

**Joint Meeting of the Planning Commissions of
Lowell Township, Vergennes Township,
and the City of Lowell**

October 18, 2001

Commissioners in Attendance:

Lowell Township: Mark Bachelder, John Cornish, Dennis Sanford, Dave Simmons.

City of Lowell: Clark Janke, Deb Hinton, Dan Pipe, Jim Hall.

Vergennes Township: Vern Nauta, Tom Read, Tom Medendorp.

The meeting was hosted by Vergennes. Vern Nauta welcomed everyone, and began the discussion by reviewing current issues in Vergennes. Considering adding Community Commercial District to the ordinance. Would be village style commercial, very restrictive, small buildings, height and lighting restrictions. Goal to preserve rural atmosphere and open space while providing for services on a small scale. Current Commercial District at corner of Lincoln Lake and Vergennes; request by property owner to rezone and add to the existing commercial is under consideration.

Lowell Township spoke about a large residential project located west of Meijers on M-21. Phase 1, Stoneridge Apartment, is currently being completed. Four buildings of 24 apartments. Whispering Hills will be next, with 180 single-family homes behind to the north. Developers funded sewer and water expansions. They shared some of the issues they dealt with.

Lowell Township is undergoing a revision to the Master Plan. They have contacted residents for input, and have hosted two meetings at which 65 to 100 participants have attended. Simmons commented that in retrospect they would have held separate meetings for the residents and realtors; the realtors tended to have some measure of influence on the citizens attending the meetings, but all in all, it was valuable and good to see the communication taking place. He also shared that they have had a lot of interest from some major commercial developers concerning the Alden Nash/Cascade Road intersection for small scale commercial use.

Jim Hall – expressed concern regarding commercial development in the townships. He feels that any commercial development outside of town will impact the downtown district negatively. Janke asked how the townships view the city – the townships responded that they see the city as a service center, and the center of the greater Lowell community as well. Cornish asked about the city’s plans for the west end of town. The city is working to keep the west end viable, and they recognize its importance as the “entrance to the city”.

There was a general discussion on increased traffic – comment that the traffic light at Lincoln Lake was needed, and it will make that intersection safer. Janke had seen plans at a Road Commission meeting and shared that the 36th street extension from Patterson to

I-96 will be happening soon, perhaps as early as 2003. Another interchange is also planned between the Thornapple River and M-50, likely at the Whitneyville Road area. All of this activity will likely create more development pressure for the Alaska area. He added that he has heard nothing new planned for M-21.

All commented that new home starts are down. Nauta commented on increasing hardship of keeping the land in large tracts for agriculture. The next generation is not going into farming. Marsha Wilcox was also in attendance, representing the Vergennes Township Open Space Citizens Committee, which has 8 to 10 regular members. They have hosted 3 workshops to educate residents to some of the tools available to help preserve the township's rural character. They are currently working on an Open Space/Clustered Community District Ordinance, and have a grant from United Growth for Kent County for a survey of landowners and for the services of the township planner to assist with the OS ordinance. A philosophical discussion regarding the clustering concept versus PUD's ensued. Wilcox noted that the OSCD would be for residential only, whereas PUD's are also for Industrial and Commercial uses. Commissioners from Lowell Township felt that their current development rate provided plenty of new home sites, and that for them the bonus a cluster development ordinance offers is unnecessary. Discussion continued around the value of the concept for each community.

There was also discussion concerning an idea to make a grant request for a joint natural features inventory of the city and two townships.

Discussion turned to the issue of reversing densities – Lowell Township has encountered a certain amount of backlash to encroachment of development. Land in the northwest corner of Lowell Township was under consideration of rezoning to allow denser development with the extension of sewer and water lines. The proposal was vigorously opposed, and 40 citizens have now petitioned to return to a 2-acre minimum lot size, and to not extend sewer and water further into the township.

Jim Hall noted the video, "The sprawling of America" that will be on Lowell Cable. He will share with the townships when the run on cable is over.

The city will host the next meeting, to be held on Thursday, February 28, 2002, 7:00pm, at the Englehardt Library.

Minutes recorded by Mari Stone