
PITTSFIELD TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

Members Present: Dennis Ward, Richard Plisko, Christina Lirones, Stuart Dowty, John Norton, Maria Constant.

Members Absent: Wilma Luna.

Others Present: Planning Director Bruce E. Fowler, Senior Planner Paul Montagno, and Recording Secretary Laura Ford.

1.0 Call Meeting to Order at 7:30 p.m. / Determination of a Quorum.

Chairperson Lirones called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. A quorum was present.

2.0 Pledge of Allegiance

Chairperson Lirones led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3.0 Approval of Agenda

Motion by Commissioner Ward, supported by Commissioner Plisko, to approve the agenda, as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

4.0 Items from the Floor

There were no audience members present.

5.0 Public Hearings

None.

6.0 Old Business

None.

7.0 New Business

7.1 Annual Evaluation of the Comprehensive Plan

Planning Director Bruce E. Fowler reviewed the proposed amendments. He stated that they are suggesting four (4) amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.

**Michigan Avenue Corridor from US-23 to the Platt Road Intersection
(Michigan-Textile Sub-Area)**

Director Fowler stated that the Planning Commission discussed this area a year ago. He said that they directed staff to look at it further. He said they are suggesting a two-step process. He said that the first step is an amendment of the Comprehensive Plan creating a Michigan Avenue-Textile Road sub-area. He said

that they recommend research and development. He said that the second step would be staff preparing a supplemental plan document. He said that the plan would include a detailed analysis of the area, the specific steps to implement the Michigan Avenue-Textile Road sub-area plan, and design guidelines. He said a workshop would be held to include stakeholders, property owners, residents, and public agencies.

Senior Planner Paul Montagno stated that staff presented to the Planning Commission on September 21, 2006, the need to plan for sites located along Michigan Avenue, Platt Road and the US-23 corridor. He said the study area has expanded to include additional parcels. He discussed the different areas in the study. Area 1: 12 parcels on the south side of Michigan Avenue. He said that there are two (2) major thoroughfares [M-12, US-23], and this is a gateway to the community because of the entrance from US-23. He said that the current condition of this area could result in traffic congestion and fragmented development areas. He discussed a Comprehensive Plan change and the possibility of an overlay district. Area 2: Ten (10) parcels in the northeast corner of Textile Road and Platt Road. Area 3: Single parcel located in the southwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Platt Road. Area 4: Eight (8) parcels north of M-12 and south of Textile Road. He added that this is a heavily wooded area. Area 5: Immediately adjacent to the south bound off ramp of US-23. He said that future land use designation calls for local commercial, regional commercial and office uses immediately adjacent to US-23.

Planner Montagno stated that all of the areas have some development potential and they are either not developed or underdeveloped. He said that this is currently large lot residential on a major thoroughfare. He handed the Commissioners a grid that amplifies these areas. He said that Shankle Motors is completely bounded by Michigan Avenue, Textile Road and Platt Road, and is virtually undevelopable. He said that Area 5 is a blighted area in the Township. He said the owners might be able to market the parcels to someone and allow something nice in the gateway of the Township. He said that Area 4 is future land use mapped for local commercial. He said that if this were developed parcel-by-parcel they would lose many trees. He said that one development could consolidate density and save trees. He mentioned that Pittsfield Preserve abuts to the west side of this area.

Commissioner Ward stated that he likes what is proposed and the improvements are really needed. He said that he is concerned with the area and the unofficial truck stops. He said that areas such as Sam's Club are still finding a lot of large truck traffic and weekend parking. He asked if the sub-areas could include language to curtail this activity. He said that the Commission did all this work on Sam's Club and the trucks are still causing blight and they stifle traffic flow. He said that this would continue to be a problem because of high truck traffic on US-23 and Michigan Avenue.

Mr. Montagno stated that there are two (2) possible solutions. He said that this is an enforcement issue. He said that they try to enforce this and it does not go away. He said that some of the proposals for this area would not have these huge parking lots. He said that it could be designed to maneuver a truck where it needs to go and not leave wide spaces open.

Commissioner Ward stated that if something can be done through good practices to discourage this he would like to see that.

Planner Montagno stated they could develop an area specifically designed for this use where it does not become blighted.

Commissioner Ward stated that he does not want this to be a Baker Road [interchange on I-94 in Scio Township] design/area.

Planner Montagno discussed a unified gas station for highway traffic and local residents. He said that it could be an area large enough to service road trucks but not a designated parking area.

Commissioner Ward asked if this would compete with the county's plan for the Willis Road interchange. He said that they are proposing five (5) interchanges/hubs for development. He mentioned that this one is big because of Toyota. He asked how they make the concept viable and work with the other area so they complement each other.

Commissioner Dowty asked if Commissioner Ward's main concern is overnight truckers, as opposed to a truck stop with restrooms and parking.

Commissioner Ward replied yes. He said the area is not conducive to have a truck stop. He said that the interchange would have to be redesigned. He said to look at it regionally. He added that he likes what has been proposed.

Planner Montagno stated this would be considered when they move forward with planning for this area. He said that there could be supplemental material added to the Comprehensive Plan. He showed an aerial plan of two areas. He said this is a rough conceptual design of what could be done at two (2) of the five (5) areas.

Chairperson Lirones asked if this [the concept for area 2] would be permitted under the current plan.

Planner Montagno replied no, not under the current plan. He said this was put forth after discussions of the intent of this area. He said that it is currently zoned for R-1A larger lot residential. He said this is an underutilized area. He said there could be a mixture of uses; commercial, higher density residential, or mixed use with residential above the commercial uses.

Chairperson Lirones stated that what the developer proposed also would not comply with the plan.

Planner Montagno stated that this is the concept staff provided and it tries to accommodate some of the current development. He discussed a residential area on Textile Road south of area 1. He said that they could look into this in the future but right now they want to preserve it. He said there is a stub that comes down from Michigan Avenue that could be used for a future drive or walking pathway, although it might cause too much disturbance right now. He said that the area around Michigan Avenue would have to be done very delicately, and MDOT would have to be involved in the discussions. He said that the proximity to residential areas would provide much needed commercial uses to this area. He said that neither the Comprehensive Plan nor the Zoning Ordinance calls for true high density mixed uses.

Planner Montagno stated that these areas could provide a destination point along the Platt Road Greenway. He said this [the green way] would provide means of alternative transportation. He said that initial conversations with the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority (AATA) show a willingness to extend the bus routes to this area. He said the township would be in talks with AATA regarding where the bus routes and stops would go. He said that many suburban areas struggle for the development of a community identity. He said that Michigan recognizes on a state level the need to transition to an economy based on knowledge and information technology. He said that businesses are looking for quality workspace, infrastructure, and a highly educated work force. He said that diversity should be created in what the Township has to offer to potential residents.

Planner Montagno stated that the steps to proceed in the process would be to amend the Comprehensive Plan to include a new future land use category. He said they could propose language to serve as a temporary guide for development in the area until a more supplemental plan is established. He said they would hold workshops with the public and outside agencies and develop a supplemental plan describing the concept and design.

Commissioner Dowty thanked staff for doing this. He asked if they could take the details from last year's Planning Commission meeting and compare them with these proposals. He said that this area is blighted and has many eyesores. He asked what the coordinating features are that Planner Montagno wants to gain.

Planner Montagno stated that this is all subject to intense discussion, input from the community, stakeholders, the Planning Commission and outside agencies. He said that the coordinating key to this would be the regulations used regarding design density, setbacks, rear parking, and minimum height densities.

Commissioner Dowty asked if Planner Montagno prefers rear parking.

Planner Montagno replied yes. He said that it still provides for parking once people know it is there, and it does not affect the business model. He said that this is a major traffic corridor and it could encourage people to use other means of transportation.

Chairperson Lirones discussed the residential areas south of Wellesley Gardens and said that typically the walking public would be coming up from the back. She said that the problem with Saline is that Michigan Avenue is going right through it and people do not want to walk through along there. She said that truck traffic rattles everything in the stores and the homes. She said that it is unclear where the pedestrian foot traffic would come from on Michigan Avenue. She said this is an unpleasant road to walk on.

Planner Montagno stated that maybe a key point.

Chairperson Lirones stated they are possibly looking at it flip-flopped. She said that they should hold the workshops first instead of amending the plan.

Planner Montagno stated if they scale things out, the green space between the sidewalks and the travel corridors is fifteen (15) feet wide.

Chairperson Lirones stated that Michigan Avenue is listed as a truck route. She said they should look back at what was already proposed in this area.

Planner Montagno stated that the proposed language is very similar to the language in the Michigan Avenue/US-23 area. He said that the Michigan Avenue and US-23 area did not go forward as proposed.

Chairperson Lirones stated that they should do the workshops first and receive a lot of input from the stakeholders. She said there is some legal consequences with this and why they retain some areas as the same in the Comprehensive Plan. She said this is one of only a few areas that allows highway commercial. She said they kept it there to not appear exclusionary. She said this is one of the few places you could put a hotel or truck stop.

Planner Montagno stated they looked at that area very specifically as well. He said there is still room for a hotel there.

Chairperson Lirones stated that everything proposed should take into account the unforeseen consequences of expanding the commercial area. She said that until the Michigan Avenue and Textile Road areas are settled she is not sure how much can be put in there.

The Commissioners and staff discussed expanding the commercial area.

Planner Montagno stated that this area [area 4] is designated for local commercial. He said that each lot could develop as a commercial area. He said they could consolidate development and intensify the buffer. He said that the area next to this building shows that office is most appropriate for the area. He said that condominiums would be similar to the residential uses already proposed, and have large rear yards. He said that there could be a substantial buffer with parking to separate the commercial use and the condominiums. He said that the owner feels a right to get some value out of this. He said there are issues with a Textile Road connection and Platt Road. He mentioned that this is nothing more than a concept.

Chairperson Lirones stated that right now the area is planned for R-1B.

Commissioner Dowty asked if Shankle owns north of Textile Road.

Planner Montagno replied no.

Chairperson Lirones stated this is worth looking at. She said she is concerned with opening this area up as a large commercial area.

Planner Montagno stated they are looking for local businesses to serve the tremendous amount of residential development in the area.

Chairperson Lirones asked if they need the residential use at all.

Planner Montagno stated that pedestrian orientation is important. He said this is a real focal point on the greenway and in the township.

Commissioner Dowty discussed having a gazebo on the Shankle property. He said this is not a good location for a nice quiet place. He said this is the same reaction

with Michigan Avenue and US-23. He said that this will always be a major hub for traffic. He said that ninety-five (95) percent of traffic is passing through and is not local.

Planner Montagno explained that something like a gazebo could be just an icon and not necessarily be functional.

Commissioner Ward stated there would always be traffic coming through there. He said that if it is designed right the trucks would have nowhere to park.

Commissioner Norton stated that the trucks are coming here because it is easy. He said that if this is made a community commercial area the trucks will not want to stop there.

Chairperson Lirones stated they should look at how to accommodate the trucks. She said they should recognize the need and incorporate it. She said she does not see the nature of changing this from one thing to another. She said they should do more sketches and have more to show the stakeholders and the public. She said that if any changes are made to the Comprehensive Plan they will be notified. She said she is not comfortable amending any of the maps. She said that successful communities share the power.

The Commissioners and staff further discussed workshops and this planning area. They agreed to hold workshops regarding this planning area.

Commissioner Norton asked why they left out the party store and the church area.

Director Fowler stated they did not include these areas because they are not prime for redevelopment like the other areas are. He said they should include it as a conservation area. He said they are looking at including a larger area but some areas are already developed and might not be redeveloped.

Commissioner Dowty asked staff to define a couple of the terms. He asked about the overlay district and how it relates to the proposal for a new future land use designation.

Planner Montagno stated that an overlay is a zoning district that goes on top of the current zoning; similar a Planned Unit Development (PUD).

Commissioner Dowty asked if this is two (2) types of districts; one for the Ordinance and one for the Comprehensive Plan.

Planner Montagno replied yes.

Commissioner Dowty asked why they cannot just work with a PUD.

Planner Montagno stated that an overlay district is something a community would start. He said that the community would initiate the rezoning.

Chairperson Lirones stated they vote on rezoning the area.

Director Fowler discussed the reclassification of existing roads. He stated there are a couple classifications that were not determined at the previous meeting. He

said that Map 7 shows the National Functional Classifications of roads in the Township. He listed the roads that should be considered; 1) Platt Road from Ellsworth Road to Bemis Road. Reclassify from "Collector" road to "Principal Arterial" road. 2) Carpenter Road from Washtenaw Avenue to Michigan Avenue. Reclassify from "Minor Arterial" road to "Principal Arterial" road. 3) State Road from Ellsworth Road to Michigan Avenue. Reclassify from "Minor Arterial" road to "Principal Arterial" road. 4) Ann Arbor-Saline Road: reclassify from "Minor Arterial" road to "Principal Arterial" road. 5) Moon Road from Michigan Avenue to Bemis Road. Reclassify from "Collector" road to "Minor Arterial" road. 6) Lohr Road from Ellsworth Road to Ann Arbor-Saline Road. Reclassify from Local Street to "Collector" road.

Director Fowler reviewed the text changes to the Comprehensive Plan for Principal Arterial, Minor Arterial, and Collector roads. He discussed the process of amending the Comprehensive Plan, and notifying area municipalities, utilities and agencies.

The Commissioners agreed to have the Township Board authorize the distribution of the Intent to Plan, as required by the Township Planning Act.

8.0 Planner's Report

Director Fowler distributed to the Commissioners notices regarding workshops for the Washtenaw County Access Management Plan, and the Washtenaw County Transit Plan. He stated that Pittsfield Township was awarded Washtenaw County's Overall Award for Pollution Prevention and Water Quality Protection. He discussed enforcement issues with Place with Space.

Planner Montagno stated that at the next meeting they would have the Code Enforcement Officer presenting background information on Place with Space.

9.0 Chairperson's Report

Chairperson Lirones discussed the corner of Waters Road and Oak Valley Drive. She said that someone previously wanted to put in a nursing home. She said they wanted to upgrade it to six (6) dwelling units per acre. She said this proposal died because of a lack of support. She said this was an individual property owner that wanted a Comprehensive Plan amendment for a nursing home. She said they are not currently looking at this.

10.0 Commissioner's Report

None.

11.0 Approval of Prior Minutes

None.

12.0 Adjournment

Motion by Commissioner Ward, supported by Commissioner Norton, to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION CARRIED

Chairperson Lirones adjourned the meeting at 9:29 p.m.

s/Wilma Luna, Secretary

October 4, 2007