

Minutes of
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING

May 24, 2022

SPRINGFIELD
CHARTER TOWNSHIP

Sean R. Miller, Clerk



Call to Order: Chairperson Baker called the May 24, 2022, Regular Meeting of the Springfield Township Planning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Springfield Township Civic Center, 12000 Davisburg Rd., Davisburg, MI 48350.

Commissioners

in Attendance: Dean Baker, Chair

Jamie Costigan

Ruth Ann Hines

Dave Hopper

Terry Rusnell (Arrived 7:09 p.m.)

Kevin Sclesky

Absent: George Mansour

Consultants Present:

Stephanie Osborn, Giffels Webster

Jill Bahm, Giffels Webster

Staff Present:

Laura Moreau, Supervisor

Joan Rusch, Planning Administrator

Approval of Agenda:

Commissioner Hines moved to proceed with the agenda as presented. Supported by Commissioner Sclesky. Vote: Yes: Baker, Costigan, Hines, Hopper, Sclesky. No: None.

Absent: Mansour, Rusnell. Motion approved.

Public Comment:

None

Approval of Consent Agenda:

Commissioner Hines moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Supported by Commissioner Hopper. Vote: Yes: Baker, Costigan, Hines, Hopper, Sclesky. No: None. Absent: Mansour, Rusnell. Motion approved.

New Business:

1. Planning Commissioner Appointments

Supervisor Moreau stated that Terry Rusnell is stepping down as Planning Commissioner due to his work schedule. Chris Moore expressed interest in serving on the Commission and is available to fill this position. Chris served as a member of the Planning Commission in 2003-2005 and has lived in the Township for 35 years. He will complete Terry's term which expires in November 2024.

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Chairperson Baker welcomed Chris and thanked him for stepping up to serve.

Old Business

1. Solar Ordinance – Revised Draft

Ms. Osborn stated that the solar ordinance has been revised based on last month's discussion and commented on the updates. She explained that the amount of coverage allowed in 634.3 of 50% is arbitrary. The definition of commercial system is provided, but since the Commissioners did not want to allow commercial systems, the standards for this have been removed. This ordinance could be numbered as a new section 40-653 or be made a subsection of section 40-649 – Accessory Structures.

The Commissioners discussed that a four-acre parcel is needed for ground mounted solar panels and that only .1 of an acre could be covered with panels, otherwise the panels must be building mounted. They discussed how much screening is adequate, if the size of screening could be increased, and how setbacks could be used to facilitate screening.

Ms. Osborn stated that six-foot screening is a common standard. With such a large parcel required, the setbacks would assist in providing adequate screening. She commented that the twelve-foot height of solar panels allows them to be angled to catch more sun. She stated that the .1 of an acre limit could be reduced further if the Commissioners wanted.

The Commissioners discussed how many solar panels it would take to supply the average home and how to take that into consideration when setting limits.

Ms. Osborn stated that the ordinance could be written as a square footage requirement and not as a per acre requirement. Ms. Osborn commented that the calculations could be redone to get an idea of what would be a reasonable number to set as a limit. She also noted that the screening could be a privacy fence, but it could be landscaping as well.

The Commissioners discussed various screening options and solutions.

Commissioner Hopper was concerned with the language about building mounted panels not being mounted on a building wall parallel to a street. This could be impractical in some situations. Commissioner Hopper was also concerned that panels mounted on a roof might impact a Fire Department emergency response or affect the Township's ISO rating.

The Commissioners discussed the height of panels on a roof and how, or if, this could be limited.

Chairperson Baker clarified that the ordinance does not have a commercial element.

Ms. Osborn stated that the definition for a commercial system is provided, but the standards have been removed based on last month's discussion.

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Chairperson Baker stated that this was his understanding. However, he was wondering if a business wanted to put solar panels up for its own use, if this would be considered a private system.

Ms. Osborn confirmed that in this situation the system would be considered a private system and the private system standards would apply.

Chairperson Baker wondered if in the definition of solar panel, the word solar cell should be defined.

Ms. Bahm stated that a typical solar cell means photovoltaic and does need to be further defined.

Supervisor Moreau wondered if the ordinance should explicitly say commercial use is not permitted.

Ms. Bahm suggested just removing the definition instead.

Supervisor Moreau asked for clarification on the wording that states, "Private solar energy systems shall be considered an accessory use and shall be permitted as a principal permitted use in all zoning districts."

Chairperson Baker clarified that solar would be an accessory use only.

Ms. Bahm stated that the wording will be changed to indicate a "permitted accessory" use in all zoning districts.

Supervisor Moreau asked for clarification on the setback requirements, as it appears this ordinance would allow for a lesser setback in some districts.

Chairperson Baker stated that the setback requirements would be the same as the building envelope.

Supervisor Moreau asked if the limits on panels would be the same for residential and nonresidential systems.

The Commissioners discussed limits and how to determine power usage for a parcel.

Ms. Osborn suggested that nonresidential uses be limited to rooftop panels only. The first part of the draft language states that only 10% of a roof can be covered with structures. The Commissioners would have to decide what a new limitation should be.

The Commissioners discussed if there should be limits on the number of rooftop structures and what screening for rooftop solar panels would be required. Consensus was reached that they should not limit the number of rooftop solar panels for nonresidential private systems.

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The Commissioners discussed special considerations for the Dixie Highway. Ground mounted systems would be a special land use in the Dixie Highway Overlay District. In the Dixie Highway Overlay District, solar panels could only be mounted on the roof and would have to be screened.

Supervisor Moreau stated that the Commissioners need to clarify between the Dixie Highway Overlay District and the Dixie Highway Corridor.

The Commissioners discussed the difference between residential and nonresidential uses of solar panels. They discussed if it mattered about the amount of a residential roof that is covered by solar panels or on what side of the roof the panels were located.

Ms. Bahm clarified that rooftop solar panels could go on any side of the roof and that the façade of the building facing the street could not have panels on it.

Ms. Osborn stated that the Commissioners would need to increase the limit of 10% of the rooftop being covered with structures (40-634.3(1)). The 50% limit specifically to solar panels (40-634.3(3)) would remain, as this is the exception to the 10% figure, unless the Commissioners wanted to increase this amount.

2. Master Plan – Discuss schedule and workplan

Ms. Osborn reviewed the revised Master Plan schedule based on a discussion with the Supervisor's Office. The plan will get underway in August with resource packets provided at the June meeting. This would prepare the Commissioners for discussions later in the process. In August the visioning process would begin. Much of the Master Plan process would take place at regular meetings. She clarified that when workshops were scheduled, they would take place one hour before the regular Planning Commission meeting.

Supervisor Moreau explained that it makes sense to start the Master Plan process in August and give the Planning Commission more time to reflect on what they would like to see moving forward. It would give more time to lay groundwork for meaningful discussions later. The ALS millage will have been decided by August 2 and this may have some impact on budgets. At the Township Board meeting in August, the Board will also know better where the Mill Pond Dam project stands. Knowing this information will impact the visioning sessions of the Master Plan.

Public Comment:

Chairperson Baker thanked Commissioner Rusnell for his years of service on the Planning Commission and wished him well in the future.

Adjournment:

Commissioner Hines moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:19 p.m. Supported by Commissioner Hopper. Vote: Yes: Baker, Costigan, Hines, Hopper, Rusnell, Sclesky. No: None. Absent: Mansour. Motion approved.

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Joan Rusch, Recording Secretary