



Minutes of **SPECIAL MEETING – JOINT**
TOWNSHIP BOARD AND PLANNING COMMISSION

Held **AUGUST 19, 2013**

Township of Springfield

Laura Moreau, Clerk

Call to Order: Supervisor Walls called the August 19, 2013 Special Joint Meeting of the Springfield Township Board and Planning Commission to order at 7:33pm at the Springfield Township Civic Center, 12000 Davisburg Road, Davisburg, MI 48350.

Board members present:

Marc Cooper
Dave Hopper
Judy Hensler
Laura Moreau
Denny Vallad
Collin Walls

Board Members Absent:

Jamie Dubre

Planning Commissioners present:

Dean Baker
Ruth Ann Hines
Dave Hopper
Bill Leddy
Linda Whiting

Planning Commissioners Absent:

Kevin Sclesky
Neil Willson

Consultants Present:

Doug Lewan, Planner

JOINT MEETING DISCUSSION:

1. 425 Agreement – report

Supervisor Walls provided an overview and history of the property subject to a possible 425 Agreement. The Township Board has already reviewed a copy of the draft agreement and has forwarded it to the Independence Township Board for their feedback. The agreement is a legal agreement by which property can be temporarily or permanently transferred. The process requires a Public Hearing in each community. This agreement was discussed by the 2 Township attorneys, Planner and Supervisors of the two communities. Dick Carlisle determined that the best development would be attached or detached single family homes. We have had a discussion with the Road Commission about realignment of Big Lake Road at Dixie but the formal discussion with MDOT and RCOC has not happened yet.



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2. Pathway Plan – implementation

Supervisor Walls explained that the Township Board adopted the pathway plan at the August meeting. The commitment portion of the Township Board began in 2010 with the Block grant project set to connect the sidewalk at Dixie and Davisburg Road with the sidewalk in front of Dixie Lake Manor. The Board has established a pathway fund in which they put a little bit of money in 2012 and there is more budgeted for 2013 and 2014. The commitment is real but the implementation will be a slow process. One of the best pieces of information that we have received is that the Road Commission will look favorably on utilizing paved shoulders for pathways.

Clerk Moreau stated that paved shoulders wouldn't be marked as a bike lane or pathway because then the Road Commission must keep it plowed and maintained. Members discussed the options for a shoulder bike lane.

Mr. Baker asked about the procedure for RCOC to contact the Township for input when they are planning a project.

Mr. Lewan verified that Ms. Elmiger was in contact with RCOC when she was developing the Pathway Plan. The Road Commission may involve the community but will not necessarily implement what is requested and the cost will likely have to be covered by the community.

Supervisor Walls stated that they have not included the Complete Streets program in the ordinance.

3. Master Plan - discussion and update schedule

Supervisor Walls stated that a review of the Master Plan is required every 5 years to determine whether or not updates should be made. He previously circulated population estimates and trends as produced by SEMCOG and distributed to members present additional census data. He explained how census trends and forecasted populations have changed since the 2009 Master Plan was devised. Supervisor Walls stated that the next step was to provide the same documents to Mr. Lewan and have him prepare a budget and work plan for the Master Plan update to be presented to the Township Board.

Mr. Lewan stated that the review of the Master Plan is required every 5 years. If we review it and find it to be okay, we can put it on the agenda of a Planning Commission meeting and then we don't have to review it for another 5 years. If the Planning Commission looks at it and determines that it needs to be changed then it is possible to make edits to the current plan without redoing the entire document. He explained several options for the members to consider for the Master Plan review. He encouraged the members to take a



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closer look at the Policy Section, Implementation Section and the map section. He also asked them to review the Goals and Policies and make sure that those still accurately reflect the residents' concerns and what they want for the Township.

Clerk Moreau stated that at the May 13th Special Board Meeting they talked about the need to review the Goals and Policies section and considered developing a Strategic Plan. She stated that the Master Plan seems to be missing a vision statement and strong goals. She believes the goals and policies should be revised with a clear vision and implementation section but otherwise the Master Plan is good as it stands with the addition of the Dixie Corridor Plan and the Pathways Plan.

Ms. Hines concurred regarding the need for a vision and clear goals but stated that they need achievable steps that they can recognize as getting closer to a final goal.

Mr. Hopper concurred. He stated that there needs to be an implementation section and a vision statement. They need to have a clear way to lead a new developer toward the goals and vision. He mentioned that it was the intent to include the Dixie Corridor Study; the Complete Streets and Pathway Plan also should be part of the Master Plan.

Mr. Lewan stated that the implementation section is a new requirement and this probably happened after the current version of the Master Plan was adopted. They can address the implementation with the new edits.

Mr. Baker concurred with the addition of the implementation section to the plan.

Mr. Vallad stated that he read through the goals section and this needs to be revised. The Master Plan needs to be more of plan instead of something that they shelve for another 5 years. He suggested that the Dixie Corridor Plan needs to be incorporated into the Master Plan. This is a good document for resource conservation but they need to define the intended business activity on Dixie Highway.

Ms. Hines stated that they should include objectives and measurements.

Clerk Moreau concurred and stated that some of the goals are very lofty and actually sound more like guiding principles because they are not measurable. The content is important but they would better communicate the intent if they re-title this section "Guiding Principals" and rewrite the "Goals" section.

Mr. Vallad stated that the Master Plan was started in the 1980s and the needs and focus of the Township was quite different then. The plan needs to accurately reflect the current status of the Township.



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Supervisor Walls added that the policies have not changed significantly since the 1980s, but the community is different now. He provided a history of the community and zoning in the Township. He concurred with Mr. Vallad in that these items are important from a historical context but they are really not that useful today.

Ms. Whiting asked the members what they believe is the biggest asset of the community.

Supervisor Walls answered that the people are the greatest asset because of their willingness to help out their neighbors; our residents are willing to volunteer their time and services.

Ms. Hensler stated that the people of Springfield Township will do the right thing. We have seen this when millage proposals are put to a vote; our residents are smart and they will do the right thing. She believes the commercial property on Dixie Highway is an asset and she is in favor of development and conveniences on the corridor.

Mr. Hopper stated that they shouldn't throw away all of the goals that were developed in the 1980s. He concurred with Ms. Hensler and stated that he wanted Dixie Highway to be developed but "done right" to respect the goals that were established years ago.

Mr. Cooper stated that when he was growing up, Springfield Township was known to be "anti-business." The formation of the Dixie Corridor Plan is a good idea and shows that the Township is encouraging business along Dixie Highway. There are several commercial properties north of Davisburg Road and he believes these properties should be included in the corridor plan.

Clerk Moreau stated that she believes the greatest strength is that the Township has the benefit of beautiful natural features alongside vacant commercial properties; there is the potential for highly desirable mixed use developments. She stated that many of our residents were drawn to Springfield for the open space and the natural beauty; this will continue if we encourage smart development. The greatest need is to create a clear vision and action plan to make the most of these strengths.

Mr. Leddy stated that people will continue to move into the area and disagrees with the SEMCOG data. The more they plan, the more attractive they will be as a community.

Supervisor Walls stated that the greatest need is to adjust to the world that they live in today.

Ms. Hensler agreed with Mr. Leddy regarding the SEMCOG data and has observed that the neighborhoods are being repopulated with new families with kids. If they had a few more amenities, they would make it more attractive for families.



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Supervisor Walls disagreed and further referred to the SEMCOG data. Members discussed the elements of the SEMCOG data. Mr. Walls stressed that the projected population for Springfield may be questioned but the change in age, family size and demographics are what we need to concentrate on.

Supervisor Walls stated that by the end of September, they should have a draft of the Dixie Corridor Plan that was developed in 2010 but stalled before it was adopted. Ms. Moreau added that by having this document complete, this would help formulate the goals and visions for the Master Plan. Supervisor Walls stated that they are working on putting some reality into the speculation. The engineers were asked to look at different options for the sanitary needs. There has been a great deal of time spent on the possible connection to the sewer intercept. The foundation of the plan is the infrastructure.

Mr. Lewan stated that he has worked with the Township for many years, but has been gone for 12 years. The things that made Springfield a great community are still here.

4. Dixie Corridor Study - update and discussion

Supervisor Walls noted that the members have already discussed the Corridor Study and stated that they should have a draft by the end of September that includes the beginning concepts and plans. It is supposed to be more implementation oriented.

5. Dixie Overlay District – goals and visions

Supervisor Walls stated that he thought the overlay was originally devised to be a series of incentives but it has become more cumbersome. This became clear with the recent submission by Mike Mills for the old Whoopee Bowl property. It does not shorten the process.

Clerk Moreau stated that the applicant must conform to both the Overlay District and the underlying zoning. The Township Board is not able to approve a plan if, for example, there is a setback issue; the applicant still has to go to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Supervisor Walls stated that he thought of the overlay as an incentive. One of the things that applicants say is that it is very difficult to get through the planning process for a business. It is difficult to get a sign permit, for example. They need to find a way to break the mindset that has developed with some in the business community.

Clerk Moreau added that she finds she must spend time reviewing the code when they get a question about the site plan process; granted there isn't a lot of activity and is not something they deal with on a daily basis, but it is a cumbersome process. The Overlay



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District is supposed to encourage redevelopment and it should be clearer and easier to navigate.

Mr. Lewan stated that this discussion is very common right now. In every community with zoning and regulations, the businesses there think that it is difficult to work there. Carlisle/Wortman has done some streamlining in other communities that has helped—sometimes as simple as a site plan review packet or rezoning packet. Zoning regulations should be plain and easy to understand and should not need interpretation. Unless it is a conditional use or PUD, the site plan process should be straightforward.

6. Planning Process – strengths and weaknesses

Supervisor Walls explained that in the Planning Act PA 110, it says that site plan review may be done by a person designated by the Township Board and it almost seems like it could be an administrative process. He suggested streamlining the process to make it easier for everyone—the applicant and the Township.

Mr. Baker stated that he is in favor of streamlining the process, but suggested that some of the difficulty is caused by the applicant not having a site plan that conforms to the ordinance. The Code clearly defines minimums and standards and yet he sees applicants present plans that do not conform to simple requirements like the number of parking spaces.

Clerk Moreau stated that standards for specific requirements should be easy to understand but it is the process that can be difficult to navigate. She likes Mr. Lewan's idea of packets and flow charts and these would be helpful.

Ms. Whiting concurred.

Mr. Hopper stated that the Overlay District was not designed for streamlining the review process; they did it to get the end result that they wanted for the district. If it was not for the Overlay, the recent Mills site plan the Board considered would not be possible in that district.

Mr. Cooper suggested that they take that information now and streamline it and all of Dixie Highway should be covered.

Clerk Moreau stated that the Mills site plan could have been submitted as a PUD and it would have required the same number of steps. She recognizes the need to promote an end result; however if the goal now is to encourage redevelopment, the Overlay District does not provide incentive for the applicant or flexibility for the Board.



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Mr. Hopper stated that the Overlay District gave good direction when the Township was overrun with site plan proposals but maybe this should be revisited in the Master Plan update.

Supervisor Walls stated that the Special Land Use process is cumbersome and sometimes they still have to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals. Supervisor Walls stated that our review of the recent plan might help create the “road map” for changes that are needed.

Mr. Lewan stated that the checklists should catch 90% of the site plan revisions that need to be made.

7. Q & A

Supervisor Walls stated that in the past they have offered incentives for businesses working on bringing nonconforming buildings up to the ordinance standards. The Township Board has discussed this briefly. He asked if there were incentives that they could offer to the existing businesses. For example, Ms. Moreau suggested looking at the properties on each side of the new Mills site plan on Dixie Highway as part of the review. Offering the assistance of the Township Planner is one incentive that the Township Board has discussed. Carlisle/Wortman has been asked for a budget to prepare a concept for the Mills site and surrounding properties. Supervisor Walls asked if there were other things that they could or should be doing that would provide incentives.

Mr. Vallad stated that there should be a way to provide incentives for the old Saturn dealership for example. He would like to get those buildings back in a useful state and asked how to make it more appealing for developers.

Ms. Hines asked about available economic incentives that they should be providing. There should be some way to get the word out there.

Mr. Vallad stated that it was actually redevelopment that they were talking about.

Mr. Lewan stated that he is sure there are economic development opportunities that are available in other communities and he would discuss those options with Mr. Carlisle.

Ms. Hines asked how they would market and promote the area. Supervisor Walls explained the Dixie Highway business owners group that has recently been formed.

Ms. Hines asked if the Board and Planning Commission were going to have another meeting.



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Mr. Baker stated that it would be a good idea to get back together after Mr. Lewan reviews the comments made this evening. Supervisor Walls stated that it is always a good idea for the Township Board and Planning Commission to work together on Master Plan goals and objectives and suggested that they get together again. They suggested the October Planning Commission meeting or an alternate day in September other than the Planning Commission meeting. Members suggested reviewing the Dixie Overlay District and being prepared to say where they stand on this streamlining process for this District.

Mr. Lewan stated that he would look at this topic in the interim.

Adjournment:

Hearing no other business, Supervisor Walls adjourned the meeting at 9:30 pm.

Collin Walls, Township Supervisor

Laura Moreau, Township Clerk