

Minutes of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Regular Meeting held August 22nd, 2024, at 7 pm

8555 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

MEMBERS PRESENT: Billips, Rober, Giarmo, Wiersema, Thomas, Waayenberg, Haagsma

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Dan Wells, Community Development Director; Dakota Swan, Assistant Planner

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Giarmo called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

II. CONSIDERATION OF MEETING AGENDA

III. CONSIDERATION OF MEETING MINUTES

Consideration of the July 25th, regular Planning Commission meeting minutes.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Rober to approve the minutes of July 25th, 2024, with corrections.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (7-0)

IV. INQUIRY OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Kim Malski of 1380 84th Street approached the podium to speak on behalf of Prairie Wolf Station, which is a mixed-use development that is planned to go at the corner of Kalamazoo and 84th Street. Malski expressed that she feels as though owners of the surrounding properties deserve the same courtesy as those that will be living in the development, and that ideally, she would like to see screening efforts between the development and other properties. She added that she feels as though this development infringes upon agricultural means of production in the area, and that the developer should bear the burden of installing a privacy fence.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Public Hearings

a. 2701 76th Street – Tentative Preliminary Plat – Alexander Trails Phase 1

Kelly Kuiper of Signature Land Development Corporation spoke on behalf of the project, and stated that within Phase 1, the applicant intends to construct 25 single family lots designed under the PUD and Zoning District requirements. Kuiper added that they will establish a streetlight assessment district, and as time goes on, agency approvals will be sought after, and fine details will be refined.

Planner Wells gave the Townships perspective and stated that the applicant is seeking tentative preliminary plat approval, which is the first step in the platting process. Wells explained that tentative preliminary approval enables the applicant to put in infrastructure such as roads and water/ sewer lines, and they will seek final plat approval after those steps are completed. Planner Wells went on to say that lot sizes and setbacks were established within the PUD approval process, which was approved by the Township Board. Wells said that landscaping and sidewalk requirements were found to be met, and the conditions of approval include providing no less than 4 house models, meeting street tree requirements, creating a streetlight assessment district before building permits are sought, and adherence to the Township Engineers review comments. Overall, staff found all standards to be met, and recommend the Planning Commission make a positive recommendation to the Township Board.

Chair Giarmo opened the public hearing and subsequently closed it as nobody approached the podium to speak.

Commissioner Haagsma began the discussion by stating that he would like to see the name of the road “Hidden Knoll” changed to something else west of Parsley to avoid confusion in the future.

Kuiper responded that the applicant did receive approval for all road names shown in the site plan, however, she will ensure that it is specified when site plans are sent to the Kent County Road Commission for final approval.

Chair Giarmo suggested making the name change a condition of approval to grant the applicant more leeway in changing the road name of Hidden Knoll to the west of Parsley.

Motion:

Motion by Waayenberg, supported by Haagsma, to make a positive recommendation and draft a resolution for the Township Board with the following conditions:

- 1.** Staff shall confirm no less than four house models that meet the requirements of the GCTZO Section 6.4 A are built within the plat.
- 2.** Staff shall enforce the street tree requirement of the GCTZO Section 16.13 A at the time of final plat consideration.
- 3.** The applicant must request the creation of a Street Light Assessment District before applying for residential building permits.

4. The applicant must adhere to all review comments provided by the Township Engineer.
5. Receive approval from Kent County Road Commission for road name requirements.

DISCUSSION: None
AYES: ALL
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: Motion Carried (7-0)

b. 2701 76th Street – Tentative Preliminary Plat – Alexander Trails Phase 2

Kelly Kuiper spoke on behalf of Phase 2 of the Alexander Trails development as well, and stated that Phase 2 will see the addition of 20 residential lots, and that the goal is to have 45 residential lots amongst phases 1 and 2. Kuiper added that the goal of Phase 2 is to bring the flow of development closer to Phase 3, and allow access to another product type within the development; the townhomes.

Planner Wells added that the condominium portions of the development were approved under the initial PUD, which underwent the same review process, and resolutions were written to approve those sections. Wells added that it has been approved in terms of locations, however, he does foresee PUD Amendments down the line.

Chair Giarmo opened the public hearing and closed it after nobody approached the podium to speak.

Commissioner Wiersema began discussion by inquiring about fire department requirements, and clarifying that after 30 houses are built, a second access point will be required, to which Planner Wells confirmed that the Fire Department and staff are monitoring numbers and will ensure that a second ingress/ egress point will be installed before exceeding 30 houses, either connecting to Hidden Knoll or Terra Cotta.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Wiersema, to draft a resolution and make a positive recommendation to the Township Board with the following conditions:

1. Staff shall confirm that no less than four house models that meet the requirements of the GCTZO Section 6.4 are built within the plat.
2. Staff shall enforce the street tree requirement of the GCTZO Section 16.13 at the time of final plat consideration.
3. The applicant must request the creation of a Street Light Assessment District before applying for residential building permits.
4. The applicant must adhere to all review comments provided by the Township Engineer.

DISCUSSION: None
AYES: ALL
NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: 7-0

2. Site Plan Review

a. 8460 Kalamazoo Avenue – Phase 1 Site Plan Review – Prairie Wolf Station PUD

Mike Speedy, a representative from the developer for this project, American Kendall Properties, was joined by Eric DeYoung of Nederveld to offer an overview of this project. Speedy stated that the applicant has complied with the comprehensive plan stipulated by the court in the form of a Consent Judgement, and that they have located and bought water pipe in addition to working with other State agencies to obtain permits and approvals related to the development.

DeYoung explained that this development is intended to be a village center style community that provides a range of multifamily homes and amenities with several mixed-use aspects, and that they are seeking Site Plan approval for Phase 1 of the development. DeYoung added that the site plan provided is consistent with what is stipulated in the Consent Judgement, including unit and building counts.

Planner Wells offered the Townships perspective on this development and began by stating that this site plan review is being reviewed against the Consent Judgement, and that staff has the ability to process minor changes within the plan; he added that although Phase 1 closely matches what was stipulated in the Consent Judgement, at this scale, it is likely there will be some changes as time goes on. Wells went on to say that the applicant is working with EGLE on wetland management and permitting, and that the wetlands found in the area aren't anticipated to affect overall development, however, the wetlands found in the southern portion of the development may affect future phases of the project. Wells said that Phase 1 of this project is solely a site plan review, as the PUD zoning has been approved and is already in effect.

Planner Wells noted that there is a slight deviation in the parking outlined in the site plan as opposed to what was stipulated in the Consent Judgement, however, the Planning Commission has the power to approve the revised parking counts, as the Consent Judgement stipulated that parking counts may be adjusted depending on project need. Staff found that between the amount of covered and surface parking provided to serve residents, parking requirements have been satisfied.

Wells stated that the applicant intends to install internally illuminated signs which will be reviewed by staff, and that the landscaping point requirements were found to be met along 84th Street, Kalamazoo Avenue, and within internal parking lots. The visual barriers provided by landscape buffers and the buildings themselves create good street corridors throughout the development, and in future phases, more landscape buffers will likely be required. In terms of lighting, Planner Wells said that the applicant is working on making revisions to the lighting plan and asked the Planning Commission to defer lighting requirements to staff.

Wells then discussed compliance with the Master Plan and stated that the proposed site plan creates a mixed-use town center that closely meets what is called for in the Master Plan. Additionally, there is compliance with the Zoning Ordinance, and the Consent Judgement. Wells added that this is certainly one of the most walkable developments Gaines Charter Township has seen in recent years.

Planner Wells stated that in terms of preservation of natural features, this swath of land was used agriculturally for several years, meaning that there aren't many natural features to be preserved, besides the wetland areas that the applicant is working with EGLE on to obtain permits. Privacy in Phase 1 of this development was also found to be adequate, however, any additional screening would be appropriate here. Emergency access has been reviewed by the Fire Inspector, and there will be three ingress/ egress points within Phase 1 of the development, with additional access points to come in future phases, which also speaks to vehicle circulation. The access points provided in conjunction with the traffic circle at the intersection of 84th Street and Kalamazoo are deemed to be adequate to handle the additional traffic that will be brought to the area.

In terms of pedestrian circulation, the development is very walkable and will feature sidewalks along 84th Street and Kalamazoo Avenue, and staff has worked with the development team to ensure that a crosswalk will be installed to provide access and connectivity to Prairie Wolf Park. Wells went on to say that the applicant will need to obtain drain permits from the Kent County Drain Commission and that the Township Engineer will be reviewing said permits to ensure that the site is drained properly. Measures to ensure public health and safety were deemed appropriate, seeing as the Kent County Sheriff's Substation is directly across the street, and the development will be easily serviced by the Dutton Fire Station.

Planner Wells concluded by saying that staff recommends approval of the Phase 1 Site Plan Review on behalf of conformity with the Consent Judgement, and the applicant will need to secure agency approvals, in addition to getting proposed signage and lighting plans reviewed by staff.

Commissioners Haagsma and Wiersema, in addition to Chair Giarmo, discussed screening in the southwest corner of Phase 1, and expressed a desire to see some additional landscape buffering so as to block headlights from shining on residential properties to the south of the development until structures in future phases can assist in blocking them. Speedy stated that in time, commercial phases will need buffering and that they don't anticipate the gap to be open for very long. Planner Wells stated that the applicant can modify the planting plan with additional landscaping in that area and staff will review the changes.

Commissioner Wiersema inquired about the height of buildings and setbacks; Planner Wells responded that the building in question is planned to be 2 stories, and that the setbacks on the site plan match exactly what was stipulated in the PUD approval, since there is little administrative power to adjust setbacks or move buildings under the Consent Judgement.

Commissioner Haagsma expressed concern that the traffic study done on the area suggested a southbound right turn lane on Kalamazoo and 84th Street, to which Planner Wells responded that site improvements are still malleable, and Speedy added that a traffic circle was considered but wasn't implemented. Planner Wells stated that approval from the Kent County Road Commission is still necessary, and that it is possible to make minor changes in circulation. Commissioner Haagsma added that this will be brought up when driveway permits begin to get submitted.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Billips, to approve the presented site plan as is, with the following conditions:

1. Addition of two trees in the southwest portion of Phase 1, planting plan to be reviewed by staff.

2. Modified lighting plan to be approved by staff.
3. Secure all Township departments and outside agency approvals
4. Signage meeting current ordinance standards shall be reviewed administratively and the proposed location shall be depicted on the site plan.

DISCUSSION: None
AYES: Wiersema, Billips, Waayenberg, Giarmo, Haagsma, Thomas
NAYS: Rober
ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: 6-1

3. Items Not Requiring a Public Hearing

a. 3316 68th Street – PUD Rezone and Site Plan – Dutton Center

Dan Larabel of Allen Edwin Homes offered a brief recap of the requests made by the Planning Commission for the Dutton Center development back in June. The applicants took Planning Commissioner's feedback and eliminated slab-on-grade homes, implemented 6 feet wide sidewalks throughout the development, and intend to provide variation in the location of the front façade of homes to create an appealing streetscape. Larabel added that a plethora of open space amenities will be all throughout Dutton Center, and the development team intends to implement wayfinding signs to direct pedestrians to the Paul Henry Trail. Larabel stated that the goal is to create a desirable, active village-center neighborhood that offers a variety of amenities, and they are requesting Phase 1 PUD approval.

Planner Wells offered the Townships perspective on this request and stated that the applicants are requesting PUD rezoning for the entire property, in addition to Phase 1 Site Plan Review for the townhome and veranda units. Wells clarified that Phase 1 Site Plan Review approval is contingent on the approval of the overall PUD, and if the PUD approval is granted by the Township Board, the site plan provided will be in effect so long as it's approved by the Planning Commission. Wells added that Phases 2 through 5 are considered preliminary at this time, and that the final aspects might change. Wells stated that infrastructure and roads will be reviewed and approved by the Township Engineer and the Fire Inspector, and that the overall unit count for the development is 232 units with the potential to accommodate up to 260 units, depending on the end use of the mixed-use buildings, which will ultimately be dependent on the developer for that portion of the PUD. Planner Wells went on to say that Dutton has been developed over the course of 120 years; development has come and gone through different phases but has never created the town-center feel that has been intended for Dutton; this development will help fill in some of the gaps with consistent commercial and retail buildings to provide services for residents and hopefully reduce the need to travel elsewhere for such services. Wells added that this development will be a good economic driver for additional businesses to move into the area in the future. Wells concluded by saying that the big question to be determined by the Planning Commission is if this development is consistent with the Master Plan's vision for Dutton and the Zoning Ordinance under the PUD standards of review. Although the site plan provided doesn't look exactly like what was proposed in the 2008 plan for Dutton, it is imagined that this development will provide for the

community in a contemporary way, as the economy and needs of the general public have changed since then.

Commissioner Waayenberg began discussion by stating that to him, the proposed plan misses the mark; he stated that although the economy has changed, he doesn't see anything unique, and he would like to see a more town center main street type of development.

Commissioner Wiersema echoed Waayenberg's concerns and added that the separation between buildings being proposed as 10 feet, in addition to the minimum distance to the PUD boundary being proposed as 30 feet, feels very close. Wiersema said that he appreciates the walking path around the retention basin and is interested to see the product types being proposed for the veranda homes, as historically in Dutton, development has drawn on walkability and front porches. Thomas agreed with Wiersema's sentiments.

Planner Wells chimed in to state that 10 feet of separation is what is stipulated by fire code.

Commissioner Rober stated that she feels as though it is too much in too small of a space.

Chair Giarmo expressed that she is concerned about giving up the intensity provided in this area for a project that isn't exactly what the Planning Commission had envisioned for a village center area. Chair Giarmo added that she would like to see more green space and less parking lot so as to eliminate any strip-mall feel within the development.

Larabel responded and stated that he was surprised at this response given what was asked of the developers at the last meeting. In terms of separation between buildings, he inquired about what is appropriate, as they have been following the Master Plan's guidance; Planner Wells responded that the required separation distance between homes in the RL-10 zoning district is 8 feet. Fire Chief Ken Van Hall chimed in at this point to add that the provided plan has been approved by the Fire Department.

Chair Giarmo expressed a desire to see stepped and staggered heights on the proposed apartment buildings; Commissioner Wiersema added that a design element as such would be conducive to a more aesthetically appealing building as opposed to a block.

Commissioner Waayenberg added that ideally, he would like to see more intentional pedestrian spaces.

Planner Wells interjected to mention that access and visibility from the roadway is necessary to drive commercial development in the area, and that the 2008 plan for Dutton did include mixed-use apartment buildings as part of a village center. Wells reminded the Planning Commission that the arrangement of buildings is malleable and can be adjusted when future phases come in seeking approval. Wells also clarified that Allen Edwin Homes is most concerned with the residential portions of the development that they will be responsible for, as opposed to the commercial portions which will likely be undertaken by a different development entity.

Commissioner Rober stated that she is worried about the number of proposed apartments. Chair Giarmo reiterated that the amount of intensity being given up for little return on mixed use development and amenities for Dutton is troublesome to her, and she'd like to see some amenities in the back of the development to take some focus off of 68th Street so as to not create a strip mall feel.

Commissioner Haagsma stated that he believes the applicant has hit the mark pretty close on what was envisioned for the area; although he wishes there was more mixed use, there isn't a lot of frontage on 68th Street to provide for that kind of development.

Chair Giarmo and Commissioner Waayenberg agreed that it is challenging to determine if this development meets the requirements for a village center development as there are not many examples of this type of development.

Planner Wells stated that Dutton is an established place, and the applicant is attempting to propose a development that will be economically viable in the area and conducive to providing more connectivity in the area. Wells added that creating corridors as such closely lines up with what was envisioned in the 2008 plan for Dutton. Wells emphasized that the applicant will need very clear directions regarding building parameters, including setbacks and separation distances.

Commissioner Haagsma stated that the Planning Commission will likely not get exactly what was envisioned for this area in 2008, and that this plan is as close as the applicant can get with the tight space they're dealing with. Haagsma said that the developer has proposed a close-knit village style community with sidewalks and roadways throughout that promote connectivity to main roads and commercial developments. He agreed that 3-story buildings are not ideal, however, everything else appears satisfactory.

Planner Wells added that the commercial buildings within the development will be subject to Neighborhood Commercial zoning regulations when they come in seeking site plan approval, which will be stipulated in the updated Zoning Ordinance.

Commissioner Wiersema summarized his thoughts and stated that he would like to see more variation amongst the separation distances between the veranda homes to emulate a main street boulevard feel. He added that he does not want to see 3 story buildings, and that a step approach with regard to the apartment buildings in the middle of the development would make sense.

Larabel and Planner Wells discussed compromising the amount of parking provided to make additional space for more activated green spaces that would be comfortable and conducive to pedestrian activity.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Waayenberg, to direct staff to develop a resolution of recommending approval with the development team that reflect changes suggested under the Master Plan, and based on those changes, can achieve consistency with the Master Plan.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: 7-0

b. 8190 Division Avenue – One Year Extension – Brewer Park Apartments

Planner Wells stated that if the extension is not approved, there will essentially be a ghost PUD, where the zoning is in effect, but the site plan is expired.

Motion:	Motion by Haagsma, supported by Thomas, to approve a 1-year extension of the site plan.
DISCUSSION:	None
AYES:	ALL
NAYS:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
DECISION:	7-0

c. 3495 68th Street – PUD Amendment – Dutton Marathon

Chair Giarmo introduced this project by stating that this agenda item was tabled at the July meeting as the Planning Commission was seeking more refined details regarding the site plan; Adam Bryant of Irish Design & Build, the applicant for this project, gave an overview of the changes to the site plan.

Bryant began by stating that there will be a parking strip installed in the rear of the building, and there is additional parking to the east. The back asphalt will also be painted with directional arrows to guide traffic and delivery trucks, in addition to speed signs to assist in slowing traffic. The front façade of the building has been optimized to accommodate snowplows in the winter months. Bryant stated that he intends to install composite decking on the gates of the dumpster enclosure that will match the siding on the main building, and the building elevations provided have been updated to offer more details. Bryant added that if traffic gets too hectic in the loading area to the rear of the building, signs can be implemented as necessary.

Planner Wells offered Township staff's perspective of this project, and stated that originally, the reason for seeking a PUD amendment was to create a 50' x 28' addition on the north side of the building, however, additional proposed changes made the project too big to process administratively, hence the request for a PUD amendment. Wells stated that the applicant has done a good job of depicting various improvements to the site plan including aesthetics, landscaping, lighting, and general freshening up of the entire site. Wells said the Planning Commission must decide if it is appropriate to alter the setbacks on the north side of the building to accommodate the addition and decide whether the addition is appropriate for the site.

Chair Giarmo stated that she is pleased to see the area cleaned up, and that she thinks the addition and subsequent site improvements should be a welcome change to the area.

Motion:	Motion by Waayenberg, supported by Billips, to make a positive recommendation to the Township Board for the PUD Amendment with the following conditions:
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1. The parking requirement is waived, and 12 parking spaces be permitted for the site.

2. Signage for the site will be regulated under General Commercial standards and must be noted on the site plan under "Requirements".
3. Asphalt on the north side of the addition must be resurfaced as indicated on the site plan.

DISCUSSION: None
AYES: Giarmo, Rober, Waayenberg, Billips, Wiersema, Thomas
NAYS: Haagsma
ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: 6-1

d. 4142 92nd Street – Special Use Permit – Solar Panels

Chair Giarmo began discussion by stating that at the July meeting, this agenda item was tabled as a result of the Planning Commission needing a more accurate site plan to make a sound decision. The applicant is seeking a Special Use Permit for consumer scale ground mounted energy collectors.

Jeff Williams, the homeowner and applicant for this project, stated that he intends to do the same project that was presented in July, just this time with the submission of a site plan that's to scale.

Planner Wells stated that the applicant provided arial images that indicate the solar panels will be located behind a grove of trees; a second arial image indicates that there shouldn't be a great deal of visibility from 92nd Street, and that they will be perpendicular to the property line. Planner Wells stated that the plans seem to be reasonably scaled.

Commissioner Haagsma stated that previously, his main concern was the proximity of the panels to the property line, however, with the support of the neighbors which would be most affected, his concern is alleviated.

Williams added that the panels will be facing south, in the opposite direction of traffic on 92nd Street and the neighbors.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Waayenberg, to approve the Special Use Permit with the following conditions:

1. Solar panel mounting and electrical systems shall be reviewed by the Building Inspector and the Township Engineer, and approval by both is required.
2. Additional screening will not be necessary.

DISCUSSION: None
AYES: ALL
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: 7-0

VII. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Planner Wells stated that Stoneco, the company executing mineral extraction in the southwest corner of the Township, has submitted materials for the annual review of the Jeplawy parcel. Wells went on to say there are approximately 2 years left of the mining operation, and that he spoke to the mine manager who said the deposits in the area are not as deep as they had initially thought. Wells added that the only complaint received during the entire operation was in the beginning when stump burning was occurring, and that the berm installed around the property has assisted in minimizing the visual impact of the project. Wells concluded by saying that all is going as planned at the mine and going quicker than originally anticipated; he added that the Sand and Gravel Subcommittee met and agreed on making a positive recommendation to the Planning Commission to accept the mine report.

Motion: Motion by Rober, supported by Waayenberg, to accept the mining report.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: 7-0

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 PM.

CERTIFICATION:

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the minutes from the August 22nd, 2024, Planning Commission Meeting of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission held at the time and place mentioned above pursuant to the required statutory procedures.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lani Thomas". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Lani Thomas,

Secretary

Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Date: 11/21, 2024