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Planning Commission Minutes 12/13/21

The Saugatuck Township Planning Commission met December 13, 2021.

1) Call to Order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Israels.

Israels read Zoom instructions for public participation. All votes should be taken via roll call. Please say your name before speaking. Mute yourself when you are not speaking. This meeting is being recorded. Please do not interrupt. If any public member is disruptive in a way that interferes with the board conducting their business, they will be blocked. If there are any individuals that would like to participate, but need special accommodations, we will do our best to make those adjustments. Please do not click on any links on Zoom.

2) Roll Call

Present: D. Ihle, R. Israels, J. Helmrich, D. DeFranco, D. Webster, M. Wurth, J. Ground
Also present: L. Wells, Zoning Administrator

3) Presentation by Ryan Kilpatrick, Executive Director of Housing Next

Ryan Kilpatrick, Executive Director of Housing Next, presented to commissioners on the concept of attainable housing and diversity of housing types, the respective housing needs of Ottawa and Allegan Counties, and on-going efforts of Housing Next to respond to area housing needs. Presentation is on file.

Webster wondered if Zoning Ordinance allowed for developers to pursue attainable housing projects in the TWP, and asked Kilpatrick where the TWP could improve its zoning ordinances to support activities related to attainable housing. Kilpatrick recommended making PUD standards more flexible while making that flexibility contingent on attainability or affordability. Kilpatrick also recommended investigating the creation of a special district strategically placed in the TWP that allows for more compact/higher density development.

Ihle asked if the TWP could create a TIF District. Kilpatrick explained that Act 381 allows for any property owned by a land bank to become brownfield eligible, allowing local units of government to pursue the creation of a TIF district without state participation. Ihle asked if the federal tax credit program only applied to the sale of homes or could be applied to rentals. Kilpatrick clarified that the program was primarily applicable to rental product.

DeFranco asked if Kilpatrick would recommend the TWP conduct a community survey to identify the demographic groups with housing needs and to determine their housing type preferences. Kilpatrick said that a survey would be a great first step. Kilpatrick noted that a



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survey was conducted in Ottawa County at a cost of \$30,000. Kilpatrick said that a tri-community survey could be conducted at a much lower cost, but Kilpatrick was confident that funding could be secured for a housing study of Allegan County. Kilpatrick added that it was important to look at senior and seasonal worker housing needs given that the dynamic for seasonal workers is more acute in the Saugatuck/Douglas area than anywhere along the west coast of Michigan up until Traverse City.

Wurth asked if anyone had been experimenting with modular home construction methods that could be more affordable than traditional construction practices. Kilpatrick has not found a way to reduce cost of shipping modular units from out of state to make it affordable, and noted that the construction of a plant in West Michigan has been discussed.

4) Approval of Agenda

DeFranco added under item “A” of New Business “Clarify Partnership with Outdoor Discovery Center”

A **Motion** was made by Ihle to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Webster. The Motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

5) Approval of Minutes

No Minutes to approve for the 11/22/21 PC Meeting.

Wells noted a requirement in the OMA that draft minutes must be submitted within 8 days of a public meeting. DeFranco agreed to provide draft minutes within the required time-period. DeFranco noted that the OMA does not require minutes to be as detailed as the minutes to which commissioners have become accustomed, and that future minutes may not be more detailed than the minimum requirements of the OMA to guarantee they are completed on time.

6) Public Comment

No Public Comment

Public Comment Closed

6) New Business

A. Clarify Partnership with the Outdoor Discovery Center

DeFranco explained that the agenda item is following up on a conversation had at the 11/22/21



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PC meeting in which the PC agreed that three commissioners would meet with the ODC to discuss the reclamation of the mining site located at Old Allegan Rd and 133rd Ave. DeFranco, Ground and Ihle met with the ODC and from that meeting the ODC submitted a proposal for a reclamation strategy to the PC at a cost of \$1,400. The proposal was shared with the PC Chair, TWP Treasurer, Zoning Administrator and Township Manager. DeFranco noted that it has come to the attention of the PC that actions taken may not have been appropriate, and asked Wells to clarify why actions taken may not have been appropriate. DeFranco asked if there was any way of altering the present approach to make partnering with the ODC on the mining site reclamation an appropriate course of action.

Wells said that the PC cannot require an applicant to partner with a specific group unless it is a requirement of the Zoning Ordinance, which it is not. Wells understood that there was already a meeting set up with the ODC to discuss a separate matter and that the reclamation question would be a secondary topic of discussion. Wells said that in her mind there was never a conversation about getting a proposal, and that if that had been discussed Wells would have said that such a decision would need to be a directive from the Board. Wells noted that the site in question was private property and that there is always concern about spending public dollars on private property. Wells added that she was unaware that the ODC provided such services at a cost, and if Wells had known she would have recommended that the PC not speak with the ODC on this matter. Wells said that ultimately it would be the decision of the applicant to proceed with partnering with the ODC on this matter.

Helmrich reviewed the history of the TWP's relationship with the ODC, noting that conversations with the ODC began in earnest in the summer when a meeting was had between the Executive Director and President of the ODC with members of the Board, PC and TWP staff. The purpose of the meeting was to learn about the work being done by the ODC and the kinds of things on which the TWP and ODC could work together. Helmrich noted that with the special committees having more focused conversations, different people were introduced to staff at the ODC to ask questions and gather information. Helmrich's recollection from the previous PC meeting was that the PC agreed to have a representative group of PC members meet with ODC to ask about what they have done or could do in an advisory role relative to land reclamation and restoration. Helmrich thought the point was to get from the ODC their feedback/proposal with cost that the PC could look over and consider whether it was something the Board should endorse. The conversation, as far as Helmrich knew, was not about requiring Top Grade to work with the ODC and pay for the study; it could be the TWP paying for the study to learn more about the issue of land reclamation because the TWP could be facing more of it in the future. Helmrich expected that the ODC would provide a proposal, the PC would review it with feedback from staff and decide whether to take it to the Board or not proceed further. Helmrich noted that TWP staff had notified the ODC that the TWP would not be working with the ODC on this project, and that was not Helmrich's expectation; Helmrich thought the PC was still researching and collecting ideas. Helmrich noted that there was never an expectation that the PC



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would require the landowner to finance the proposal.

Wells said that there needs to be a conversation about the chain of command; does the TWP Manager take ideas and the Board directs the PC to talk to organizations to get proposals or do ideas come from the bottom up? Wells reiterated that she was unaware the ODC provided these services. Helmrich said that to have the project thwarted so quickly by TWP staff felt out of the process.

Ground understood what Wells was saying, but agreed with Helmrich; while it might not be prudent to pay for this specific project, it may be advantageous to pursue partnerships for future projects. Ground felt that working with outside organizations was more about education than requiring an applicant to adhere to conditions. Ground believed it was worth investigating how the PC might proceed.

Ihle did not realize there would be a contract involved when speaking with the ODC. After hearing the discussion, Ihle agreed with Wells that if a proposal is project specific and concerns private property it may not make sense. Ihle also understood Helmrich's view that the focus of the project could be looked at more broadly, such as dealing with mining abatement in general. Ihle suggested moving away from project specific requests and moving toward a community wide approach. Wells said as it pertains to the Rural Character and Conservation Committee, if there was a desire to amend the Zoning Ordinance as it pertains to Special Use Standards for mining projects, there was a need to explore best practices for reclamation and land stewardship, and the PC determined it would be beneficial to have outside advice, Wells believed that would be an appropriate conversation to have with the TWP Manager and Board. Wells noted that this was not the end of the relationship between the PC and ODC, and that Wells did not communicate with the ODC to terminate the project in question.

Helmrich agreed with Wells and expressed concern that someone might stop something during the initial research and discovery phase. Helmrich noted it was important to be cognizant of what the processes are, because similar issues will arise again given the work of the special committees. Helmrich noted that it was a surprise that this conversation with the ODC was stopped two weeks into it before the full PC could discuss the ODC's response.

Webster understood that it was ok for PC members to meet with ODC, but thought the purpose of the meeting was further education, not requesting a proposal. Ground said she did not know that the ODC was going to provide the PC with a proposal and that the intent of the meeting was not to acquire a proposal. Webster agreed that PC members did not think they were going to the ODC to get a proposal, and Webster did not think the PC could require the applicant to contract with ODC. Helmrich noted that the ODC decided to send a proposal in response to the PC's request for information.



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Israels said that the PC did not discuss a proposal at the last meeting. Israels noted that there are sometimes difficult decisions to make and that the PC makes those decisions and that it is not always an easy road to get there. Israels said that the PC needed to reflect and determine what its relationship is going to be with the ODC, because the ODC are experts in land use. Israels stated that Wells did not stifle the proposal in question in any way. Israels suggested that the proposal should go to the Board, that the Board decide how the relationship will look between the PC and ODC, and that the PC will take direction from the Board.

7) Old Business

A. Committee Reports

- **Attainable Housing (Webster)**

Webster reviewed Attainable Housing Special Committee Recommendations on file in PC 12/13/21 Agenda Packet. Webster explained that the Attainable Housing Committee was asking whether TWP Zoning Ordinances were allowing for housing to be achievable and affordable. Webster explained that the committee was more focused on home purchasing than on rentals; that focus does not mean that rentals should not be looked at by the TWP at another time, but simply that it fell out of the initial scope of the committee. Webster said that she had invited Ryan Kilpatrick of Housing Next to speak to committee members and review housing options.

DeFranco asked whether the Housing Committee considered adding a definition for efficiency or studio apartment. Wells mentioned that Grand Rapids has micro units with a maximum and not a minimum square footage. Wells also noted that there was a lot of gray area in the TWP's Zoning Ordinance with respect to density for number of units in PUDs. DeFranco inquired about the 800sq. ft. storage space requirement for apartments exclusive of interior space. Wells thought that requirement could be gotten rid of. Wurth thought a storage requirement may be necessary. Webster asked whether "Apartment" would need to be redefined or should efficiency units should be placed under "special accommodations." Webster asked if the Housing Committee should venture into PUDs. Wells said that it was not necessary. Wurth asked who would address PUDs if not the PC. Webster suggested contracting with Kilpatrick to create zoning ordinances that make the TWP more attractive to developers of attainable housing.

- **Economic Development (Helmrich)**

Helmrich reviewed the Economic Development Committee's recommendations on file in PC 12/13/21 Agenda Packet. Wurth emphasized the importance of addressing the beautification of the highway interchanges. Helmrich mentioned that the Committee will have Lakeshore Advantage as a guest speaker at their next meeting, and that Helmrich was looking for an



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additional committee member. Israels said that Lakeshore Advantage was a great group for collaboration. Israels noted that there is a third highway interchange at the Fennville exit on I-196, and that this exit should be considered in any redesign of the highway interchanges as it could be the site of future development.

- **Rural Character and Conservation (DeFranco)**

DeFranco reviewed the Rural Character and Conservation Committee recommendations on file in PC 12/13/21 Agenda Packet. Ihle inquired as to how the TWP might inspire developers to integrate green infrastructure projects into developments. Wells advised to be strategic and to proactively identify natural features requiring protection prior to development as opposed to waiting for site plan review.

Wells thanks commissioners for their hard work. Israels will meet with Wells to discuss next steps. Webster recommended Israels and Wells consider prioritizing action items presented by the special committees and distinguish between long and short term goals. Helmrich asked Wells to provide insight as to which action items would be easy changes and which would be more complicated. Wurth asked PC to consider which action item could make the most impact.

Israels asked each committee chair to identify their top three priorities that could be completed within a year and priorities for long term projects for the next PC meeting. Helmrich asked if Israels could become the intermediary between the PC and Special Committees, assessing the importance and impact level of each action item. Wells noted that once the PC compiled its priority list, the Board and TWP Manager would have to review for budgetary purposes.

B. Township Board Update: December 8, 2021 Submitted by Board and PC Member Jon Helmrich

- **The Township Board met on December 8, 2021:**
- Public Comment on Dugout Road and the LCWM nature easement by the new owner of property.
- Helmrich shared the five representatives to the Coastal Leadership Academy: Ihle, DeFranco, Engel, Butler, and Saint Amour. First session is in January.
- Andy Diaz has resigned from the Parks & Recreation Commission...open seat to be posted.



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- Voted to support the Road Commission's application for a CZM grant to help with study of Lakeshore Drive erosion issues.
- Approved 2022 road work orders and Hall Renovation calendar for concept plan.
- Approved the Indemnification agreement with Fire District relative to the extension of public water to the Van Horn properties.
- **Next Board meeting is Wednesday, January 12, 2021 at 6:00pm.**

C. Staff Update

- Wells noted that the next PC meeting would be held in person at the TWP Hall
- At the next PC meeting the PC would be reviewing the following projects: (1) site plan review for phase 3 on Commercial Drive, (2) Special Land Use for a new marijuana retail site, and (3) Special Land Use for a marijuana grow facility on Just Barns Drive
- Wells noted that Top Grade would be presenting their mine reclamation plan at the February PC meeting

8) Public Comment

1. Jane Dickie, 6108 Old Allegan Rd, was grateful for everyone who serves on the PC. Dickie noted Wurth's earlier comment concerning who would be working on PUD related ordinances and also that Dickie serves on the special committee on Rural Character and Conservation. Dickie said that that committee was investigating amendments to current ordinances related to PUDs. Dickie said that there are some beautiful and expensive small homes. Referencing Kilpatrick's earlier statement that the majority of residents in Allegan County are single and/or have no children at home, Dickie advocated for reducing the minimum square footage for homes and that the PC should not assume that such a change would reduce property value. Dickie noted that higher density need not be incompatible with rural character, as some of the research the Rural Character and Conservation Committee has found outlines how high density developments can integrate large tracks of green space and green infrastructure projects. Dickie stated that such developments could be accomplished through amending current PUD standards. Dickie added that density is coming to the TWP and that ordinances dealing with density through the lens of green practices and affordability should be pursued. Dickie referenced the mining site at Old Allegan and 133rd Ave, saying that neighbors left the last PC meeting feeling like finally there would be some expertise brought to the project via a partnership with the ODC. Dickie noted the degradation of the slopes of the mining pit and encouraged commissioners to visit the site in person. Dickie advocated for the TWP to update the zoning ordinance to stipulate that future



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mining projects be required to involve an expert approved by the TWP in the development of a reclamation plan. Dickie cited the Van Horn Pond and said that the TWP should anticipate future mining projects given the large sand deposits in the TWP. Dickie encouraged the PC to consider ordinance amendments that require bringing in experts for consultation. Dickie suggested using some of Top Grade's bond money to pay for the ODC report on the mining site.

Public Comment Closed

8. Adjourn

A **Motion** was made to adjourn the meeting at 9:12 pm by DeFranco. Seconded by Ihle. Motion passed by unanimous roll call vote. Next P.C. meeting: Monday, January 24th, 2021 at 6:00 pm.

Motions:

1. A **Motion** was made by Ihle to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Webster. The Motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

2. A **Motion** was made to adjourn the meeting at 9:12 pm by DeFranco. Seconded by Ihle. Motion passed by unanimous roll call vote. Next P.C. meeting: Monday, January 24th, 2021 at 6:00 pm.

Respectfully,

D. DeFranco, P.C. Sec.