

**Vergennes Township  
Planning Commission Minutes  
September 10, 2001**

A meeting of the Vergennes Township Planning Commission was held on September 10, 2001 at the Vergennes Township Hall. At 7:00 p.m., Chairman Vern Nauta called the meeting to order. Other members present were Dean Alger, Tom Medendorp, Rick Gillett, Scott Jernberg, Vern Nauta, and Tom Read. Jerry Richmond was absent.

There were approximately 30 members of the public in attendance.

**Approval of August 6, 2001 Minutes**

Nauta asked for approval of the minutes of the last meeting. Alger noted two corrections. There was no mention of Vandersloot's comments regarding front parking and no notation about Alger's objections in the minutes which were that front parking should be permitted. Motion to approve minutes was made by Jernberg and seconded by Read to accept the minutes with these clarifications. Amended minutes were approved by all.

The Agenda was approved by the group.

**Old Business**

1. Commercial District Amendments

Public Hearing Opened

Components of a proposed new Commercial District were presented by City Planner, Jay Kilpatrick. Intention of the new district is to create a commercial district with the look and feel of a village atmosphere, similar to what has been done in Ada or Rockford, Michigan. Rural character would be preserved by adding green space and the use of natural land features. Lighting would be limited. Buffers would be required next to residential areas. Building height would be limited to 1 ½ stories with residential look and appearances with no drive-through. When the master plan was developed, there was a recognized need for more commercial space, but it wasn't designated. The decision process recognized a growing population based on census figures, with promise of continued growth through 2005. The idea is to avoid strip patterns with a focus on parking and present more visually appealing storefronts.

Standards for the existing Commercial are very broad. Permitted uses for this designation would not be compatible with residential. This "village" type of district would promote more walking instead of parking and would be a pioneering effort in some ways. If the ordinance were accepted tonight, it would not have a map attached to it. That would come in a separate proposal.

Mike Mastrovito, Clear Creek Drive. If you are proposing to do this on corner of Lincoln Lake and Vergennes, is concerned on how the township would draw customers for the described "walking atmosphere?" He fears a heavy turnover of businesses.

Susanne Alger, 3-Mile Road. Concept is nice but is it practical? She is concerned also about turnover. Would handicap laws pose a problem? [No] What kind of business would be there? [Restaurants, a bank, etc.] Would security be an issue? [No – front is presentable, but “back” would actually be the front and be well lit.] What is setback distance [Minimum of 25’ to a maximum of 50’ plus a 3’ landscaping berm. Current ordinance is 35’.]

Tracy Miller, Clear Creek Drive. Asked about industrial district.

Al Baird, 3-Mile Road. Has anyone contacted other developments and is it working for them? [Jay: “it is working in Cascade at least on the governmental side... don’t know about the businesses located there. Might be a good question.”]

Carol Lee – 34 Lincoln Lake Avenue. She believes businesses will have a hard time making it in that location. As to Village Commercial District, it is wonderful idea. Where do dumpsters go? [They would be screened.] She fears that a dry cleaning business might contaminate her well. She cited a situation in Saugatuck. [That was an old dry cleaning business in Saugatuck and today’s chemicals would not be a concern. Actual cleaning at that location would be a special exception use anyway.]

Jim Cook, 500 Alden Nash. May need to look at strip-type stores at the corner, maybe an upscale restaurant or upscale office buildings. Suggests not setting the height limitation for now. Feels if we become too stringent, too much having to jump through hoops could lead to business failure. Have to realize some are road frontage types of business, and some can be back-tier business; perhaps even a two-story level in the back. [Jernberg said if someone proposed a 2-story building that the board might be able to work with it e.g., if the 2<sup>nd</sup> story was in the back and not too obtrusive, that is what special exception uses are for. A nice restaurant would need to have adequate parking around the facility but the cars would be gone by a reasonable hour.]

Tim Wittenbach. Does ordinance have that much breathing space? Ordinance would only let you adjust 25% as the standard sets now. It is possible to disguise the cars with landscaping. The Timbers restaurant was used as an example.

### **Public hearing closed**

### **Discussion and motions by Planning Commission**

Alger thinks most places where this type of development have been successful have been in an area of visibility and with a more upscale or wealthy clientele and that you need to have parking in front. He is concerned about the extreme restrictions of having the parking in the back of the stores. Nauta said this would be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Alger is also concerned about the 1500 square foot limitation per business. Kilpatrick suggested you can go larger, but need to get a special exception permit – you would go

from “business by right” to “business by exception.” Alger is concerned that we are competing against the draw on M-21 by businesses such as Meijer’s. Also, how many incoming business will accept parking in back? Will two fronts be more expensive? Jernberg said what we are doing is thinking about the community. Special exception could even be made for parking to be in the front. Gillette, commented that there is no guarantee in any mall that there will be no empty stores.

Read suggested that the commission take a more serious look at the 1½ story height limitation in the plan. Nauta suggested to drop the 25% standard so all changes could be handed by special use exception.

Kilpatrick said to the extent that language seems restrictive, there are mechanisms to deal with the parking – landscaping, screens.

Nauta stated that the commission can later make changes to ordinance as long as they are not more restrictive.

Jernberg offered a 3-part motion to amend the proposed Ordinance changes as suggested in the handout to the commission members:

1. On page 10, Section G. Modifications, paragraph 1, drop 25% restriction requirement for height modification
2. Change the ordinance wording on page 7, Section F, paragraph c., 3), third and last line of the paragraph, to read “corner lots except when screened behind buildings/landscaping on those lots.
3. Page 6, Section F Design Standards and Use Restrictions, add the wording at the end of the paragraph, “except as modified as permitted in Section G.”

Motion was seconded by Read. Amendment passed, with Alger dissenting.

2. Comprehensive Plan Update

Kilpatrick reviewed proposed changes to the Amendment to the comprehensive plan. Vergennes currently rates 2<sup>nd</sup> in Kent County for number of families with children - which is indicator of an upcoming need for increased commercial services. By making the proposed shift to commercial this also makes the airport more compatible with the surrounding area.

Gillette Motioned to hold public a Public Hearing, October 1, 2001 on the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment. Jernberg seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Carolyn Way Private Road Update

Rick Pulaski, Nederveld & Assoc. reviewed proposed plan changes and gave an overview of the history of this request. Special Use Permit was approved in 1999 for a road to be built. Road into the Wade MacKay property was never built. MacKay found out 9-acre parcels didn't sell. Approval expired. A new ordinance requiring 500 ft. between private roads was approved later so the 220' of space between current road and access road to MacKay development property does not meet regulations. Planning Commission had asked them to explore few options including requesting permission to move the road from property owners and gain access through an easement. Permission was denied in all cases. They are requesting through a hardship ruling to have their request accepted. There was comment from several neighbors to the Carolyn Way Road.

Mike Mastrovito, Clear Creek Drive said traffic would increase from 20 to 52 cars a day and, with the two roads so close together, this would look an I-96 expressway. Also there is the concern about safety of children in the area. Also, there are only a few trees for protection and coverage. MacKay never informs neighbors of what he plans. Neighbors just received a letter from him 4 days before tonight's meeting. There is also the issue of address (street names). Discussion ensued between MacKay, Mastrovito, Pulaski and members of the Planning Commission.

Gillette motioned that the request be denied. Jernberg seconded the motion. After further discussion, motion was withdrawn. Pulaski and MacKay will set up a joint meeting with Clear Creek property owners. The township hall was offered as a meeting place.

**New Business:**

Coopers have requested a withdrawal of their request for rezoning and per escrow policy, a refund of their unused escrow fees.

**Adjournment**

A motion was made to adjourn by Gillette and seconded by Jernberg.

Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 9:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Sandy Lindhout, Recorder