

Vergennes Township

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

April 10, 2000

A meeting of the Vergennes Township Planning Commission was held on April 10, 2000, at the Township Offices. At 7:00 PM the meeting was called to order by Chairman Nauta. Also present were Commissioners Alger, Baird, Culross, Gillett, Lenihan, Warning and Weber. Absent was Commissioner Jernberg.

APPROVAL OF MARCH 6 MINUTES: Motion to approve by Gillett, seconded by Lenihan. All approved.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA: Motion to approve by Baird, seconded by Lenihan. All approved.

OLD BUSINESS

HEARINGS

1. LOWELL AREA SCHOOLS, SPECIAL EXCEPTION USE APPLICATION FOR AGRISCIENCE TEACHING FACILITY AT 11715 VERGENNES:

Presentation by the applicant briefly reviewed the same material as their previous visit. Public hearing opened at 7:05 PM. No public comment. Public Hearing closed at 7:06 pm.

Deliberation & action by Planning Commission: ordinance technically prohibits parking between the building and the street. The Special Use procedure allows the Township Board to ok the project with the variance included, if the Planning Commission so recommends to the Township Board.

Baird: concerned by gravel parking lot, should be paved? Blacktopped?/answer: budget is a concern

Baird: amount of parking ok?/answer: it's twice the required amount

Discussion about using city water rather than drilling a well.

Discussion about clarifying the use of the remainder of the school's property - whether it'll be left as open space/answer: intention is to build additional school building(s), Jim White showed artist rendering of same. The Wege property is the land slated to remain as open space. To remove doubt, it was suggested to delete item #6 in the applicant's Statement of Justification.

Motion by Gillett, seconded by Culross: Recommend to the Township Board to approve this application, with a variance by the Township Board pertaining to the parking configuration and with Item #6 in the Statement of Justification crossed out. Seconded by Culross.

Discussion: there is concern about a slow-down lane for turning cars (to be decided by the Road Commission). Comment was made of the minimal water use predicted by this building and that a 4" well should be no problem until the additional schools possibly to be built on the property are planned, when city water/sewer will be needed.

Vote: All approved except Baird, who voted “nay.”

NEW BUSINESS

1. PRESENTATION BY KARA GRIFFITH OF MSU EXTENSION ON A LAND USE MAPPING PROJECT: (actually made after item two of this section of the agenda) Joined by Jeremiah Asher, also of MSU, to demonstrate a computer program (SmartPlaces, an extension of another program called ArcView) that can map various elements within the Township, and “layer” data in a multi-level fashion. Time required to learn the software?/Asher: a person using it a few hours each week would be well-equipped to use the software within a couple of months - very user-friendly. There are three levels of using the program, two of which are free to the township.

Weber: Township just entered into a different software use option. Wants to see if this option is something for which the Township has a need & would have time to use. Nauta: the tool could be helpful to the assessor. Input from people in the office is needed. Using the free options would give everyone a chance to become familiar with the range of options of the software.

Motion by Weber: ask for the recommendation of the assessor & other officers by giving them the information about the software, and having them tell the Planning Commission before the next meeting:

- what they think
- how it would be useful to the Township
- to what level the Township should get into the system.

Seconded by Gillett. All approved.

2. PRESENTATION BY BILL SCHREUR FROM THE PROPOSED “VERGENNES TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION COMMITTEE”: The concept of the committee was recently presented at the Township Board and referred to the Planning Commission for consideration. Schreur introduced MSU Extension Office’s Dave Guikema, who described some efforts in nearby townships to preserve open space while a community build-out is underway. He recommends looking scientifically at what makes for good ecology (via various inventories of natural features) and also to catalogue a visual survey of what makes the Township look special in the eyes of its citizens. Public input is helpful when making decisions about the various methods and options available for land preservation.

Discussion followed about various specific concerns (helping farmers, land rights, etc.) and potential solutions of which people are already aware. General sentiment was

supportive of creating mechanisms to minimize over-development and putting safeguards and precautions into place, and educating the Township Board and Planning Commission about the various tools available to do that. The committee is visioned as a citizen advisory committee which can provide the necessary education and awareness-building. Membership is open to interested citizens. Precautions should be taken not to let it take on a “life of its own” and to bear in mind it’s an advisory committee to the township.

Weber: purpose of the committee would be to educate. If the township could preserve a little open space every year, it could add up in 10-15 years. People want land preservation here.

Nauta: for example, the committee should get 10 things that other Townships are doing & how it works on paper, and then inform the Township Board & the Planning Commission about them.

Motion by Gillett: to recommend to the Township Board that the Township have the Open Space Committee to study the issues of land preservation and forward its findings & recommendations to the Planning Commission, which will make recommendations to the Township Board; the committee will be reviewed for continuation every three years. Seconded by Weber. All approved.

3. INFORMAL PRE-APPLICATION CONFERENCE BY ROD HORLINGS ON A POSSIBLE PUD PROJECT. Mr. Horlings was not present.

4. DISCUSSION ON ORDINANCE AMENDMENT TO REMOVE CAPTION LETTERS FROM DEFINITION SECTION: the current system is difficult. It would be easier if definitions were instead put in alphabetical order. Jay: if the definitions were put into 26 subsections, one each for the letters A-Z, amendments would be much easier to do in the future.

Motion by Gillett: Recommend to the planning coordinator to include this amendment with the next Public Hearing scheduled, and that the system use 26 subsections, one each for the letters A-Z, with all the definitions of a certain letter under the subsection corresponding to that letter. Seconded by Alger. All approved.

Motion to adjourn by Gillett. Seconded by Culross. All approved.

The next meeting is May 1st, 2000.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate Dernocoeur, Recorder