

**ELK RAPIDS TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION**

Meeting Minutes – Tuesday March 17, 2009

Chairwoman Mischel called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM at the Government Center, 315 Bridge Street.

Present: Dorance Amos, Jean Derenzy, William Larson, Jim Lundy, Emile Sabty, Shen Smith and Renee Mischel.

Also Present: Leonard Harrett, Zoning Administrator, Larry Nix, Planning Consultant and audience of 3.

Adoption of Agenda: Agenda for 3-17-2009 meeting was adopted by consensus.

Approval of Minutes:

M/S – Lundy/Larson. Minutes for 2-17-2009 meeting were approved by the Planning Commission unanimously.

Public Forum: None.

Old Business:

Pine Hollow Group Retreat Center

M/S – Sabty/Lundy. Move to remove from table the Group Retreat Center review deliberation. **Yes 6-0-0.**

The Chair advised the Planning Commission that Mr. Russ Clark on behalf of the applicant for Pine Hollow Group Retreat Center (Special Exception) called the Chair and the Planning Consultant Mr. L. Nix and informed that the applicant officially withdraws their request for a Group Retreat Center, and that this case is to be dropped by the Planning Commission. The Chair then asked for a motion to that effect.

M/S – Sabty/Lundy. As the applicant Ms. Leslie Lee, owner of Pine Hollow Estate, 10400 S Bayshore Drive, Elk Rapids, MI, through her agent Mr. Russell Clark has requested the termination of their application for a Group Retreat Center (Special Exception). Move that the termination request for the Group Retreat Center at Pine Hollow Estate be granted effective this date of March 17, 2009 and that this case is considered closed by the Planning Commission.

Vote – Yes to terminate. Derenzy, Larson. Lundy. Sabty, Smith & Mischel.
Motion passed 6-0-0. Approved termination is in effect.

Elk Rapids Township Community Character – Visioning

The Chair asked Mr. Nix, Planning Consultant, to review the Visioning Statement Memo of 3/10/2009.

Mr. Nix stated that past studies on hand were reviewed to identify those ideas that the Township holds important for the future, also the visioning exercise just completed. The 15 items each on opportunities and threats were prioritized into three levels of response from which two visioning sample statements were prepared for review.

Discussion, statements (**S**) and questions (**Q**) followed to which Mr. Nix responded (**A**):

Q – Even though good schools ranked high, what can the Planning Commission (PC) do about that and should it be included in the visioning statement?

A – The school system here is part of the positive opportunities in this community. The PC doesn't want to do anything that adversely affects that. The PC would be creating opportunities that complement the good schools system. It opens a positive channel of communications with the schools system should they be affected.

Q – Are those prioritized items in the exercise significant to what we do?

A – The exercise was intended to create a base on which the PC can move on. The thoughts focused on having a target to head for, more so than what the Master Plan tells us. These thoughts can become a guide to check against as we plan future actions and make sure that we are avoiding these threats and bolster these opportunities.

Q – Why not expand the survey and include the Township residents rather just the PC members?

A – The summary memo of Feb 2, 2009 covered the five past community surveys on hand, they are representative of this community, and they include the Township, the Village and the Elk Rapids Community. Out of that review the current vision 15/15 items ran parallel.

Q – What value an additional survey might have if there was a court case regarding a problem that may arise?

A – The value of a survey is to supplement the PC collective knowledge. PC members represent the various segments of the citizenry in the community. A survey only gives the PC a degree of affirming what is believed the citizens want. Repeated surveys basic results do not change that much and can be predictable especially with the same people participating. As to a court case, if the PC is so far off in what they are doing that they are not representing the people, it could help. A new community survey would not help at all unless there is a reason where there is a real shift in attitude in this community regarding land use items, and past surveys are not telling that.

S – Mr. Harrett, Zoning Administrator, suggested changing a text phrase in the visioning statement from ‘quality farm land’, to ‘active agriculture’.

S – Ms. Derenzy suggested changing the visioning statement opening phrase ‘In the year 2025’ to ‘In the future,’ which would cover the near and far future.

S – Mr. Sabty suggested, in the visioning statement to delete the phrase ‘absent of large land developments.’ The Township Government and the owners should be free to consider such a development if it is proposed, we should not be restrictive into the unknown future. Currently we have enough in our Ordinance to cover that. If it looks like it may become an issue then we can work on it in terms of when and where it is happening.

Q – Why was farm land listed in the visioning statement but not under opportunities?

A – It appears under threats and shows high; the intent of the visioning statement is to protect and preserve it.

Q – Why was open space preservation left out of the visioning statement?

A – Open space preservation was discussed including farm preservation and housing clustering. The Township is not deeply into that area. The intent is to try to balance all the involved elements to achieve that. Nothing in the visioning statement says we shall preserve that, we just value these things and we are going to work towards maintaining those to the greatest extent possible.

Ms. Smith inquired as to how would any of the items discussed equate to better schools, and what can we possibly do when writing an ordinance that would lead to creating better schools?

Ms. Derenzy expressed her thought by saying that a good healthy school system is a valuable asset to this community, to the families, to recreation and other aspects of residing here. A healthy school system does not necessarily have anything to do with how we act, we can’t influence it, but a healthy school system helps us plan for the future of this area, because it brings people to our area. It is an important asset to this community and we don’t want to do anything to jeopardize it, but we want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to help maintain it. It is not necessarily that we include it in the visioning statement, but it should be upfront and in front of us as we move forward because it is an important aspect of how the Elk Rapids Community is viewed as a whole.

The Chair told Mr. Nix, that with all this discussion we look forward to a revised vision statement, and to direction and steps we can take, and how we can apply it to our Zoning Ordinance and Master Plan.

Mr. Nix stated that a refined visioning statement draft may read, 'Elk Rapids Township will strive to balance future growth and development with active agriculture, magnificent views and high quality natural resources.' From this we would try to see how these vision elements can enhance the Zoning Ordinance and if need be make revisions to preserve and protect the Township should there be zoning challenges. That our rules and regulations need to promote what we feel are valuable and compliment the Community that is here.

Mr. Amos summed up with a statement that as he grew up in this community, this whole area at one time was farm land supported by farm businesses. At some point there was change that brought us to where we are now. For the past hour discussion covered how we are going to stop change or change patterns. I do agree with change controls that may preserve and protect, but regardless, change will continue as we go into the future, that is the human nature.

By consent the Chair tabled this subject to be continued at the next meeting.

New Business – Postponed for time constraints.

Correspondence - None.

Public Comments - None.

Members Comments

The Chair brought up the subject of the received Village invitation to the Twp PC to hold a joint meeting with the Village PC on Tuesday March 24, 2009 at 6-7 PM. Mrs. B. Mullaly, ER Village Planning Commission, expressed hope that by reviewing the common concerns and finding solutions the Elk Rapids Community would benefit from this. It was brought up that the Village would notice the meeting on the Bulletin Board of the Government Center. The Chair encouraged all members to attend the joint meeting

As there was no further discussion Chairwoman Mischel adjourned the meeting at 8:00 PM.

The next scheduled meeting will be on Tuesday April 21, 2009 at 6:30 PM in the Government Center, 315 Bridge Street.

E. S. Sabty, Secretary
3-17-2009

Minutes Approved 4-21-2009

Minutes are subject to approval at the next regular Planning Commission Meeting.