feet and was unclear how that would affect the property along the front.

Mr. Alafazanos stated he could accommodate a bypass lane by removing the seven (7) foot and seven and one-half (7-1/2) foot landscaping buffers which currently do not exist and eliminate the need for a bypass lane variance.

Commissioner Ianni inquired if the applicant could move the fire hydrant to the front.

Mr. Alafazanos responded he could add an additional 100 feet for the piping to accommodate the location of the fire hydrant in the front.

Commissioner Scott-Craig believed elimination of the drive-through lane would solve most of the need for variances. He noted the proposed model for Jimmy John's does not typically include a drive-through window.

Commissioner Scott-Craig addressed the possibility of contaminated soils on the site.

Mr. Alafazanos replied the Phase I and Phase II environmental assessments were conducted and the soil and water samples did not exceed state regulations. He added that once demolition begins, his environmental consultant will be on site when the hydraulic lifts are removed to ensure proper procedure is followed.

Commissioner Scott-Craig inquired of staff as to the role of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) in this site.

Associate Planner Wyatt contacted the applicant's engineer to inquire if MDEQ reports had been received.

Mr. Alafazanios added that since all findings were below state regulations, no further action is required.

Commissioner Scott-Craig asked the applicant if there was a necessity for a decision to be made the same night as the public hearing, something the Planning Commission does not typically like to do.

Mr. Alafazanios replied the request was made to accommodate contractual closing dates with the land owner.

Commissioner Van Coevering addressed the challenge of the additional drive, a condition based on the Fire Department's concern regarding circulation. She also expressed concern regarding MDEQ approvals.

Commissioner Ianni inquired as to the length of time the property has been vacant.

Associate Planner Wyatt responded the building on the property has been vacant for approximately one (1) year.

Commissioner Honicky asked for an explanation regarding the elevations on the proposed plan, citing specific elevations on the existing conditions.

Mr. Alafazanios replied the grading for the proposed plan would level the site for "flat" parking. He explained the different elevation scenarios for the site.

Commissioner Scott-Craig suggested one possible solution to lower the size of the building footprint would be to build "up".

Chair Jackson reminded fellow Commissioners the Planning Commission is vetting the appropriateness of the drive-through window under all the stated conditions. She noted the bypass lane is required by ordinance as a safety and convenience issue. Chair Jackson inquired if it was possible to obtain a variance for the bypass lane.

Principal Planner Oranchak responded there is a width requirement for the bypass lane, but the applicant may request a variance from the dimensional requirement.

Chair Jackson stated a drive-through window needs a bypass lane for safety reasons and there is too much building on the subject property to accomplish that.

Mr. Alafazanios reiterated the bypass lane could be installed if the landscape buffers are eliminated through the variance process as the current site has no landscaping buffer on either side of the parcel.

Commissioner Van Coevering requested staff clarification if what is properly before the Planning Commission is consideration of the drive-through window.

Associate Planner Wyatt responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Van Coevering asked for staff confirmation if the Planning Commission's decision should not be based upon the full site plan, but only on the drive-through window and the bypass lane.

Associate Planner Wyatt responded in the affirmative.

Chair Jackson explained the Planning Commission would either approve the drive-through window for this site with the bypass lane or with conditions about the bypass lane.

Commissioner Van Coevering noted the resolution which approves the drive-through window only also contains conditions which requires a second egress and variance approvals through the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).

Principal Planner Oranchak commented the applicant is asking to install a drive-through lane which impacts the design of the site.

Commissioner Cordill inquired if the ZBA would address the landscape buffer issue.

Chair Jackson explained the ZBA would consider the landscape buffers if a variance from the landscape buffer requirement is being requested by the applicant.

Commissioner Cordill asked if the ZBA would consider only the dimensional requirements and not the loss of landscape plan.

Chair Jackson stated the ZBA would not address the drive-through lane, but consider if they will allow the loss of the landscape buffer and build the parking lot out to the property line. She noted the ZBA will address whether the requested variances will change the character of the neighborhood in a negative manner.

Commissioner Cordill spoke in favor of the project without the drive-through lane. She addressed the applicant's desire for certain items which are self-created.

Chair Jackson clarified the applicant has the right to ask for variances and it is up to the ZBA whether or not to grant those requests.

Commissioner Ianni added there is currently an overly large nonconforming vacant structure on the property without any landscaping. He believed what the applicant is proposing will bring the property closer into conformance with Township ordinances, adding it will be less of an "eye sore" and more harmonious with the surrounding area.

Chair Jackson reminded fellow Commissioners that the current vacant building was constructed prior to enactment of the dimensional zoning standards, acknowledging that although the applicant is making the building smaller, the impervious surface is not being reduced.

Commissioner Hildebrandt stated she will consider the bypass lane as part of the drive-through window, as they are not mutually exclusive.

Commissioner Scott-Craig noted the word “bypass” is not included in the conditions for approval. He reminded fellow Commissioners that the Belle Tire project immediately to the east never came before the Planning Commission as it did not need a special use permit and satisfied all the Township ordinances.

Commissioner Honicky added that one way for the applicant to meet the pervious/impervious ratio requirement is to make the parking lot a pervious surface. He suggested staff prepare a resolution to deny the project as proposed because of all the requested variances, which would allow the applicant to come back before the Planning Commission with another proposal, taken all the concerns expressed this evening into consideration.

Chair Jackson clarified the project is not before the Planning Commission, only the drive-through window. She stated the issue of the amount of impervious surface cannot even be placed as a condition of approval of the drive-through window.

Commissioner Honicky restated his preference for staff to prepare a resolution to deny the drive-through window on the subject property.

Principal Planner Oranchak noted the Planning Commission can also vote on the resolution to approve, and if that resolution does not receive sufficient votes for passage, it serves the same purpose as a denial.

Commissioner Hildebrandt expressed her concern with a previous case where the attorney indicated failure to approve a motion is not a denial, and voiced her support, as well, for a resolution to deny.

Commissioner Van Coevering inquired if the Planning Commission approved the drive-through window and the other variance issues went before the ZBA, would the other items related to the site be addressed during site plan review by staff.

Principal Planner Oranchak responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Cordill requested the resolution to deny include language which states the denial for the drive-through window is based on the plan presented to the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Ianni stated if the Planning Commission does not approve the request, the applicant would not have the special use permit to construct the project.

Principal Planner Oranchak indicated the applicant has the right to bring back a modified site plan at the next meeting based upon comments heard at this public hearing. She cautioned Planning Commissioners to not consider a resolution to deny if they want to give the applicant an opportunity to submit a modified plan.

Chair Jackson clarified that not voting on the issue this evening would allow for the possibility of a modified site plan to come before the Planning Commission prior to a final vote. She noted the applicant always has the opportunity to alter the site plan between the time frame of the public hearing and a vote on the SUP request.

Chair Jackson closed the public hearing at 8:45 P.M.

8. Unfinished Business

- A. *Special Use Permit #14111 (MF Okemos), request for a fast food drive-through window in a new retail building at 2049 Grand River (former Northwest Tire site)

Commissioner Scott-Craig moved to suspend Bylaw 6.4a to take action on Special Use Permit #14111 the same night as the public hearing.

The motion died for lack of a second.

- B. Rezoning #14070 (Township Board), request to rezone 0.5 acres at 2150 Clinton Street from RB (Single Family-High Density) to C-2 (Commercial)

Associate Planner Menser summarized the rezoning request as outlined in staff memorandum dated November 20, 2014.

Commissioner Hildebrandt moved [and read into the record] NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN hereby recommends approval of Rezoning #14070 to rezone approximately 0.48 acres located at 2150 Clinton St. from RB (Single Family, High Density) to C-2 (Commercial) with the condition the site be developed using the provisions of the mixed use planned unit development (MUPUD) ordinance. Seconded by Commissioner Van Coevering.

Planning Commission discussion:

- MUPUD development could be a forward looking project which would redefine downtown Okemos
- If the Township Board decides to develop the site as a MUPUD, the project will come before the Planning Commission again
- Question regarding the viability of the tree would require examination of the subject tree in season by an arborist
- As part of the development process, the Planning Commission requires a natural features assessment
- Parcel is a good opportunity for a public/private partnership
- Potential for abandonment of Ardmore Street
- Request for abandonment of Ardmore Street would need to be made by the Township to Ingham County

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Commissioners Cordill, Hildebrandt, Honicky, Ianni, Scott-Craig, Van Covering, Chair Jackson

NAYS: None

Motion carried 7-0.

[Chair Jackson recessed the meeting at 9:00 P.M.]

[Chair Jackson reconvened the meeting at 9:08 P.M.]

- C. Commission Review #14083 (Planning Commission), amendments to the Goals and Objectives section of the 2005 Master Plan

Commissioner Ianni moved to table Commission Review #14083 until the next Planning Commission Meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Honicky.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 5-2 (Hildebrandt, Scott-Craig).

9. Other Business

A. 2015 Planning Commission Calendar

Commissioner Ianni moved [and read into the record] NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN, INGHAM COUNTY, MICHIGAN as follows:

1. The Planning Commission will meet for regular meetings on certain Mondays, January through December in 2015 in the Town Hall Room of the Meridian Municipal Building, 5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864, 517-853-4560.

2. The specific dates for meetings are as follows:

| | |
|------------------|--|
| January | 12 - regular meeting 26 - regular meeting |
| February | 9 - regular meeting 23 - regular meeting |
| March | 9 - regular meeting 23 - regular meeting |
| April | 13 - regular meeting 27 - regular meeting |
| May | 11 - regular meeting 18 - regular meeting |
| June | 8 - regular meeting 22 - regular meeting |
| July | 13 - regular meeting 27 - regular meeting |
| August | 10 - regular meeting 24 - regular meeting |
| September | 14 - regular meeting 28 - regular meeting |
| October | 12 - regular meeting 26 - regular meeting |
| November | 9 - regular meeting 23 - regular meeting |

December 14 - regular meeting
21 - regular meeting

- 3. Meetings will begin at approximately 7:00 p.m.**
- 4. Special meetings of the Planning Commission may be called pursuant to the applicable statute.**
- 5. Regular meetings may be canceled, recessed or postponed by members of the Planning Commission pursuant to the applicable statute.**
- 6. A summary of this resolution stating date, place, and time shall be posted in the Meridian Municipal Building within ten (10) days after the first regularly scheduled meeting of the year in accordance with MCL 15.265.**

Seconded by Commissioner Scott-Craig.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Commissioners Cordill, Hildebrandt, Honicky, Ianni, Scott-Craig, Van Covering, Chair Jackson

NAYS: None

Motion carried 7-0.

B. Master Plan Update

Principal Planner Oranchak summarized the Master Plan Update as summarized in staff memorandum dated November 21, 2014.

John Sarver, Environmental Commission (EC) member, 2218 Burcham Drive, East Lansing, spoke to the four strategies the EC suggested relative to solar energy. He availed himself for Planning Commission questions.

Planning Commission and Environmental Commission member discussion:

- Framework for the demographic chapter different than for the natural features section
- Suggestion to take the approach of a generalized description of what is good and what is not as noted in Chair Jackson's comments
- Map in the Natural Features Chapter is "irrelevant" as only the source of the groundwater vulnerability data is provided, not the data itself
- Infrastructure and Economic Chapter comments to be added and will be discussed at the next meeting
- Goal of Planning Commissioners was to update, not rewrite, the Master Plan
- Inquiry if current Township ordinances impede residents' use of solar energy
- Township ordinance review should be conducted for possible improvement
- Sustainability assessment comment that ordinances inhibit options for use of alternative energy
- Goal 7, Promote Efficient Sustainable Growth: Planning Commissioner belief that today's retail rate of .13 plus .55 per kilowatt hour does not reduce energy costs
- Purchase of a solar electric system is a long term investment which will last 20-30 years
- Today's retail rate of .13 per kilowatt hour will change in the future
- Current federal tax credit of 30% for solar energy sunsets in January, 2016

- Concern with rules and regulations to take advantage of the tax credit
- Investing in a solar system can be for environmental reasons
- Conservative estimate the system will pay for itself in approximately 16 years
- Concern with rules and regulations to take advantage of the tax credit
- Planning Commissioner belief two companies which provide solar systems have become “loan businesses”
- Fragility of the electric grid and the unrealistic notion it will be able to take a large number of solar panels and their intermittency
- Solar and wind energy are backed up by a power plant which can rapidly be turned on
- Significant reduction in hardware over the next few years
- Significant decline in costs expected for labor (e.g., technology development and installations) and permitting costs
- Electric grid constantly changes with supply and demand
- Solar systems experience little variability and do not require backup
- Most systems are considered “good tie” which uses the electric grid as the battery or storage
- Economies of scale must be taken into consideration when purchasing a solar energy system
- Investment in purchasing batteries for storage

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

Commissioner Scott-Craig announced the Michigan Association of Planning and the Michigan Safe Routes to School will be presenting the Transportation Bonanza #6 on December 11th at the Lansing Center at a cost of \$59.00. Part of the program will be teaching participants how to perform a walkability audit.

Patty McPhee, 5275 Thames, Haslett, left comments regarding the presentation by Wayne Beyea on the sustainability assessment.

Commissioner Hildebrandt voiced appreciation for the materials handed out by Wayne Beyea. She expressed her desire for a Planning Commission opportunity to establish overlay districts which use form based codes to guide development.

11. New applications

- A. Special Use Permit #14121 (Fedewa), request to request to construct a 6-unit multiple family townhouse complex at 2043 Hamilton Road

11. Site plans received (None)

12. Site plans approved (None)

13. Public remarks

Chair Jackson opened and closed public remarks.

14. Adjournment

Chair Jackson adjourned the regular meeting at 9:53 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra K. Otto
Recording Secretary