

Vergennes Township

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

February 6, 2006

A meeting of the Vergennes Township Planning Commission was held on February 6, 2006 at the Township Offices. At 7:03 PM Chairman Jernberg called the meeting to order. Also present were Commissioners Gillett, Mastrovito, Medendorp, and Makuski. Tardy was Kropf (7:05 pm). Absent was Nauta. Assisting the commissioners was Jeanne Vandersloot, Township Zoning Administrator. Also present in the audience from the Township Board: Tim Wittenbach, Al Baird.

APPROVAL OF JAN. 9, 2006, MINUTES: Motion to approve as written by Gillett, seconded by Medendorp. All approved.

1. ELECT OFFICERS. Chair: Scott Jernberg nominated by Rick Gillett. Accepted. Seconded by Mastrovito. Vice-Chair: Rick Gillett nominated by Tom Medendorp. Accepted. Seconded by Mastrovito. Secretary: Chris Kropf nominated by Rick Gillett. Accepted. Seconded by Medendorp. All approved (Jernberg abstained from the vote). Discussed who would have the appointment to the ZBA; Jernberg has been in the position and is willing to continue. Township Board to discuss.

2. LIGHTING ORDINANCE - DISCUSSION. Jeanne read from the prior discussion in the Township Board minutes. Twp Planner provided suggestions dated 4/1/05 and 9/25/05. Board would like new lighting to have a cap for downward lighting and implement a very simple lighting ordinance. Jeanne said Jay looked at lighting ordinances from various municipalities and included a sample ordinance with illustrations. Commission referred to the light at the new gas station by the highway as a mistake.

Steve Platt spoke regarding a letter he sent to the Twp Board written to address some of the issues he felt Jay was missing in the 9/25/05 memo, which he said focused primarily on safety, traffic and enforcement, and mentioned other elements to consider, particularly preservation of night skies (there's no point in throwing light into the sky, creating sky glow). Strict enforcement might be difficult and existing lighting in the Township would be grandfathered in. A lighting ordinance could be applied to new building applications and nuisance complaints could be addressed as they came up. An increasing concern is the cost of energy. Horizontal light is not useful from security point of view. Light cut off at property line would be appropriate. (Copies of letter sent to Twp Board dated January 6, 2005 were provided to and read by the Planning Commissioners.)

Makuski: does this have a time frame for adoption? / No. Has been under discussion for several months. / Makuski: being in the country, we came for the privacy and no night-sky glare. We want to be able to see the stars. Agrees on the concept of an

ordinance, with questions about governance. Gillett: governance is the real issue, but if you get something established, you can educate people. The new development by the high school has agreed to these sorts of lights.

Wittenbach: Twp Board almost threw out the idea because of legislating difficulties and grandfathering. The type of lights that shine up and outward are going out of style and market forces will probably make this a non-issue within 10 years. Neighbors should resolve over-lighting complaints between themselves. The Board is only interested in a very simple ordinance. Lighting complaints to him have been rare.

Medendorp: we have to set some guidelines so people will have guidelines to comply with in a clearer manner.

Mastrovito: How to regulate? / Jernberg: at the time a person gets a building permit, you give them a copy of the ordinance, and then it's part of the building process and the inspector can check that. Further discussion about requiring specific things like this.

Baird: there would be an issue with people in RA - someone with enough acreage can put up lights and it won't bother the neighbors / Medendorp disagreed. Wittenbach's neighbor had floodlights and he worked it out with his neighbor. / Need to regulate new development. Baird said he could see the moon and stars through his mercury vapor lights.

Further discussion. Homeowner association on Alden Nash will have to police their lights. Jeanne: complaints about lighting can currently be reviewed by the ZBA and people can request that a problem be resolved. Jernberg: goal is to educate developers and create opportunity to have downcast lights be used. Guidelines will help people avoid conflicts. Can ask a developer to install preferred lighting, and most would, but probably cannot force it unless there are guidelines/standards/regulations. Elements of a possible ordinance discussed.

Wittenbach: biggest offenders are commercial operations and municipalities. We have a lighting ordinance in the Commercial and Industrial districts.

Jernberg: request Open Space committee to review Jay's April 1, 2005 document, with figure 2.1 illustration and come up with a simple proposal. Tom Medendorp to assist.

General Public Comment Time: none

Motion to adjourn by Gillett. Seconded by Kropf.

The next meeting is March 6, 2006

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Dernocoeur, Recorder