

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
April 11, 2011**

**APPROVED**

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

PRESENT: Commissioners Beyea, Cordill, Deits, Goldsberry, Jackson, Norkin, Scales  
ABSENT: Commissioner Goodale, Honicky  
STAFF: Principal Planner Gail Oranchak

**1. Call meeting to order**

Chair Deits called the regular meeting to order at 7:05 P.M.

**2. Approval of agenda**

Commissioner Scales moved to approve the agenda amended as follows:

- **Remove Agenda Item #8A: Special Use Permit #10-09081 (Grand Petro Mart), request to withdraw the special use permit for a drive-through window.**

**Seconded by Commissioner Jackson.**

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 7-0.

**3. Approval of Minutes (None)**

**4. Public Remarks**

Chair Deits opened the floor for public remarks.

John Esser, 5448 Okemos Road, East Lansing, urged Planning Commission members to give serious consideration to concerns expressed in letters sent by him and his neighbors relative to PUD #11014 (Cameron Oaks Development Co., LLC).

Chair Deits closed public remarks.

**5. Communications**

- John Esser, et al, 5448 Okemos Road, East Lansing; RE: Opposition to PUD #11014 (Cameron Oaks Development Co., LLC)
- John Esser, et al, 5448 Okemos Road, East Lansing; RE: Traffic and water runoff concerns relative to PUD #11014 (Cameron Oaks Development Co., LLC)

**6. Public hearings**

- A. Special Use Permit #11-07031 (Okemos/Grand River Group LLC), request to install a changing message sign at 2131 Grand River Avenue.

Chair Deits opened the public hearing at 7:08 P.M.

- Introduction by the Chair (announcement of procedures, time limits and protocols for public participation and applicants)
- Summary of subject matter  
Principal Planner Oranchak summarized the proposed special use permit as outlined in staff memorandum dated April 6, 2011.

- Applicant  
Samuel C. Eyde, representing Okemos/Grand River Group, LLC, 4660 S. Hagadorn Road, East Lansing, availed himself for Planning Commission questions. He added this type of signage is not new, as both Okemos and Haslett High Schools have signage that scrolls and moves.

Principal Planner Oranchak added that the Township does not have any authority to regulate signage or anything on school properties.

- Planning Commission discussion:  
Commissioner Cordill asked if consideration was given to lowering the height of the sign. She believed the maximum height of sixteen (16) feet was more fitting for a highway location, not a business corridor location.

Mr. Eyde stated the applicant simply requested the maximum allowable height.

Commissioner Cordill asked if the applicant would consider lowering the height.

Mr. Eyde responded he would take whatever suggestions came from the public hearing back to the applicant for presentation.

Commissioner Cordill recommended a sign lower to the ground.

Mr. Eyde asked for some parameters to take back to the applicant

Commissioner Cordill suggested the parameters similar to the Rite Aid on Grand River and Dobie, which is down to the ground at the intersection.

Chair Deits asked for a sense of the sign's location on the property.

Mr. Eyde responded it will be on a 45 degree angle at the corner of Okemos and Grand River Avenue , with the illuminated portions of the sign facing northeast.

Chair Deits asked if the sign was illuminated on both sides.

Mr. Eyde responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Jackson inquired if the illumination would only come from the lettering contained in area designated as the electronic message center.

Mr. Eyde responded that was his understanding.

Commissioner Jackson asked how often and how rapidly the message would change.

Mr. Eyde responded he was not familiar with Walgreen's criteria. He added he did have more familiarity with the Walgreen's sign located at the corner of Saginaw Highway and Coolidge Road, which is the same type of message board being requested and it remained fairly static.

Commissioner Jackson asked if the word Walgreens, located underneath the electronic message center, would be lit at night.

Mr. Eyde stated that it probably would be.

Commissioner Beyea noted information contained in the staff memorandum indicated that structures with a gross floor area of 25,000 square feet or less are permitted one freestanding sign with a maximum of 28 square feet of surface display area per side. He inquired if the 28 square feet would include the word Walgreens displayed below the electronic message center.

Principal Planner Oranchak responded the maximum allowed for signage is 25 square feet plus three square feet for an address. Ms. Oranchak noted the applicant is at the maximum allowed with the example shown.

Commissioner Beyea expressed concern from an aesthetic and safety standpoint with a message board which would have continuous scrolling movements. He also believed the applicant would have an advantage over other businesses which have been limited by the current code in terms of what can be advertised on a sign. Commissioner Beyea cautioned fellow Commissioners that if this request is approved, the Planning Commission needs to be prepared to receive many more requests for these types of sign, mainly from existing businesses.

Commissioner Norkin indicated the charm of the residential neighborhood on Ardmore directly behind the proposed development needs to be protected and did not believe Walgreens needed a moving sign to be successful. He also spoke to driver distraction with a scrolling message center.

Commissioner Jackson asked the Commission to consider alternate possibilities; i.e., lowering the sign and limiting the rate of message change similar to previously approved signs for several gas stations and Culver's Restaurant. She noted this is the busiest intersection in Meridian Township and the safety concern is paramount.

Chair Deits asked staff if double sided signs are in compliance with the Township's ordinance.

Principal Planner Oranchak responded double sided signs are acceptable.

Commissioner Cordill asked if the double sided sign would carry the same message.

Mr. Eyde responded he was unsure, but would look into that question.

Commissioner Scales inquired if the sign is within the Township's ordinance.

Principal Planner Oranchak responded in the affirmative as far as size and height is concerned.

Commissioner Scales asked what other issues are before the Planning Commission.

Principal Planner Oranchak responded the changing of the sign's message is the only issue before the Planning Commission, although the Planning Commission could place conditions on the height as part of the special use permit approval.

Commissioner Scales felt this was a sign of the times as the world is changing. He stated he did not see anything wrong with allowing the sign.

Chair Deits stated the sign is too tall, too big and too garish for Meridian Township. He believed a monument sign was best suited for this location.

Commissioner Beyea expressed concern with proximity to the adjacent neighborhood and the illumination into the neighborhood due to the sign's height. He spoke in support of Commissioner Jackson's recommendation to lower the sign's height and limit the rate of change on the sign's message.

Commissioner Norkin felt the flashing and changing of a sign "cheapens" the sign, the business and the community.

Chair Deits closed the public hearing at 7:33 P.M.

## 7. Unfinished Business

- A. Planned Unit Development #11014 (Cameron Oaks Development Co. LLC), a request for a planned unit development consisting of 14 single-family detached home sites located on the east side of Okemos Road and west of the CN/Grand Trunk and Western RR in Section 16.

**Commissioner Cordill moved [and read into the record], NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN hereby recommends approval of Planned Unit Development #11014, a project consisting of 14 single family detached residential condominium sites subject to the following conditions:**

1. **Approval is granted in accordance with the plans prepared by KEBS, Inc. dated February 8, 2011, indicating 14 sites for detached single family condominium dwelling units and accompanying materials provided by the applicant, subject to revisions as required.**
2. **The applicant shall obtain all necessary permits and approvals from the Township. Copies of all permits and approval letters shall be submitted to the Department of Community Planning and Development.**
3. **The final site plan shall be subject to the approval of the Director of Community Planning and Development.**
4. **Final utility plans for the site are subject to the approval of the Director of Public Works and Engineering and shall be in accordance with the Township Engineering Design and Construction Standards.**
5. **Prior to construction on any unit, the applicant shall obtain either a Letter of Map Revision (LOMR) or Letter of Map Amendment (LOMA) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) indicating the change to the 100-year floodplain boundary associated with fill authorized by Special Use Permit #01021.**
6. **An easement shall be granted to the Township for the purpose of locating a water main and pedestrian-bicycle pathway extension from Cameron Oaks Drive north to the Consumers Energy right-of-way. Prior to recording, the easement shall be subject to the approval of the Director of Public Works and Engineering.**
7. **A minimum of 50 percent of the developable area of the site excluding wetlands and floodplain will remain as open space.**
8. **All common open space areas shall be reserved or dedicated by lease or conveyance of title, including beneficial ownership, to a corporation, association, or other legal entity or by reservation by means of a restrictive covenant.**
9. **Minimum building setbacks measured from unit boundary lines shall be ten feet from the front unit line, 7.5 feet from each side unit line, and five feet from a unit's rear line.**

- 10. Any future residential structure built on the filled portion of the floodplain shall either have the lowest floor elevation flood-proofed to one (1) foot above the floodplain elevation or the lowest floor, and lowest adjacent grade shall be elevated to at least one (1) foot above the floodplain elevation.**
- 11. Foundations for residential structures adjacent to the floodplain shall be designed and constructed to withstand hydrostatic pressure; verification shall be provided with the building permit application.**
- 12. The natural vegetation strip shall be clearly identified with permanent markers. The size, number and location of markers, and the language on the markers shall be subject to the approval of the Director of Community Planning and Development.**
- 13. Street trees shall be required along Okemos Road and Cameron Oaks Drive. The species, size, location and number of trees shall be subject to the approval of the Director of Community Planning and Development and the Ingham County Road Commission.**
- 14. Lighting of the Cameron Oaks development entry sign shall be brought into compliance with Chapter 38 Article VII Outdoor Lighting of the Meridian Township Code of Ordinances.**
- 15. No buildings, accessory structures, structural appurtenances, or grading shall be permitted in regulated wetlands or floodplain without appropriate permits from the Township and Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.**

**Seconded by Commissioner Scales.**

Planning Commission and staff discussion:

- Site was previously subdivided into eight (8) lots
- Application before the Planning Commission is to add six (6) units
- All units follow the Township's rules for a planned unit development, i.e., the amount of open space, etc.
- The units comply with the Township's interest in clustered housing
- Concern with the increased traffic generated by the additional units
- Inquiry to staff of the Township's policy for working with the Ingham County Road Commission on passing acceleration lanes
- No passing lane is being proposed as part of this planned unit development
- Rationale for proposal not including a passing lane is due to the limited number of units proposed for the site
- Passing lanes installed for Banyon Trail and Quarry were relative to the large number of housing units (which included Sapphire Lakes, Emerald Lakes, Hidden Lakes, etc.) between Park Lake and Okemos Roads
- Planning Commission option to place a condition on approval that requests the Ingham County Road Commission (ICRC) look into the necessity of a passing lane for this PUD
- The existing traffic count along Okemos Road came from the most recent count by the Ingham County Road Commission at the closest location to the subject site
- Location of the traffic data is on Okemos Road between the railroad tracks and Central Park Drive where there are no turning movements
- It is not unusual to experience a traffic reduction at a location
- The Ingham County Drain Commissioner (ICDC) does not have an easement in this area
- Two ways to establish an easement: 1) easement the applicant obtained from the property owner several years ago when the Cameron Oaks project was first approved and 2) ICDC requirement that the ICDC be the easement holder

- Recommendation for a passing lane in the resolution
- Location of the easement for the pedestrian-bicycle pathway extension from Cameron Oaks Drive north to the Consumers Energy right of way would be between the lots, beginning at the end of Cameron Oaks Drive and extend northward to Consumers' right of way to connect with the Interurban Pathway
- Applicant would work with the Department of Public Works and Engineering on the exact location of the water main and pedestrian-bicycle pathway extension as they would both be located within the same easement
- Project is far below the Master Plan recommendation relative to the number of units per acre
- Project could be viewed as in-fill development
- Northbound Okemos Road has a deceleration lane that approaches the site
- Scale of the development is much smaller than neighboring developments which acquired a passing lane

**Chair Deits offered the following friendly amendment:**

- **Add Condition #16: The Director of Community Planning and Development, working with the Ingham County Road Commission, shall investigate the need for a passing lane to accommodate the increased traffic into the site and implement a passing lane if needed.**

**The amendment was accepted by the maker and seconder.**

Continued Planning Commission discussion:

- More common open space than what was in the original planned unit development
- Appreciation for the pedestrian-bicycle pathway connection to the Interurban Pathway
- Proximity of the development to the railroad tracks
- Planning Commission does not have discretion over the layout of streetlights
- Specific lighting levels required for residential neighborhoods
- If requested, streetlights would be installed according to streetlighting district standards
- No streetlights have been requested by the applicant
- Not all subdivisions or developments have streetlights
- Streetlights and an entry sign currently exist for the development
- Location and aesthetics of the natural vegetation strip
- Posting of signs notify residents that the natural vegetation strip is a restricted area

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Commissioners Beyea, Cordill, Goldsberry, Jackson, Norkin, Scales, Chair Deits

NAYS: None

Motion carried 7-0.

B. Zoning Amendment #11020 (Township Board), amendment to Section 86-440 Mixed Use Planned Unit Development

Principal Planner Oranchak summarized the proposed zoning amendment as outlined in staff memorandum dated April 7, 2011.

Planning Commission discussion:

- Appreciation to staff for its work on the comparative analysis of the MUPUD and the CPUD
- Page 3, beginning on line 96: Concern with the list of commercial uses
- Exclusion of bars and taverns address not only the residential uses on site, but residential uses adjacent to the site

- Prohibition on medical marihuana dispensaries as dispensaries can only be located in commercial districts
- Staff responsibility to identify which MUPUD waivers exist after the application is submitted
- Preassumption does not exist in the CPUD, but individuals waivers, requested by the applicant, are granted as part of the approval process
- Language in the CPUD makes it clear that the onus is on the developer to seek and obtain permission for waivers
- Concern with possible interpretations of Section 86-220(f)(1) relative to language which states restrictions “are generally waived”
- Review procedure of a concept plan requires the Director of Community Planning and Development to forward comments to the Planning Commission and Township Board within 30 days
- Concept Plan review procedure (page 10, line 420): Concern there is no time limit for rendering a decision by either the Planning Commission or the Township Board
- The Planning Commission and Township Board concurrently provides comments or suggestions on the design, but does not approve or deny the concept plan
- Concern there is no time frame for comment on the concept plan
- Concept plan review procedure is intended to be informal
- Page 5; line 187: Check to see if language should read “water charge capacity”
- Explanation of water charge capacity
- Concept of a site absorbing more water and reducing the amount of runoff post development as an amenity
- Page 5, line 185: Need to define significant technologies
- Certification systems use a point system
- Inquiry if there is a way to describe a significant number of points which meet the requirement for amenity status
- Multitude of possible combinations for features
- Goal is not necessarily the certification, but what the certification represents
- Suggestion to eliminate references to LEED or SERF certification as the categories listing examples of possible amenities include certification categories
- Demonstration that the project has met the standard of one of the levels of certification, without actually submitting the application
- Suggestion to start with the certification component and list the other components accordingly
- Need for the applicant to delineate which items under the certification they plan to accomplish and staff will hold the applicant to those items
- Belief that within the next decade all buildings will be required to comply with the standards listed for current certification
- Suggestion to change language in line 185 to read, in part: “Other significant elements as delineated by LEED or similar organizations,…”
- Suggestion to replace “significant technologies” by putting a qualifier in place which identifies the minimum level an applicant must demonstrate
- Page 12, line 498: “consent of the township” would be the Township Board
- If an amendment section is added, a minor amendment is under the purview of the Director of Community Planning and Development so a condition imposed in that instance would be subject to consent by the Director

**The consensus of the Planning Commission was to allow staff to make suggested changes and bring back a revised draft at the next Planning Commission meeting.**

## 8. Other Business

### A. Laptop policy discussion

Chair Deits summarized the previous discussion and informal agreement regarding the Planning Commission's use of laptops during its meetings.

Planning Commission discussion:

- Usefulness in having the ability to research an item during discussion
- Part of previous laptop discussion dealt with Planning Commission members beginning to receive their packets electronically
- Township Hall has wi-fi capability
- Suggestion to have staff packet on the hard drive prior to the meeting
- Concept of an electronic packet would require a Planning Commissioner to either bring a laptop to access those documents or print the documents prior to the meeting
- While agreeing with the concept of reducing costs for the Township, there is appreciation for a paper copy of the packet
- Concern with public perception by leaving a laptop open during the entire public hearing
- Informal etiquette of not leaving laptops open when an individual is addressing the Planning Commission at the podium
- Need for all Planning Commissioners to have access to the same information during public deliberation
- Advanced electronic technology is a "sign of the times" and aids in making better decisions without the need to wait until another meeting
- Ability to bring up information via the internet and show it on the overhead projector for all Planning Commissioners and the public
- Appropriateness of using a laptop during work sessions v. public hearings
- Concern with new information or ideas brought forth as a result of an internet search being conducted while the subject is being discussed by the Planning Commission as a whole
- Example of an internet search at a previous meeting where LEED certification was discussed enhanced deliberations by noting other certification processes existed
- No consensus to entirely prohibit laptops
- No consensus to allow laptops during unfinished business and other business sessions
- No consensus to allow laptops during public hearings
- Consensus to allow laptops at work sessions
- Continued concern with ex parte communications
- Policy guideline for use of laptops at work sessions
- Staff to speak with Township Attorney on guidelines for laptop use
- Explanation regarding ex parte communications
- Possible training on ex parte communications
- Suggestion to develop an "opt in" procedure to receive an electronic packet
- Preference for the mode of operation to be that Planning Commissioners receive all agenda items as part of the paper packet unless an individual Planning Commission requests otherwise
- Electronic packets simplify retention of documents

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

Chair Deits reported the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) met April 4, 2011 and will be placing new sculptures within the DDA in early May. He noted that due to declining revenues and the fact that the DDA is funded through property taxes, the DDA budget has significantly decreased and the Art Walk will be scaled back for this year.



**10. New applications** (None)

**11. Site plans received** (None)

**12. Site plans approved**

- A. Site Plan Review #11-00-09 (Ted Hu Architects), amendment for façade changes and parking islands at Okemos Auto Collection addressed as 2186 Jolly Road.

**13. Public remarks**

Chair Deits opened and closed public remarks.

**14. Adjournment**

Chair Deits adjourned the regular meeting at 9:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra K. Otto  
Recording Secretary