

Vergennes Township

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

June 4, 2007

Draft Until Approved

A meeting of the Vergennes Township Planning Commission was held on June 4, 2007 at the Township Offices. At 7:05 PM the meeting was called to order by Chairman Jernberg. Also present were Commissioners Makuski, Mastrovito, Medendorp, and Post. Absent were Gillett and Nauta. Assisting the commissioners was Ryan Kilpatrick (Williams & Works).

APPROVAL OF MAY 14, 2007 MINUTES: Motion to approve by Medendorp, seconded by Makuski. All approved.

APPROVAL OF/CHANGES TO AGENDA: Motion to approve by Medendorp, seconded by Makuski. All approved.

1. ORDINANCE AMENDMENT DISCUSSION - WIND ENERGY CONVERSION SYSTEMS.

Presentation by Ryan Kilpatrick, referring to a memo dated May 4, 2007. The memo is sample language for small wind energy conversion systems (e.g. windmills for onsite electricity production). There are applicants coming in with requests to install these. Not sure of dimensions being applied for. If they want to sell electricity, it will be a large tower up to 80-150 feet tall.

The VT zoning ordinance now does not outline this use, so it is not permitted. Vergennes Twp doesn't have a lot of wind so it would likely not be profitable, but more applicants might come in wanting onsite windmills, for various onsite uses. These smaller units are less obtrusive and tend to be viewed more favorably by other townships.

The language in the memo is basic, not specific to Vergennes yet, pending commissioner comments. Need to address such things as heights, setbacks, noise, and "flicker" (at sunset behind a windmill, the light shines through the blades and creates a flicker effect). This sample language offers a graduated scale depending on parcel size, to a maximum of 80 feet for largest parcels. Commission could choose to set a height limit regardless of lot size.

Jernberg: do other twp's have this? Gaines Twp does, and has a 35' maximum regardless of lot size. Others have industrial applications, up to 200' - no one else in the immediate area is seeing such commercial applications.

Post: what's a minimum? As small as 2-4 feet.

Medendorp: 35' is our residential height limit for anything - for personal use, I would be flexible. If someone's selling, it's a commercial use and would need to be in a commercial district or have a special exception use.

Discussion about use in agricultural settings. Wind energy is something not to discourage. Could develop site plan rules and a special permit process. There are areas of

the twp that get good breezes. Measuring varies when determining height. Could set a standard low height and leave applications for bigger ones up to review. Could start with 35 foot limit and ask those with more than 5 acres wanting a larger windmill to come in for a hearing. If allowing 35 feet, do you restrict it to one per site? What size blades are on a 35 foot structure? Need to define height - 35 is maximum height of the entire unit. Or tower 35 feet with 40 feet maximum height? Do we need more information how these things are built? Discussion about height - consensus: 35 feet as highest point matches other twp standards. Anyone wanting something different can come in for a hearing.

Another thought: minimum ground clearance for the blades. Typically 15-20 feet. Consensus to use that figure.

Kilpatrick handed out some manufacturer literature, Michigan guidelines and another pamphlet, as well as the US Dept. of Energy pamphlet and other information. Ag land might be preserved by allowing wind farming.

Kilpatrick will draft more specific standards for the next meeting. If allowing as a special exception use on parcels greater than 5 acres, how high should they go? Further discussion. Also for Ag areas, such as being permitted on Ag buildings. Could be a special exemption for Ag use, even though not a traditional agricultural use, perhaps with a limit of the number of allowed. Say, one per parcel up to 5 acres. Might want to consider setbacks based on height, which would limit the number, allowed.

General Public Comment Time: Medendorp: we need to limit the number of days storage pods that are becoming popular can be in someone's front yard; they fall between the cracks re: classification. East Grand Rapids is doing an ordinance for this. Semi-trailers were addressed - could add a line item. Kilpatrick to investigate the options.

Jernberg/Medendorp: what about also revisiting the classification of the commercial zone - we were close to finishing that project to have a community feel versus a long strip mall, visually. Kilpatrick will resurrect the language and see what the commission wants to do when Gillett and Nauta are back.

Motion to adjourn by Jernberg. Seconded by Mastrovito.

The next meeting is July 2, 2007

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Kate Dernocoeur, Recorder