

**ALPINE TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
Thursday, January 18, 2007**

07-01 CALL TO ORDER/ APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Alpine Township Planning Commission held its regular meeting on Thursday, January 18, 2007, at 7:30 PM at the Alpine Township Center, 5255 Alpine Ave. NW, Comstock Park, MI 49321, with due notice. Present were Chair Jason Rosenzweig, Vice-Chair Jim Townsend, Secretary Nelda Johnson, and members Greg Madura, Jim May, and Dick Sedlecky. Absent was Max Dunneback. Also in attendance were Township Planning Director Sue Thomas, Planning Consultant Tim Johnson, and Recording Secretary Patricia Kolkman.

Rosenzweig called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM with the Pledge of Allegiance. Townsend asked for a spelling correction on page one and **then moved, with support from Madura, to accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting of December 21, 2006, with the change requested.**

Ayes: 6 Nays: 0 Motion carried.

07-02 PLANNING COMMISSION ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

At the request of the Chair, Planner Thomas moved to the podium to introduce the PC Administrative items for 2007. In addition to the election of officers and committee members for 2007, she noted that 2006 Annual Staff Reports from the Planning Director and Code Enforcement Officer were also provided for the PC's review.

Sedlecky commented that he had requested several times to have the Township provide a portable microphone for those speaking away from the podium so their voices are carried by the sound system, but that wasn't done although Planner Vega had again asked the Board for one before she left. Thomas agreed to ask the Township Board to reconsider their earlier decision, and May promised to convey the need for one again to the Board.

Both Rosenzweig and Townsend were nominated to fill the position of Chair, with one individual nominated for Vice-Chair and Secretary. Results of voting are:

Chair: Jim Townsend

Vice-Chair: Greg Madura

Secretary: Nelda Johnson

Commissioners agreed to postpone committee appointments until Commissioner Dunneback arrived.

Thomas then summarized the other Administrative items provided to the PC for their review:

- 1) 2006 Year End Report from Code Enforcement Officer. 160 complaints were received, with 157 of them resolved with compliance, with three remaining active cases. One ticket was issued.
- 2) Annual Report for 2006 PC Activity. Thomas commented that the PC was busy last year, and noted that a summary of all subjects covered by the PC were detailed on her report, some items requiring multiple returns to the PC. She added that the summary also included those projects that were reviewed by the Site Plan Review Committee.

Sedlecky commented that it was his understanding that “postponed”, rather than “tabled” should be reflected on the report, since the PC had deferred their decision several times until a later meeting.

- 3) A contact sheet is being circulated among Commissioners to confirm their address, phone numbers (both land lines and cell phones) and email addresses if available. Thomas assured Commissioners that this information will only be used by Staff during regular business hours and won't be made available to the general public.

Dunneback arrives at 7:45 PM

- 4) Thomas asked that the PC set two public hearings for the February 15, 2007 regular PC meeting.

May moved, with support from Rosenzweig, to set a public hearing for the regular February 15, 2007 Planning Commission meeting to consider a rezoning request at 3780 Walker Ave., NW (approximately 16 acres) from AG to RA, in compliance with the 1998 Alpine Township Master Plan.

Ayes: 7 Nays: 0 Motion carried.

May also moved, with Madura's support, to set a public hearing for the regular February 15, 2007 Planning Commission meeting to consider a Special Land Use request to add generators at the two water tower locations in the Township.

Ayes: 7 Nays: 0 Motion carried.

07-03 PUBLIC HEARING: Proposed Amendment to Section 2.40 (e), Home Occupations; Signs

Thomas first informed the PC that the Township Board had remanded back to the Planning Commission the amendments to the Sign Ordinance (Chapter 20) that had been recommended to the Board at its last meeting. Commissioner May explained that an audience was dissatisfied with allowing portable, balloon, and temporary signs, and was also against electronic reader board signs. He added that while the Board did not unanimously agree with the concerns that were voiced, it did feel that the PC should review the chapter again.

Thomas explained she had been told the Board was concerned that approving this amendment would allow multiple temporary and portable signs for strip malls. Another issue was that the PC had worked so hard in recent years to improve design standards for buildings along Alpine Ave., and this amendment could effectively prevent the new

facades from being visible.

Commissioners discussed the Board request extensively. Madura reminded everyone that the PC had held multiple public hearings to solicit public input and to review the suggested changes. It had asked Planner Johnson to provide information regarding the State and Federal standards regarding timing of electronic reader board messages, and had also considered the needs of local businesses.

Townsend was concerned about the additional time be needed to review this chapter again, particularly in light of recent comments he had heard regarding the time the PC has already taken to review and amend the Master Plan.

Rosenzweig suggested that the PC ask for specific information on why the Board did not approve the amendments, and Sedlecky agreed.

Planner Johnson thought the Planning Commissioner Chair should meet with the Township Supervisor to get clarification on their concerns.

Rosenzweig moved, with support from May, to return the Chapter 20 Sign amendments to the Township Board, providing it with the State standards on timing of electronic reader board text changes, and to request more information about the Board's hesitancy to allow temporary and balloon signs.

Ayes: 7 Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Townsend suggested he and Rosenzweig meet jointly with the Township Supervisor to explain how the Chapter 20 amendments evolved.

Townsend then asked for a motion to open the public hearing on Chapter 2.40 (e).

Sedlecky moved with support from May, to open the Public Hearing for the proposed amendments to Section 2.40 (e) of the Zoning Ordinance.

Ayes: 7 Nays: 0 Motion carried.

With no public comment offered regarding the proposed amendments, **May moved, with Madura's support, to close the public hearing.**

Ayes: 7 Nays: 0 Motion carried.

Planner Thomas then introduced changes to Section 2.40 (e) which should be made when Chapter 20 amendments are adopted. The amendments cover the location and size of home occupation signs, and requires that signs be set back a minimum of 15 feet from all lot lines.

Sedlecky asked for clarification on which home occupations were involved. Thomas said that beauty salons, daycare homes, accounting services, are typical examples of the kinds of home occupations which might want a sign.

Thomas then stated that whatever recommendation the PC reaches, it will move forward concurrent with Chapter 20 amendments.

Townsend suggested adding the phrase "lot lines" to setback requirements. Commissioners agreed it would provide details necessary for implementation.

A paragraph will be added summarizing the earlier work of Beckett & Raeder with both the PC and members of the community in the public sessions held to help define Township goals. This information was then used in the final recommendations for development areas.

Johnson commented that the Vision Statement on page 4 was from earlier work done by Frank Wash, a previous Township Planning Director. Johnson said he identified the 7 goals from the review process and then summarized them in the document provided to Commissioners. Each of the 7 goals includes multiple objectives for accomplishing it, listing various ways of reaching the objective. Goal number 1, for example, states the Township's commitment to maintaining policies preserving Agricultural land and lists methods and practices which will help reach that goal.

Specific comments regarding this section were made by Commissioners:

- Goal 2 / Objective 5 (Senior Housing) add the text "including related medical care facilities" to clarify the intent of the type of housing to be provided.
- Goal 3 / Objective 5 (Public Roadway System) use complete reference to Capital Improvement Plan rather than its acronym.
- Goal 4 /Objective 6 (Encourage Dynamic Commercial and Industrial districts), change "Research" to "Research and Encourage", to complement the work already underway regarding the Rusche Dr. extension, as the railroad has recently granted a crossing which would allow the road work to be done.
- Goal 7 (Maintain and expand inter-governmental cooperation, etc.) add a final goal to "Continue to partner with North Kent Sewer Authority regarding the public sewer system and wastewater treatment."

Townsend shared with the PC and Staff a recent article he had read in a Law Journal regarding land use, which states that land should be provided for all development types in a community. Johnson said he did not think the courts have clearly defined the uses within a "Mixed Use- Town Center" designation, but agreed to review the case Townsend provided.

Townsend also expressed his desire to include the following statement: "The Master Plan provides a plan for 20 years in the future of the community, with reviews of that plan every 5 years".

Sedlecky also commented that he prefers that references to senior housing be expanded.

❖ **Review of Final Land Use Recommendation from December 2005.**

Planner Johnson then directed Commissioners to the document titled: "Final Land Use Map Recommendation, 2005" provided by Beckett & Raeder. He commented again that since he had not participated in Beckett & Raeder's initial Master Plan process, he needed to confirm and clarify his understanding in order to proceed with drafting the text for the 2007 Master Plan.

A brief intermission was requested at 9:12 PM, and concluded at 9:17 PM.

A review of the document included the following :

- “General Themes” provides a summary of the public’s comments from the neighborhood community meetings. Primary concerns identified by participants were:
 - Farmland Preservation
 - Traffic (increase)
 - Development Pressure
 - Public Services
 - Drainage

Sedlecky felt that the material is too general and does not provide enough information to be used in the new text.

- “Development Character” identifies the types of development currently in existence within the Township, with four identifiable “zones”:
 - Farms and Orchards- Farm Homesteads This zone identifies the predominant character of the Township, with the primarily rural and active agricultural areas. Development occurs with a density from 1 unit per 100 acres to 1 unit per 20 acres. Residential homesteads are typically associated with farming.
 - Low Density Residential, with Orchards and Farms The portion of the Township with both active agricultural operations, and rural residential estate lots, having density between 1 unit per 5 acres, to 1 unit per 2 acres. The document notes this area acts as a “transition” zone between active farming and developed residential areas. Commissioners agreed that parcels of 1.5 acres cannot be reasonably farmed.
 - Moderate Density Residential with Commercial “Nodes” This type of development occurs primarily along the 4 Mile Rd. corridor with small subdivisions and some single lot commercial uses. The summary notes that 4 Mile Rd. and Fruit Ridge Ave. could continue to accommodate limited community commercial uses.
 - Medium to High Density Residential and the “Commercial Core” This character zone typifies the area with higher density multi-family dwellings, traditional subdivisions, and continuous commercial development along M-37, generally considered an urban area because of the higher density residential development and commercial areas.

The Development Character Map shows the general locations of these zones, illustrating that over 60% of the Township remains as Farms and farm homesteads.

- “Housing Density” is another summary sheet in the Beckett & Raeder packet, showing Alpine Township’s current housing “clustered” in the Water and Sewer service areas. Beckett & Raeder also summarized for readers some of today’s planning principles which were reached after the use of low-density or “large lot” residential development. In short, low-density development has resulted in the loss of open space and farmland, contributed to urban sprawl, increased local costs for various public infrastructure, and made it more difficult to deliver public services.

Several scenarios (maps) are used to show how increasing density allows more housing units to be built on less land. It also notes that higher density

development does not have to mean high-rise apartment-style buildings. To elaborate, 100 residential units consumed: **250 acres** at 1 unit per two acres, **125 acres** at one unit per acre, **63 acres** at one unit per ½ acre and only **32 acres** at one unit per ¼ acre. The conclusion: higher density development consumes far less open space than “large-lot residential” does. (Note: the additional acreage noted in these scenarios is required for roads, setbacks and utilities.)

- The “Household Forecasts” section of the Beckett & Raeder packet summarizes estimates for new housing units that had been provided by several different sources for Alpine Township’s Master Plan process. Townsend said he had heard that the estimated housing needs had been substantial at the outset and wanted to understand which sources had been used. The West Michigan Regional Planning Commission (WMRPC) estimates had caused concern among residents when WMRPC presented them at Alpine’s initial Master Plan meeting, but their housing needs estimate was based on *regional* housing needs. The University of Michigan also projected more ambitious housing requirements for Alpine than Beckett & Raeder would have, since both State and regional trends had been used, reflecting the movement of residents from urban centers to the outlying areas. Neither group considered either local policy or community planning goals and objectives or included the factual data on new housing in the community.

Beckett & Raeder used Alpine Township’s 2000 U. S. Census data (growth in the recent past), Claritas’ estimates (Claritas is an independent private research corporation) and the actual growth in Alpine Township based on building permits issued for new homes, all of which are lower. Because Alpine Township has proven to be committed to preserving its rural character, Beckett & Raeder was confident that using Claritas’ estimates better reflect Alpine’s land use goals and policies. The WMRPC and U of M estimates are between 51% and 60% residential growth by 2025, while Claritas and Beckett & Raeder project a slow rate of growth for Alpine.

The map accompanying this page shows that new and recently approved projects are concentrated south of 6 Mile Rd. and east of Baumhoff Ave., representing conventional subdivisions and site condominiums, and that any future growth will be controlled by the Future Land Use Plan, the presence of utilities, and the Township Zoning Ordinance.

- “Water and Sewer Utilities” details the current water and sewer lines in the Township. The service area for sewer is primarily along the M-37 corridor from 4 Mile Rd. to 7 Mile Rd. and water is along 4 Mile Rd. from Plainfield Township to Hendershot Ave., serving Kenowa Hills High School and Alpine Meadows Mobile Home Park. The majority of existing higher-density residential development lies within these service areas, and since each system is already sized to accommodate additional development, a reasonable policy for planned development would utilize these pre-existing service areas. Doing so would not only maximize the Township’s previous investment in infrastructure, but would limit pressure to develop farms and orchards. The Future Land Use Scenarios provided reflect this recommendation to direct new moderate density housing developments into areas already served with utilities.

Commissioners discussed adding a reference in this section regarding the North Kent Sewer Authority (NKSA) to emphasize local control over utilities.

- “Future Land Use Scenarios” covers the process by which the Planning Commission arrived at its proposed Future Land Use map. Over an extended period, the PC held multiple regular, special and subcommittee meetings under Beckett & Raeder’s guidance, to consider the impact of allocating different amounts of land to the various zoning designations. Planner Johnson recommends that this document be retained in the Master Plan text, as it includes the rationale the PC used to reach its final map recommendation. Input from the public included designating certain parcels with their current uses. Four scenarios resulted from these meetings, each of which shows slightly different views of the Township. The Future Land Use Map which was ultimately recommended refines Land Use Scenario 4 using input from the public as well as the PC, and increased Agricultural/ Orchard land between 5 and 6 Mile Roads. It also reduced the area of Residential Mixed Use in the southeast quadrant, excepting a parcel along M-37. The map also shows the increase in the size of the Wahlfield County Park at 8 Mile Rd. and M-37.

The PC recognized a need to change the Zoning Ordinance to accommodate the Mixed Use development style and wanted to provide for it in other areas of the Township as well, if “phased- in”. The Commission devised a development plan concentrating future development within those sections already served by both public water and sewer. This plan accommodates the more conservative Claritas estimates, but could also support more development, without requiring conversion of existing agricultural and orchard/ farms outside of the water and sewer service areas.

Planner Johnson pointed out to Commissioners that while the map *allows* development in the utility areas, it does not control the *phasing* of it. A number of factors will influence development timing, including the economic climate, and a landowner’s interest in selling land for development.

- “Land Development Options” details the kinds of development the Township recognizes in the development areas.
 - Residential Mixed Use is an option to integrate land uses if certain conditions exist; e.g., a portion of the property fronts on M-37. Areas along M-37 could be used for commercial and office uses, while the parcel’s interior land would be devoted to medium and/or moderate density housing styles. The residential uses would be predominant.

The rationale used by the Planning Commission was to limit unnecessary road trips via primary roads, maximize the use of previously-built infrastructure, and aid in establishing a sense of community. The commercial and office buildings, such as professional offices, banks, and institutional uses would provide those services to the residences within the development and be accessible to them without using the commercial corridor roads. Residential development styles might include site condominiums, townhomes, and “traditional” subdivisions. Included in the residential design would be open space and parks, greenways, and other natural features.

- Open Space Subdivisions would promote the preservation of open spaces while allowing a reduction in lot size. Consideration of lot sizes in the surrounding areas would be included as part of the design process. Several desired benefits from this type of development would be:
 - Orientation and size of yards and open space would complement previously developed parcels in the area;
 - A more desirable living environment would be achieved through preserving the natural character of wetlands, farmland, trees, brooks, hills and other natural assets;
 - Encouraging developers to be more creative;
 - Encouraging a more efficient, and aesthetically pleasing use of open areas, while reducing development costs by allowing a developer to avoid natural obstacles to development.

Beckett & Raeder also notes that both Residential Mixed Use and the Open Space Subdivision regulations would need to be added into the Alpine Township Zoning Ordinance.

❖ **Comparison Between 2007 Draft Master Plan and 1998 Master Plan**

Johnson then asked Commissioners to review the document labeled “Future Land Use Categories” to compare the designations used in both the 1998 Master Plan and the 2007 Draft Master Plan and choose those they want to use in the 2007 Plan. The following were discussed and confirmed:

- **AP- Agricultural Preservation (1998) vs. Agricultural/Orchards (2007).**

After considerable discussion, the PC agreed to retain the AP–Agricultural Preservation designation title, since it supports the primary intent of the Master Plan.

- **RA – Rural Agricultural (1998) vs. Rural Estate (2007).** There was extended discussion on what term should be used to designate this development type. Rosenzweig pointed out that for financing, use of the term “Rural” could limit a buyer’s options. Lenders may focus more on the “Rural” aspect of the term, and make presumptions about the parcel’s primary focus. Since this designation actually defines residential uses in rural areas, the PC determined that the word “Rural” should be replaced with “Residential”. Commissioners agreed that “Residential Estate” would best define larger-lot residential uses and would also give owners more flexibility in their financing and insurance needs.
- **LDR – Low Density Residential (1998) vs. Residential Moderate (2007).** In the 1998 Plan, LDR areas correlate with the R-1 District, requiring a minimum lot size of 13,500 s.f., a density of 3.22 units per acre and served by public utilities. Residential Moderate was a new term coined for the 2007 plan which used the same minimum standards. Commissioners agreed that the LDR district designation should be used, using the same standards now used.
- **MOD (1998) vs. no such designation recommended in the 2007 plan.** The PC agreed that this designation should be discussed at length in a future meeting, as

there is no designation for residential land uses with densities between 3.22 and 8 units per acre.

- **MDR** – Medium Density Residential (1998) vs. **Residential High** (2007 Plan). Both plans include a provision for housing development at 8 units per acre, and 2-4 units per building. This development district correlates with the R-2 District in the Zoning Ordinance and Commissioners felt it should be retained, as it is the density which would be used for Senior Housing.
- **HDR** – High Density Residential = R3 (1998) vs. the 2007 Plan, which has no such designation, but does identify the York Creek Apartments as Residential High. The R-3 Zoning District allows for 12.5 units per acre.
- **Mixed Use PUD** (1998) vs. **Residential Mixed Use** (2007), was discussed very generally, with Commissioners agreeing further discussion was needed but whichever designation was used should be expanded to show that it allows for a mixture of housing densities.

Sedlecky said he thought the designations used in the Master Plan should match those in the Zoning Ordinance.

Townsend requested Johnson and Thomas to draft a new development designation that will accommodate neighborhood service businesses, such as groceries, pharmacies, doctor offices that could be built in conjunction with residential development that is at a higher density than LDR.

07-05 PUBLIC COMMENT/ COMMISSIONER COMMENT

Cathy (Jost) Kennedy of the Village of Spring Lake, who represents the Jost Family interests, spoke of their concern about the future of their land at 4823 and 4605 Baumhoff Ave. She said when Future Land Use Scenario #4 was presented to the public, one of the family's parcels (4605 Baumhoff) was shown as RE (Rural Estate) and one (4823 Baumhoff) was designated as AP (Agricultural Preservation). The family hopes both pieces will be designated as RE, as they had been assured they would be. She wanted to inform the PC that her family hasn't farmed their land in 50 years, but has been leasing it to others as a source of income for their taxes. The family is concerned about the time when no tenants wish to farm it, and that the land, if developed, would provide more income to the Township than Agricultural land not being farmed. She and her family ask that the Township consider financial needs of farmers and their families when they can no longer farm but must still pay the taxes.

May said that the State MTA convention will be held in Detroit the week of January 22nd and he will be attending.

Dunneback, Sedlecky and Madura had no comments.

Johnson reported that there had been no ZBA meeting in December and none was scheduled for January.

Rosenzweig commented he found it disheartening that the Township website had not been updated.

May added that he and the Board are very pleased with the three new Department Heads (Campbell, Keeling, and Thomas) they had hired. Much work has already been done by them in their departments and they have been a positive addition to the Township.

Thomas reminded Commissioners to note that the Special Meeting scheduled for Master Plan work will begin at 7 PM on January 31st. She also stated that there is a GIS website link that Commissioners could utilize.

May moved, with support from Dunneback, to adjourn at 10:30 PM.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0

Motion carried.

Nelda Johnson, Secretary

Patricia Kolkman, Recording Secretary