

Vergennes Township

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

Monday, February 5, 2001

A meeting of the Vergennes Township Planning Commission was held on February 5, 2001 at the Township Offices. At 7:01 PM the meeting was called to order by Chairman Nauta. Also present were Commissioners Alger, Gillett, Read, and Richmond. Tardy was Jernberg (7:05 PM). Missing was Lenihan.

APPROVAL OF JANUARY 2001 MINUTES: Motion to approve by Gillette (amend one date to show "2001"), seconded by Read. All approved.

APPROVAL OR CHANGES OF AGENDA: Motion to approve by Gillette , seconded by Alger. All approved.

OLD BUSINESS

1. REZONING REQUEST FROM JIM & BERDIE COOK. Chairman Nauta disclosed a family connection to the Cooks (wife works part-time for the Cooks), offered to abstain from running the meeting, but feels comfortable if everyone agrees. No objections.

– **Public Hearing** (Opened: 7:06 PM; Closed: 8:02 PM) Purpose of request: 42 acre rezoning (3 parcels) residential to commercial. Jim Cook presented the plan: the property is segregated by railroad tracks to west, with wetland & trees beyond (unbuildable). NW corner is trees/hill (natural buffer zone). Two established commercial-zoned lots on east between these lots & Lincoln Lake, with more across the road. Current zoning could allow a density of 80-90 manufactured homes or apartments.

– Otto Lind, 468 Forstrum: what kind of commercial ventures would come in?/Nauta: read 201.308 (B.) to the crowd listing allowable businesses, all requiring special use permit.

– Bart Griffith (Lincoln Lake & Vergennes): any actual proposed business to go in there now?/Nauta: can't change zoning based on what's proposed. Jim Cook: it's wide open right now, possibly a convenience store & gas station on corner.

– Ed VanTimmeran, 1275 Burroughs: Master Plan calls for what?/Nauta - medium/high density residential, as of 1999./Is there a plan for the existing buildings on the site?/most of the buildings are in the commercial zone already.

– Carol Lee, 334 Lincoln Lake: has lived within sight of the site for 12 years. Loss of farmland and open space is a priority of the township. Wants to retain rural character of the township. Letter of opposition was distributed to commissioners. Commercial development is at the bottom of the priority list of residents per the Master Plan. Devaluation of property also a concern. Also concerned about the minimal standards for commercial development – wouldn't want ugly commercial development. Stores have a tough time making it in a bedroom community. Hopes for positive development. Asks

Planning Commission to follow the Master Plan and not allow this change. Delivered 113 names on a petition demonstrating opposition to rezone / Nauta: the commission is required to take and consider any request that comes before it.

– Sandra Birmingham, 58 Lincoln Lake: opposes the rezoning. Expected the residential rezone, but not a switch to commercial. 5 homeowners have unobstructed views of the property. Appraisal service has advised her that there's cause for concern. No set limit to # of services/acre and other concerns about development standards. Concerned about loss of property value. Wide ramifications: traffic, the need generally (12 large parcels of commercial land available nearby + vacant storefronts in Lowell), loss of rural character, effect of lighting on night skies. No one supported the rezoning while she was gathering petition signatures. There are many options; it's not just either 90 homes or commercial.

– Paul Barron (owner Elite Auto Body): Appeal for open-mindedness, that commercial businesses need to be put in neatly. Traffic would be less with that than with housing. Cooks should have the option, and it's a positive move for the area.

– Kay V., 12678 Burroughs: watches deer from her home. Concerned about wildlife & where they can go.

– Doug Lindhout, Beckwith. Resident 23-24 years. Rural character isn't maintained by putting in houses. Concerned: additional houses would not be as positive as a commercial development, if guidelines are set. Supports the application.

– Ed VanTimmeran (comments): why not run with the Master Plan for awhile before changing it? Which adjoining property would be next to be rezoned commercial?

– Daina Ward, 255 Lincoln Lake: seconding Ed's comment re: snowball effect. Residential development could use a plan that incorporates open land. Worrisome. Stick with Master Plan for now. Traffic will happen either way.

– Cindy V., 12691 Vergennes. Concern about where deer can go. Dirt roads getting paved. Need to give & take. Making commercial may not hurt.

– Rick Mis, 158 Bahala. likes the field. Doesn't want Lowell to grow north - let it grow west toward Ada. Concerned about lights, noise, etc.

– Kay V.: because there are no written standards, what can the PC guarantee that it'll look nice?/Jernberg: nothing huge would go up; they have options not to pave as long as dust is controlled. Rules & regulations are in effect for outward appearances and creation of green areas. /Alger there are different standards between industrial and commercial. Is an advocate of personal property rights if they lie within the parameters of the township. Re: Master Plan, we looked at where things like commercial growth could go – the area toward Lowell is most likely, which lets the rest of the township stay more rural. This proposal is right in the middle of the pattern of growth.

Berdie Cook, 500 Alden Nash: understand the changes. Has seen huge changes, plus now the Meijer. store. Noise. Lights. Chooses to look at the good points. Resolve to look at what change does for the good of the community and the township.

– Jim Herb, 162 Bahala: Complexion of area changing very fast. Has seen

snowballing development in other places, doesn't want to see it here. Understands progress, but the Planning Commission is here to control that progress. / Nauta - we can't stop it, can only give guidance.

– **Comments by Township Planner & Zoning Administrator:** Jeanne: encourages Planning Commissioners to consider the many comments. Passed out additional letters that came in today. Be consistent with Master Plan. Jay: highlighted points made in his written report: Michigan law doesn't give a lot of direction beyond Master Plan to changing zoning. Conformity to Master Plan is important. This rezone would expand that commercial zone and eliminate the buffer (aside from the natural features that provide some buffering). This request doesn't conform very well. Altering Parcel 053 might conform better than the others. Consider amending Master Plan if this passes, since it'll double commercial zoning area in the township. Evidence of inability to use property as currently zoned isn't strong. Other appropriate locations for this type of use in VT? Probably not. A modest degree of commercial development is probably best in this area. Be mindful of commercial development in the larger scheme of the area. Recommends against rezoning re: non-conformity to Master Plan.

– **Discussion & Motions by Planning Commission:**

Alger: Parcel 053 would be less good for residential. Maybe there's room for a compromise- let Parcel 053 go commercial but deny a change on the properties to the north.

Jernberg: Parcel 053 would be easiest to zone commercial. Perhaps split parcel Parcel 052, too. Wouldn't want commercial to go further north than ½ way up Parcel 052 re: intersection with Burroughs. It's set up to be a buffer zone. Parcel 051 needs to be a buffer.

Richmond: could go for Parcel 053 to go commercial, the rest residential. However, logically, the best use for the other two lots is commercial, too, although we maybe don't need that much commercial area. Want to look at 100 homes?

Read: Sees the various viewpoints - tough to decide.

Gillett: That area's not going to be used for farming. Parcel 053 could be commercial. Parcel 051 & Parcel 052 were created as a transition zone. No sewer/water at this time. Down the road, who knows? Already have homes on small lots in Schreur development with septic. 90 homes or apartment could go in.

Discussion about the Parcel 053 idea. Would leave some buffer. An option is to postpone a decision. Cook: goal to do things tastefully. Concern about piecemealing and loss of the size of the buffer zone. Reminder: cannot discriminate against mobile homes, and where to allow them is a tough issue, esp. if rezoning these lots would eliminate an area in the Township Master Plan for where a mobile home park would be permitted. Lincoln Lake Rd. is a main corridor, Class A road. 7,000 cars/day.

Motion by Gillett: Table and re-address at March meeting to give people time to sift through comments and address the impact on the Master Plan. Seconded by Jernberg. No discussion. All approved.

NEW BUSINESS

1. NEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (LAS & BETA DESIGN GROUP). Formal request for special use. School for 400 students on north edge of VT, Lally/Alden Nash. 19 classrooms plus support space (e.g. gym, etc.) on 29.5 acres. Have tried for a residential look. Timeline: bid October, completion Fall 2003. This one is a prototype for the 2nd school, to be built later wherever population growth dictates.

Kerri Manley, exterior design: concern for rural character, so they placed the school north of the bluff, to buffer from Lally and put driveway on Alden Nash for sight distance. School 430 feet into property. Buses to be parked on-site overnight in fenced, graveled area with electrical hook-up. Re: 300-foot lot width at road-side entrance; they have 150 feet. Driveway is located where there was already a drive for the site. Will need to request a waiver of the frontage requirement, or possibly get an easement from the farmer, or purchase another 150 feet of frontage. Another 20-foot easement running northwards will allow hookup to the sewer line. 30% of property is used for the building/parking, so there is open space. Intends to preserve apple trees where possible. Area to north will continue to be farmed for now.

Jim White: Grattan has already approved tapping into their septic system.

Larry Halberstadt, civil engineer, Beta Design speaking about the grading plan. Trying to match school with existing elevation; water flows toward school from west. Storm water detention basin in west. North: existing drainage goes off site to Alden Nash, through an existing culvert (would need to enlarge).

Bob Walters, Beta Design, re: interior: brief overview. Exterior view looking toward entrance (“front face”) Building = 59,000 sq.ft.

Why not pave the bus lot?/Jim White: Cost. Overflow parking to go in green space./ Is there enough parking?/It has more slots than at Cherry Creek. 99 parking slots, 30 used by staff, leaving 70 slots for visitors on a given day. Big learning fairs, etc. would be the only time overflow parking would be needed. Baird: look hard at parking. Gillett: don't forget the rural atmosphere re: paving parking lots.

Richmond: Concerns: Kropf Chemical Company mixing plant across the street; retail herbicide/pesticide & fertilizer. Spraying trees in spring/Mikulski: kids are still there, just taking them further now/White: question was asked re: ground water quality. Discussion re: chemical spill, flows away from the school site./Richmond: Chemicals are contained in a tank, but what about a fire?

Would have to take out apple trees eventually so, if not sprayed, won't spread disease to surrounding orchards. 4-foot vinyl fence was chosen for its good aesthetics.

Jay's comments: some concerns. Circulation pattern improved. Site plan: special exception use requires a hearing, set a date. Show overflow parking on green space. Be OK with drainage, meet with engineer. Detail on exterior lighting needed.

Jeanne's comments: send drainage plan to engineer.

Motion by Gillett to schedule a public hearing for Lowell Area Schools to present the

North Elementary school proposal at the March meeting. Seconded by Jernberg. All approved..

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Mari Stone, representing the Open Space Committee of Vergennes Township, updated the Planning Commission about the Open Space committee's recent educational program which drew in 86 people! Also, the committee is studying ways to tie preservation of open space into the ordinances. One way is to consider amending the PUD ordinance to include open space as a reason to qualify for a PUD. Asked if there was support from the Planning Commission for such an effort. Gillett: definitely. The consensus from the community is clear. General agreement from commissioners was evident.

2. Nauta announcement: Planning Commissioners are invited to a joint planning commission meeting with colleagues from Lowell City & Lowell Township on Feb 15th at Look Fire Station, 7:00 pm.

Motion to adjourn by Nauta. Seconded by Gillett.
The next meeting is March 5, 2001.
The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kate Dernocoeur, Recorder