

Minutes of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Regular Meeting held January 25, 2024, at 7 pm

8555 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Dan Wells, Community Development Director; Dakota Swan, Assistant Planner; Jeff Gritter, Township Engineer

I. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Giarmo called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

II. CONSIDERATION OF MEETING AGENDA

No changes to the agenda.

III. CONSIDERATION OF MEETING MINUTES

Consideration of the December 14, 2023, regular Planning Commission meeting minutes.

Motion: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Waayenberg to approve the minutes of December 14, 2023.

DISCUSSION: None.

AYES: Giarmo, Billips, Haagsma, Rober, Thomas, Waayenberg, Wiersema

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (7-0)

IV. INQUIRY OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was made.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Items not requiring a Public Hearing

a. 7610 Division Avenue SE

Requesting for a rezone from Heavy Industrial (I-2) to Neighborhood Commercial (NC)

Planner Wells explained that this request is fitting for the area and would be compatible with adjacent land uses, and meets the designated use in the Future Land Use Plan. Additionally, it was mentioned that the parcel in question is currently partially vacant, with the remainder of the parcel containing a self-storage facility. Planner Wells gave a staff recommendation to the Planning Commission for the rezone request.

MOTION: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Waayenberg to hold a public hearing for the rezoning.

DISCUSSION: Giarmo thinks it will improve the aesthetic appearance of the area.

AYES: Giarmo, Billips, Haagsma, Rober, Thomas, Waayenberg, Wiersema

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (7-0)

b. 3805 92nd Street

Request for PUD- Preliminary Review

Paul Henderson, who is representing applicants for the PUD, stated he will be responding to recommendations made by Planner Wells and Engineer Gritter. He elaborated on details pertaining to proposed water and sewer plans for the development, which would include a Septic Tank Effluent Pumping (STEP) system for the 34 proposed units.

Planner Wells explained that this application serves as a preliminary site plan and a PUD rezoning, not a final site plan, and that if the Planning Commission granted preliminary approval, the applicant would then move onto a public hearing and move through a site plan review.

Wells confirmed that staff found submittal requirements to all be adequate for a preliminary review.

Planner Wells mentioned that this request is typical for this type of development, the only difference is that within suburban developments, lots are typically larger than what is being proposed for this type of development.

The proposed development includes sidewalks on one side of the street; Planner Wells added that typically for a development of this density, the township would require sidewalks

on both sides of the street, therefore it is undetermined if that standard is met through this application.

Planner Wells then discussed the intricacies of the proposed STEP system and concerns regarding long term management of the community septic system. Final site plans are not available at this time; consequentially, Planner Wells recommends a condition in which the Township Engineer would review and approve all site plans to ensure legitimacy regarding long-term management of the septic system and protection of the natural environment.

Planner Wells confirmed that the conditions for a Planned Unit Development-Open Space Preservation have been met since 45 acres of agricultural land will be set aside, and 2.5 acres of mature woods would be preserved under the proposed development. There aren't any significant natural features to be preserved within the parcel given that it mainly consists of agricultural land, however, requirements for an Open Space PUD are still satisfied due to the acreage of the farmland and the mature woods set to be preserved.

Staff recommends a condition in which a legal covenant acts to ensure that the proposed open space remains undeveloped open space; this would need to be submitted to the Township Attorney for review. It is recommended by Planner Wells that legal formalities are ironed out before this recommendation goes to the Township Board.

Planner Wells also explained that staff found details regarding community drain fields/detention and retention ponds to be unsatisfactory. The amount of proposed open space is subject to change depending on how much space is allocated to drain fields and ponds within the PUD; Planner Wells advises waiting for final site plans to consider this possibility.

Pertinent to the Township Non-Motorized Plan, Planner Wells discussed a proposed unapproved trail to be included in the PUD surrounding the farm area. Staff recommends the development include an ADA-compliant trail. Staff also recommended a formal agreement ensuring perpetual protection of the open space to be reified before this request is seen by the Township Board.

Planner Wells mentioned that water quality testing would need to be performed on this parcel to determine the viability of the STEP system, and the availability and quality of well water for the lots.

Chair Giarmo invited Henderson to respond to Planner Wells' review and comments, to which he clarified that through meetings with the health department and EGLE, they dropped a lot from the proposed development. Henderson mentioned that they would be using the septic system featured in the Hideaway development as reference for the proposed STEP system.

Attorney Steve Tjapkes had the chance to elaborate on the open space uses; he said that the developers are attempting to ensure that the proposed trail is a useful amenity for residents, but also that it does not incur high costs to implement.

Staff questioned the remnant parcel in the southwest corner of the PUD and inquired about whether it had undergone a perc test.

Tjapkes confirmed that the master deed for the property grants the Township authority to create a special assessment district to ensure that there is a long-term plan in place for the preservation of open space, and states he is willing to negotiate with the Township Attorney on a formal legal instrument to oversee this matter.

Henderson returned to the podium and elaborated in response to staff concerns about sidewalks; he stated that the developer is interested in keeping this development affordable, and sees this as a cost to the individual homeowner.

Planner Wells inquired about the sale price of units, Henderson stated that sale prices are currently undetermined.

Giarmo inquired about intricacies of the private sewer system with Engineer Gritter; he claims that it is quite early in the development process for intricate design details, but we do know that retention is a risky idea in this area of the Township due to the clay deposits in the ground and subsequent inability to perc. Additionally, a Special Assessment District was recommended up front with the Hideaway development, and Engineer Gritter is hopeful it would be applied here too.

Planner Wells inquired about consultation with Kent County Health Department regarding the preliminary review.

Engineer Gritter responded that there are details to work out given what they proposed, and that some variance may be required, but that the health department preliminarily said this proposal could hypothetically work, based on testing done in the area and the discovery of some sand.

Chair Giarmo inquired about potential concerns from hideaway residents, Planner Wells responded that there haven't been many since not many houses have been put up yet.

Waayenberg echoed staff review points dealing with sidewalks on both sides of the development for the sake of accessibility and expressed concern regarding stormwater retention on behalf of the clay soils in the area.

Chair Giarmo and Member Wiersema also expressed a desire for sidewalks on either side of the development, and Wiersema inquired about access points to the development for the sake of emergency services since there is only one proposed. Fire Chief Ken VanHall weighed

in and confirmed that a second access point will need to be included in the development due to the number of houses.

Member Wiersema also inquired about the open lot towards the front of the development in front of lot 1, Henderson affirmed that nothing is planned for that lot.

Member Rober expressed concerns regarding the long-term preservation of the allocated open space; Tjapkes reassured her that the open space in question is intended to be part of the site condo plan. Commissioner Rober also inquired about risks associated with the proposed sewer/ sanitation plan, Henderson confirmed that there will be more conversations and steps to be taken with the health department and EGLE. Planner Wells added that a thorough review by the Township Engineer will also be a necessary step in this process.

Commissioners Thomas and Billips echoed prior concerns in lieu of sidewalks and access points.

Member Haagsma expressed agreement with staff comments and sought clarification regarding ownership of two adjacent parcels located southeast of the proposed development.

Planner Wells inquired about an easement on the property, Henderson confirmed it is a drainage easement.

Chair Giarmo encouraged the inclusion of trail maintenance in master deed and inquired about the Township Attorneys role in that process, to which Planner Wells confirmed the Township Attorney would be included in that discussion and offered to provide Chair Giarmo with further details as needed. Chair Giarmo also expressed the importance of preserving wooded lots in the township, such as the 2.5 acres included in this property.

MOTION: Motion by Waayenberg, supported by Billips to approve the preliminary rezoning, with the staff recommendations and fire department requirements being considered.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: Giarmo, Billips, Haagsma, Rober, Thomas, Waayenberg, Wiersema

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (7-0)

C. 3316 68th Street – Thornapple Village

Request for PUD – Preliminary Review

The applicant is seeking to rezone a portion of a parcel to a PUD called Thornapple Village to implement a residential development. Dan Larabel of Allen Edwin Homes discussed the design overview and explained that they are aiming to develop 114 single-family homes within the area, including 52 detached homes, 11 4-unit townhomes, and 18 “terrace” homes.

Dan Larabel of Allen Edwin Homes addressed their plan to mitigate stormwater retention and discussed the details of a proposed detention pond in the northeast corner of the property. Their goal is to minimize the footprint of the detention pond as much as possible.

Larabel then discussed the staff report and expressed how the developer feels as though the proposed development is contingent with the future land use plan. He touched on each of the standards for both the Dutton master plan and the designated future land use category, village residential, and how the proposed development fits those standards.

Planner Wells mentioned that the density and housing variety standards included in the plan for Dutton seem to be satisfied through this proposed development, however, he explained that the Future Land Use Plan for mixed-use development, and current Neighborhood Commercial zoning in this area are left unsatisfied. Planner Wells also voiced concerns about the proposed location of the detention pond and the way in which it would eliminate the possibility of connectivity to adjacent arterial streets in the area and inquired with Member Haagsma about KCRC’s findings regarding this matter.

Planner Wells expressed concerns about the number of residents and subsequent traffic that would be added to the area and inquired about the need for conducting a traffic study.

Wells also elaborated on open space requirements and how there is flexibility within those standards for a PUD; the proposed development currently allocates 0.85 acres as open space and features a park within the site plan. Wells encouraged the Planning Commission to consider whether this amount of open space would be sufficient for the number of units planned to be included in this development.

Planner Wells then discussed the non-motorized network within the PUD and highlighted the cyclist-friendly element of roads within this proposal. Wells also spoke on the possibility of connecting to the Paul Henry trail.

Planner Wells encouraged the Planning Commission to consider this PUD and if it is aiming to reach the intended village center goals that are outlined in the Master Plan for Dutton. Staff recommended conditions to reach all outside agency approvals, including approval from the Township Engineer.

Commissioner Wiersema elaborated on the importance of sidewalks and how critical they are in this area. Wiersema then voiced concern regarding accessibility within the area and the village residential intent for this parcel of land. He commented on the lack of connectivity proposed within the area and the bifurcated feel of the neighborhood. Wiersema inquired about the

distinction between porches and stoops, and how the proposed porches on these units do not emulate a walkable, pedestrian-friendly aesthetic.

Commissioner Billips echoed Wiersema's porch concern, and added that aesthetically, the units appear bland to her. She expressed an interest in seeing more variation amongst the products given the large number of them that would be built so close together.

Secretary Thomas highlighted the number of families projected to be moving in as a primary concern regarding sidewalks and connectivity. Thomas echoed earlier concerns about stoops and spoke in favor of porches instead.

Commissioner Waayenberg voiced uncertainty on whether the proposed PUD meets the village center requirements; Waayenberg added that it feels as though the developer pushing faster than what the township is ready for. Waayenberg expressed discontent towards having only one entrance and exit point into the development as it discourages connectivity. He also voiced support for a traffic study being conducted in the area.

Commissioner Haagsma offered insight into the details of traffic that would be added to the area, and stated that this area will see about 2600 more automobile trips a day; subsequently, he voiced the need for a traffic study. Haagsma referenced Section 10.1 under the sections for review and expressed that this PUD doesn't enhance the creativity or distinctiveness of the area. He believes there is little flexibility within the design, and it would not necessarily benefit the community. Haagsma said that it doesn't seem as though this PUD would integrate any of the village residential elements together for this area as the Planning Commission had envisioned, other than offering a variety of housing types.

Commissioner Rober chimed in and reiterated earlier concerns about the stoops on the front of homes. Rober expressed a distaste for the "cookie cutter" nature of the product, and she spoke on a desire to do this development right.

Chair Giarmo highlighted the amount of time spent on crafting a vision for the Dutton area and the desire to bring it to life, and how this PUD is in stark contrast to what has been envisioned; Giarmo stated that this PUD doesn't offer the Planning Commission any comfort and doesn't make her believe that the developer understands the intentions for this area.

Giarmo inquired about the developers history with designing mixed use area plans, and Larabel responded that they have previously been peripheral to commercial elements, but never to this extent.

Giarmo reiterated the disconnect between the proposed project and the envisioned plans for the Dutton area and expressed a distaste for the detention pond on 68t Street. Giarmo encouraged Larabel to rethink the village neighborhood characteristics that are being envisioned for this area, and to come back to the Planning Commission with something more fitting.

MOTION: Motion by Haagsma, support by Rober to table the preliminary decision.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: Giarmo, Billips, Haagsma, Rober, Thomas, Waayenberg, Wiersema

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

c. 1160/ 1188/ 1190 76th Street – Cooks Crossing Enclave
Preliminary Site Condominium Plan

Planner Wells started the discussion by offering some insight into the content of the development; this is a request for a site condominium that would be adjacent to the Cooks Crossing PUD.

Mike McGraw of Eastbrook Homes spoke on behalf of this preliminary site condo plan and offered some opening comments. He stated that the addition of a property to their parcel was very beneficial, and these homes will be bigger than any other projects they've developed.

Planner Wells offered more context for the long-term implications of the development and said that there is an easement for water service that heads into an adjacent parcel, so there is potential for future water service. Wells clarified that there is no need for a public hearing with site condominiums, and that if this is approved, Eastbrook Homes will have two years to finalize site plans based on the preliminary plan presented to the Planning Commission.

Regarding development standards, Wells stated that all aspects are compliant with requirements for the RL-14 zone. Wells feels confident that Eastbrook Homes will provide a variety of housing types for this development, and that there will need to be a streetlight assessment in addition to a review of the utilities plan by the Township Engineer.

Wells stated that staff gives a positive recommendation to the Planning Commission with the conditions that the four house models meet the requirements for the development, sidewalks would be included on both sides of the street, a streetlight assessment district would be implemented, and that street tree requirements would be met. Additionally, it is necessary to undergo review by the Township Engineer.

Commissioner Haagsma inquired about the water easement, and Wells provided clarification on the dimensions and location.

MOTION: Motion by Waayenberg, support by Wiersema to make a positive resolution and move this to the township board.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: Billips, Haagsma, Rober, Thomas, Waayenberg, Wiersema, Giarmo
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: Motion Carried (6-0)

d. 2023 Planning & Zoning Report

Staff compiled a 2023 summary of the planning and zoning department, which was provided for the Planning Commission's review and questions as necessary.

Chair Giarmo inquired about how many units of housing were built in the township last year, Wells responded that it was approximately 1600 units, including developments from November and December of the year prior. Wells also commented that we're seeing a variety of homes and getting a range of products in the township to suit a range of people.

Planner Wells took some time to address big plans on the docket for the Planning and Zoning department in 2024, and what the department accomplished last year. In 2023, an upgrade to the master plan was complete, alongside a parks and recreation plan, and now the township is undertaking an update to the Zoning Ordinance. Within the next few years, Planner Wells is hoping to update the non-motorized transportation plan, specifically by means of identifying and marking shared pathways for cycling. Wells also wants to get the Planning and Zoning department working on developing a public park (referred to as Codys Mill) within the township, and he plans to initiate a discussion with the DNR about grants to help connect this new park to Prairie Wolf Park. Planner Wells also highlighted the importance of protecting critical wetlands, woodlands and creeks as time goes on and as development carries on within the township.

e . Election of Officers

The Planning Commission needed to reelect their officers, including the Chair of the commission (Giarmo), the Vice Chair (Rober), and the Secretary (Thomas).

MOTION: Motion by Haagsma, support by Waayenberg to keep the same officers for 2024.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: Giarmo, Billips, Haagsma, Rober, Thomas, Waayenberg, Wiersema

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (7-0)

VII. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Planner Wells explained that the next Planning Commission meeting is looking like it will be light; in February the Planning Commission will hear an application for site plan review from Jack's Landscaping.

Wells also mentioned that the standards for the R-3 zoning category were reviewed by the township board but will likely be coming back to the Planning Commission for further consideration, given some concerns about affordability and flexibility.

Tangentially, Wells mentioned that setback requirements near the M-6 corridor might see some exceptions in the Zoning Ordinance update and apartment developments may be subject to more gracious standards eventually.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:19 PM.

CERTIFICATION:

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the minutes from the January 25, 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,


Lani Thomas,

Secretary

Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Date: January 25, 2024