

Vergennes Township
Planning Commission Minutes
March 5, 2001

A meeting of the Vergennes Township Planning Commission was held on March 5, 2001 at the Vergennes Township Hall. At 7:07 p.m., Chairman Vern Nauta called the meeting to order. Other members present were Dean Alger, Rick Gillett, Scott Jernberg, Vern Nauta, Tom Read, and Jerry Richmond. Colleen Lenihan was absent.

Approval of February 5 Minutes

Nauta asked for approval of the minutes of the last meeting. Motion to approve minutes was made by Dean Alger and seconded by Jerry Richmond. Minutes were approved.

Nauta asked for approval of the Agenda. Agenda was approved.

Old Business

Rezoning Request by Jim and Berdie Cook – Discussion and Motions Tabled from 2/5/01 meeting.

Nauta thanked the public for their previous input on this matter and asked for comments from other commission members regarding the matter.

Alger expressed a concern of the precedence this may set if the whole parcel were zoned commercial without plans or need and that it could open others to request rezoning. Gillette said the commission can't make a recommendation based on a plan in front of them. He commented that once a zoning change is made to commercial, any commercial use would be allowed. It wouldn't have to be based on a plan.

Kilpatrick stated that, if the rezone were approved, it would be wise to concurrently revise the Master Plan or follow up the rezone with an amendment to the master plan

Richmond stated that there are two choices for this area - commercial or high density homes. According to the Master Plan, we should concentrate our development (other than residential) at this south end of Vergennes Township and this seems to fit in that guideline. If the area were to go commercial, it would be a slow development; if it were to be developed residential, it would be a speedy one, possibly within a year.

Gillette commented that there is potential for 120 homes if it stays R-3. When the master plan was put together, it was set for [going north] Commercial, R-3, and then R-A. Is commercial better than having a buffer zone?

Richmond stated residential development would also affect the schools and greatly increase traffic (both the day and night).

It was discussed that traffic on Lincoln Lake and Vergennes is getting heavier, and a stop light is planned for the corner of Vergennes and Lincoln Lake. It is an ideal safe area to get in and out of. A school could be built there.

Gillette asked Kilpatrick, if this were zoned commercial, could it then only be used for commercial? Kilpatrick commented that you can put residences in a commercial zoning and quoted the ordinance "any use that is permitted in any of the previously listed zoning districts is allowed."

Kilpatrick reinforced that the Master Plan did call for some commercial in this area. There would be some justification to add some commercial area without changing the plan. One idea might be a Planned

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Unit Development that would allow incorporation of some commercial and some residential development – with mixed use. That is a compromise that Cook needs to come to the Commission with, not something the Commission can impose on him. His strong suggestion is that if the Commission should choose to approve the entire request, that they simultaneously, or beforehand, amend the Master Plan, but at minimum, set the wheels in motion to start the amendment process at the same time.

Cook commented that doesn't want a partial rezone.

Discussion continued that the Commission would rather see something go in where they had control rather than manufactured homes where there is no control. Gillette recognized a concern some have had about lack of teeth in the commercial ordinance. He suggested that, should this request be passed, they would want to strengthen that ordinance since it has not been revised since 1978.

Gillette stated an advantage to commercial property is a better tax base, whereas, manufactured homes will be a drain on the tax base and schools. Additionally, commercial will hold its property value and good looks longer.

The group discussed the fact that there will be time to update the commercial code including lighting concerns if they do approve this request.

Cook says he is willing to wait 6 months to let the township beef up the commercial ordinance because he wants to do things right, within reason.

In response to a question from Gillette, Fitzpatrick noted there are two ways to handle the process: 1. Hold a public hearing; then have the Planning Commission recommend approval of the change to the Master Plan; then present it to the Township Board for approval, or 2., Do both concurrently – recommend rezoning while you are in the process of amending the Master Plan. This is what a lot of communities are doing now.

Fitzpatrick said the Township Board has the authority to sit on the issue until the Planning Commission amends the Master Plan to something that coincides with tonight's decision. Gillette commented that the Township Board could still turn it down.

Richmond moved that the commission accept Cook's proposed request to rezone all 3 parcels. Richmond's motion was seconded by Read. Vote was tied 3 to 3 and did not pass.

Gillette then moved to amend the Master Plan to make the two parcels (51 and 52) to commercial. Motion was seconded by Jernberg. Motion passed.

A public hearing will now be scheduled for May, with a general discussion on the topic at the next meeting in April.

Mari Stone commented that the Planning Commission has already been charged by the Township at the last board meeting to work on ordinance revisions including industrial and commercial districts. Alger, Jernberg, and Read will form a committee to look at the commercial zoning regarding the cook rezoning.

New Elementary School – Lowell Schools and Beta Design Group Public Hearing – Special Use Permit Application.

Public hearing was opened and Bert Bleke, Superintendent of Lowell Schools spoke about the proposed new school to be located near the corner of Lally and Alden Nash. The school wants to purchase approximately 29 acres to house 400-425 students, K-4. Also present from Lowell Public Schools was Larry Mikulski.

Kerri Manley, Landscape Designer from Beta Design Group gave an overview of the proposed facility. The driveway enters on a 150' x 440' easement off of Alden Nash. Also present with the Beta Design Group were Bob Walters and Larry Halberstadt. 99 parking spaces are designed with an additional 75 spaces for overflow for additional activities at the facility.

The facility is in the form of a quarter circle with classroom spurring out from that with playing fields behind the facility. A 4' vinyl fence is planned around the entire facility to be a less intrusive view. Plan shows lighting that hugs the facility and shines directly down.

1. Allan Baird asked about driveway – is it owned? No. Manley answered, they are proposing an easement. There were three options: 1. Request a waiver for frontage requirement, 2. Get an easement, and 3. Purchase another 150'. They felt an easement was the best answer.
2. Barb Roth asked which students it would serve. K-4
3. Aaron Roth asked about height and type of lighting planned. 25' poles and white light.
4. Butch Landman – Island of Murray Lake – how much light pollution will he see from his home? How much will reflect up in the sky. Not much. May see some light reflected on a snowy night.
5. Ed VanTimmeran – What will be the impact on the existing sewer system? It would be equal to 18 single-family homes. Have permission from Grattan Township; they feel they can handle it
6. Jean Hoffman has concern for the water that her grandchildren will be drinking when they attend there. Bleke responded that two studies were done last summer and have concluded that there is no reason for concern regarding the soil and the water. They will be required to test at 30 day intervals, 90 day intervals, 120 day intervals, progressing down to yearly after 6 years.
7. Butch Landman – He is concerned about the chemicals used for spraying fruit trees in school's proximity – in the water, the air and close-by storage buildings (which he considers a potential "bomb"). Bleke addressed the question and said the trees on the school property will disappear. He said there are no apple trees to the west, it is private property. The only apple trees by the school will be some to the north of the school property. He feels it is a comfortable situation.
8. Jim Jager – Is there a study of traffic impact on Alden Nash, already a poor road? Larry Mikulski, Director of Transportation for Lowell Schools responded that it won't increase traffic because the busses are already there picking up students. It may actually save fuel and some time for students on the bus runs.
9. Barb Roth asked if the busses would stay at this school or return to the bus garage at night. They will stay here. They will fuel back where they do now.
10. Allan Baird – Two more comments to think about: 1. Parking for special activities and child pickup and 2. The condition of the township roads - we may not be in a financial position to repair roads. Manley noted there are 75 extra parking spaces over and above the 99 for regular parking.

Bob Walters presented the school's proposed floor plan – with a residential look and feel in the classroom portion with sloped, shingled roofs.

11. Kim Kroft – Are there exit doors in each classroom? No – not each classroom. This is not required. The building fits all fire codes.

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12. Pat Satchek – Is there an art room? Yes .

13. Rick Gillette – What is the square footage of the classrooms? 900 square feet.

Presentation was completed and Public Hearing was closed.

Gillette motioned to recommend approval of the proposal with the stipulation that Jay Kilpatrick, Jeanne VanderSloot and the township engineer review these plans. Motion was seconded by Scott Jernberg and passed unanimously.

Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn by Gillette and seconded by Richmond. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandy Lindhout

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandy Lindhout". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.