

Minutes of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Regular Meeting held June 27, 2024, at 7 pm

8555 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Waayenberg and Haagsma, with notice.

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 May 23rd, regular Planning Commission meeting minutes.

Motion: Motion by Wiersema, supported by Thomas to approve the minutes of May 23rd, 2024, with corrections.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (5-0)

IV. INQUIRY OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Giarmo opened the public hearing at 7:03 PM and closed it at 7:03 PM as nobody approached the podium to speak.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Public Hearings

a. 163 68th Street – Special Use Permit – Accessory Building

Daniel Suarez-Lopez, the applicant and homeowner for this project, was unable to attend the meeting. Community Development Director Dan Wells spoke on behalf of this request and gave an overview of the project. The Planning Commission approved a Special Use Permit for Suarez-Lopez to construct a 900 SF garage back in April, however, after receiving approval he realized he'd like to add a 300 SF roof to the back of the garage, which required him to return to the Planning Commission to receive a second Special Use Permit for the additional square footage being added. Suarez-Lopez intends to store watercraft under the awning in winter and use the additional square footage as patio space in summer. Planner Wells stated that all standards of review are found to be met, and that staff recommends approval of this project.

Chair Giarmo expressed that the intention behind approving buildings of this size is to get residential storage occurring inside the structure; Wells responded that storing trailers and boats in either rear or side yards is permitted under the zoning ordinance and is common practice.

Suarez-Lopez submitted two renderings featuring two different roof options; the Planning Commission expressed that they would prefer the applicant to go with the gable roof option that was presented.

Commissioner Rober inquired about how far the neighbors are from the addition; Planner Wells responded that any neighbors are at least approximately 80 feet to the east and 60 feet to the north.

Wiersema added that it appears as though there is a decent sized tree line offering some visual buffering between the neighbors and the applicants property.

Motion:	Motion by Wiersema supported by Billips to accept the Special Use Permit with the condition that the building features the gable roof option instead of the shed roof option.
DISCUSSION:	None
AYES:	ALL
NAYS:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
DECISION:	Motion Carried (5-0)

b. 985 61st Street– Special Use Permit – Accessory Building

Jeffrey Prins, the homeowner and applicant for this project, approached the podium to speak on behalf of his request for a Special Use Permit. Prins stated that he would like to build a 50x50 steel post-frame pole barn building to house his camper, trailer, vehicle, and gardening equipment. Furthermore, Prins stated that the new building may end up being smaller than 50x50, depending on construction costs and what he can reasonably afford. Prins added that there is an existing shed on the property that he intends to tear down in lieu of the new building being constructed.

Chair Giarmo inquired about the distance that will be between the new structure and the home on the property, Prins responded that there will be a minimum of 10 feet between the house and the new building, and that the new building will be at least 10 feet from any property line.

Chair Giarmo also inquired about whether or not the building is going to match the dwelling on the property, to which Prins said he intends to match it to the best of his ability and will ensure it is aesthetically pleasing.

Planner Wells offered the Township's perspective on this request and began by saying that this property is surrounded by residential lots to the north, east, and west, and that there is a county drain and a tree line to the south which separates Prins' property from the Woodfield Apartments. Wells added that the proposed building is large for the area, many surrounding properties have accessory buildings, but none are quite this large. Wells highlighted standard 19.8(D) which pertains to public services and facilities and said that although the Zoning Ordinance does not require updates to nonconforming driveways for new accessory buildings, there are a lot of overhanging branches which could be problematic for potential fire department access. Wells added that branch removal or ensuring adequate fire access could be a condition of approval and should be discussed by the Planning Commission. Standard 19.8(E) considers if this request would set negative precedence for development which could adversely affect long-term plans for the township, which staff found to be undetermined based solely on the size of the building. There are no accessory buildings in the immediate surrounding area that are greater than 1000 SF; staff encourages the Planning Commission to decide if the size of this building is appropriate.

Prins stated in his application that he intends to install solar panels on the roof eventually, and Planner Wells added that a building permit would be necessary for that request. Standard 20.2(D).4 (F) pertains to the extent to which the building absorbs yards and other open spaces and was found to be undetermined; Wells stated that this building is just over 10% of the total lot size, and that the Planning Commission must determine if the size is appropriate given the size of the lot.

Fire Chief Ken Van Hall offered his perspective and stated that the driveway does present challenges for adequate fire access; the driveway is approximately 12 feet wide, and their trucks are 10 feet wide. Height is also a concern; overhanging branches could obstruct trucks in the event of an emergency and require ladder tests to be done if the ladders are struck by branches. Van Hall suggested implementing something to ensure that branches remain trimmed and maintained to provide fire access.

Van Hall confirmed for Chair Giarmo that although the driveway is quite narrow, the overhang of branches is the main concern; Planner Wells mentioned that Prins owns the entire roadway that provides access to all four houses, and he technically has the legal right to trim anything hanging onto his easement regardless of if his neighbors approve.

Chair Giarmo opened the public hearing.

Jay Tucker of 980 61st Street approached the podium; he is a neighbor to Prins and expressed that he and his wife support the approval of this project. Tucker said that they would be enthusiastic about the camper being stored inside of a structure and out of their view.

Chair Giarmo closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Wiersema began discussion by inquiring about when the existing structure would be removed; Prins responded that it would be demolished before construction of the new building begins, and Planner Wells added that a condition of approval could be imposed that requires demolition at the point that maximum square footage is achieved.

Commissioner Wiersema stated that he has an issue with the size of the building and the amount of property that would be consumed by the building, and the potential inconsistencies with the character of the rest of the neighborhood.

Chair Giarmo reiterated earlier sentiments about imposing a condition of approval that would require branch trimming to allow for adequate fire access, and Planner Wells added that the applicant could work with Van Hall to determine what is necessary and address the branches that would be of the biggest concern.

Chair Giarmo stated that she would have bigger issues with the size of the building if it wasn't planned to be adjacent to the Woodfield Apartments, and that she likes the idea of requiring the maintenance of a vegetative buffer and requiring collaboration with the Fire Chief to ensure that adequate access is maintained.

Motion: Motion by Wiersema, supported by Billips, to approve this Special Use Permits with the following conditions:

1 – A vegetative buffer on the east, west, and south side of the property must remain intact; if the currently existing wood lot is ever removed, a new vegetative buffer must be installed and maintained.

2 – The existing accessory structure must be removed at the point that the maximum square footage is reached.

3 – Tree branch removal will occur as per Fire Chief Ken Van Hall's guidance.

4 – The building will not be used for commercial purposes.

DISCUSSION: Commissioner Rober asked that if the applicant decides to make the building smaller than 50x50, he makes the Planning Commission aware.

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: 5-0

c. 1688 68th Street – Childcare Center Special Use Permit and Site Plan

Mark Kellenberger, the Director of Development for 814 Commercial Real Estate, and Steve Witte, the engineer for this project, explained their request for a Special Use Permit. 814 Commercial Real Estate is seeking a Special Use Permit and Site Plan Review for a 13,533 SF child daycare center. They are looking to redevelop the property, and the building they have designed is fit to accommodate 202 children and 27 staff members. They spoke about staff recommendations mentioned in the memo for this agenda item, and stated that the photometric plan has been revised, and they intend to follow staff recommendations for fencing. Witte added that there is a single drive entrance that will lead into a parking lot with 57 spaces, and that the play area featured in the back of the building will be well set back off of property lines and is intended to have smaller groups of children playing at once to ensure better monitoring by staff. Witte went on to say that the property is serviced by water and sewer, and that although sidewalks along 68th Street do not connect to the building, they do not anticipate much foot traffic in the area.

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

Chair Giarmo began discussion by inquiring about the color of the building; Kellenberger responded that it is planned to be a white building with pewter trim, and it will feature stacked stone at the entryway. Planner Wells chimed in to add that the applicant submitted some screening that will hide the rooftop mechanics.

Planner Wells gave the staff perspective on this request and began by highlighting how necessary childcare is as the Township grows; expanding services in the Township is a critical economic development issue. Wells stated that the main concerns are the amount of additional traffic that would be generated on 68th Street and added that the intersection at Kalamazoo Avenue is approximately 450 feet away. Wells went on to say that Commissioner Haagsma (who Safety Director for Kent County Road Commission) did not express any concerns about the location of the driveway or additional traffic. Planner Wells went on to say that this building is set to be located on a commercial corridor and could serve as a good transition between commercial uses to the north and residential uses to the south. Childcare facilities are an allowed use within the RL-10 zoning district if a Special Use Permit is obtained; because of this, Wells is not worried about this development setting a precedent for development.

Wells stated that staff recommended solid fencing because the facility to the east is an adult care facility, and staff wants to ensure the childcare facility is adequately screened. Wells went on to say that all dimensional standards were found to be met, and that the sign being proposed will be reviewed administratively and as per the sign ordinance regulations. Additionally, the submitted landscaping plan provides sufficient screening and meets landscaping standards. Wells added that although the staff memo states that lighting plans do not meet standards, they have resubmitted a photometric plan and those standards are now found to be met. Planner Wells stated that the drain in the area is not a county drain on this side of 68th (it starts across the road), however, the applicant will work with the Township Engineer to ensure that development is concurrent with maintenance of the drain, and that the applicant will also work with the Fire Chief to ensure that safety access to the site is sufficient. Planner Wells encouraged the Planning Commission to deliberate and determine whether sidewalks should be implemented to connect to the building, even though the applicant has stated they would prefer not to.

Commissioner Wiersema began discussion by inquiring about the material planned to be used for the fencing; Kellenberger responded that the external fence is planned to be a solid screening fence to provide security to the sidewalk, and the additional fence around the play area is intended to be chain link.

Commissioner Rober expressed hesitation about this project due to traffic, proximity to the intersection of 68th Street and Kalamazoo, and high speeds seen in the area. Witte responded by saying that peak times at daycare facilities vary, and the peak number of cars is about 50-60 per hour, spread out throughout the hour. Witte added that not all children enrolled in the daycare attend every day, and oftentimes parents have more than one child enrolled, so the number of cars isn't necessarily one per enrolled child.

Chair Giarmo inquired about the possibility of altering the location of the curb cut/ driveway; Witte explained that the grading changes drastically if the driveway moves and would cause engineering issues. Giarmo then expressed that she is hesitant to put anything of an intense use on the south side of

68th Street due to heavy traffic, high speeds, and safety issues that would manifest due to the proximity to the intersection. She stated that a short-term fix to providing more childcare would consequently cause long term issues for the Township, and Commissioners Rober and Thomas agreed with these sentiments.

Planner Wells reiterated that Commissioner Haagsma didn't voice any concerns regarding this project.

Chair Giarmo stated that although it is only one curb cut being proposed, this project adds an intensity to the area that she is not comfortable with, and she doesn't feel as though this area is right for a use other than residential.

The overall feeling was that the Planning Commission wasn't quite ready to approve this project; Planner Wells inquired about tabling this agenda item, and inquired about what further information would assist the Commissioners in making a decision. Chair Giarmo and Commissioner Thomas suggested moving the driveway/ curb cut as far east as possible.

Kellenberger responded that they have looked at alternative driveway locations, however, as Witte had mentioned, it causes significant grading changes and would require a plethora of engineering issues. Kellenberger stated that they will investigate whatever the Planning Commission desires because they would like to move forward with this project, however, if the curb cut does move as far east as it can go, that will only be approximately 80-90 feet of difference and the same concerns will still remain.

Motion:	Motion by Rober, supported by Thomas, to table this Special Use Permit/ Site Plan Review.
DISCUSSION:	Thomas expressed that she would like to see the curb cut moved as far east as possible.
AYES:	Rober, Billips, Thomas, Wiersema
NAYS:	Giarmo
ABSTAIN:	None
DECISION:	4-1

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

Dan Larabel of Allen Edwin Homes approached the podium to explain the request for a PUD Rezoning and a Site Plan Review. Dutton Center is a project that was discussed at the March Planning Commission meeting, and was approved to move to site plan review and a public hearing the applicant is now back after making significant changes to the site plan based on Planning Commission feedback. Larabel stated that the new design features more amenities and focuses on centralizing activity within the development. Larabel also mentioned that the traffic study requested at the March meeting is now complete, and reminded the Planning Commission that the Site Plan Review is only for Phases 1 and 2, and that Phases 3, 4, and 5 are still in the conceptual stage.

Updated amenities include a tot lot, a multi-use court, a paved pedestrian path around the stormwater basin, and a dog park; Larabel clarified that their intention was to create high-value amenities that contribute to active open space. Additional updates include wider roads, density change due to a reduction in the number of units to 232 units from the previous 243 units.

Larabel then gave an overview of the different housing types they intend to offer in this development and stated that their main focuses were front porch architecture and creating a product that is appealing from a pedestrian scale. He stated that they are offering townhouses, platted homes, multiple family apartment buildings, and a variety of mixed use and commercial buildings. Larabel mentioned that over 50% of the single-family detached homes feature rear loaded garages, and that they are requiring 20% of units within the PUD to have a full front porch to create attractiveness, value, and a village center feel.

Planner Wells gave the Townships perspective on this request and explained that the applicants intent is to create a PUD that offers a variety of housing types, provides a nice transition from the platted area to the south to the mixed use area in the north, and fulfill the vision for a village center in Dutton which dates back to 2008. Wells went on to say that it is likely the developer will partner with another entity for the mixed use and apartment areas, since Allen Edwin is a residential homebuilder.

With regard to standards of review for PUD's, Wells stated that staff found this project to be consistent with the Master Plan for the area, and consistent with the sixteen goals listed in the Master Plan that pertain to the redevelopment of Dutton. Neighborhood oriented business opportunities and traffic calming measures are intended features of a village center area and can help mitigate the amount of people driving in the area. Wells added that while he does believe the developer has done a good job with the design of the veranda homes, and does not think the front-loaded garages featured in the PUD meet the concept of Traditional Neighborhood Design principals.

Planner Wells encouraged the Planning Commission to discuss setback modifications and determine if the proposed PUD is consistent with the goals of the Master Plan. Wells also advised that the Planning Commission determine if the development goals for Dutton are met through this request. He added that generally speaking, this development fits into the existing neighborhoods in terms of building forms, and that overall density requirements are met. Wells went on to say that the Kent County Road Commission reviewed the traffic study that was done.

In terms of natural features, this is farmland so there are no features or wetlands to work around. A previous concern was the lack of greenspace in the development and if it would be sufficient for the amount of people planned to be living here, and Wells encouraged the Planning Commission to discuss this again. Additionally, Wells stated that a dedicated trail pointing cyclists towards the Paul Henry Trail would be nice, and that although bike paths are not clearly depicted in the site plans, the street layout is conducive to biking access.

Wells said that overall, staff recommends that the Planning Commission consider the PUD rezoning and determine if the goals for creating a village center in Dutton are met, and if the review standards for section 10.1 and 11.1 have been met.

Chair Giarmo then opened the public hearing.

Jim Blehm of 3610 Deeprise Drive approached the podium to express his concerns regarding traffic in the area in lieu of this development. He stated that the traffic from the Amazon facility is already hazardous enough, and added traffic from this development would be extremely concerning to him. Blehm explained that he would like to see the roads get improved before this development adds additional hazards to the area.

Steve VanLaan, who owns a business at 3240 68th Street, approached the podium to voice concerns about traffic. VanLaan emphasized that a few hundred vehicle trips will be added every day, and he feels as though the roads are not equipped for such volumes.

Chair Giarmo then closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Wiersema began discussion by inquiring about changes made to the stormwater retention area, and if these changes were acceptable with the drain commission; Larabel responded by saying that the basin is designed to be a master storage area for all the tributaries flowing to it throughout all phases, and that it still offers the same amount of water storage, just with a lower water level. Wiersema also inquired about when the walking path around the pond is intended to be built out; Larabel responded that it is intended to be an amenity for Phase 1 and will be constructed alongside Phase 1.

Chair Giarmo inquired about if certain units will be slab-built and if basements are featured within the homes, and Larabel responded that the alley load townhouses will be slab grade due to the garage, however, they are seeing more value in the veranda homes that feature a basement. Chair Giarmo expressed that she is not fond of the slab-built options due to the flat porch; she'd prefer to see an elevated porch, and the Planning Commission agreed with this sentiment.

Commissioner Rober explained that she is not satisfied with the open space being presented in this iteration of the design, and Chair Giarmo agreed and added that it looks like a lot of concrete. Larabel responded and encouraged the Planning Commission to consider the acre and a half of open space within the Thornapple Farms plat to the south, the connectivity to Shadyside Park, the variety of activities that are available through activated greenspaces, and the overall preservation and open space being presented throughout the entire development.

Commissioner Rober asked about lot sizes and how big houses are planned to be; Larabel responded that the lots are narrow to emulate the traditional lots seen in Dutton, and they interpreted this as a good opportunity to replicate that. Larabel added that the additional bedrooms in the single-family models offer additional usable space for families.

Commissioner Rober then expressed a distaste for how aligned all the houses appear to be in the renderings. Planner Wells reassured Rober that the placements of the front of the houses will be staggered to help create texture in the neighborhood and break up monotony.

Larabel added that their self-imposed conditions help reinforce the character of the neighborhood, such as setting minimum standards for porches, minimizing garage prominence, and avoiding redundancy as much as possible. Larabel went on to say that they are sensitive to such issues and are seeking the right balance.

Commissioner Billips said that she feels as though the applicant is getting closer to the hub/ community feel and that she doesn't mind the smaller lots in the platted area. She added that she is fond of the idea of staggering the houses to create a different façade in the front.

On the topic of traffic, Larabel stated that the main findings from the traffic study were that a center left turn lane will be necessary on Hanna Lake Avenue, streetlight sequencing will be necessary at the corner of Hanna Lake and 68th Street, and that a high-peak commercial use in the northern section will likely be

sensitive to the additional traffic and would not be ideal. He added that if there are future issues with traffic, they will be addressed during the final site plan review, and it will primarily relate to the use and functionality rather than the form.

The Planning Commission confirmed for Larabel that in the next iteration they would like to see sidewalk widening within the development, staggering of front building foundations, and designated signs to guide cyclists and direct them towards the Paul Henry Trail.

Motion: Motion by Rober, supported by Thomas, to postpone this agenda item to the August meeting
DISCUSSION: None
AYES: ALL
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: (5-0)

2. Site Plan Review

a. None

3. Items Not Requiring a Public Hearing

a. Alexander Trails – Resolution and Ordinance

In May, the Planning Commission decided to recommend approval of the Alexander Trails PUD Amendment to the Township Board; this is the resolution associated with that decision that will officially recommend approval.

Motion: Motion by Billips, supported by Rober to recommend resolution for the Alexander Trails PUD Amendment to the board and approve the site plan.
DISCUSSION: None
AYES: ALL
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN: None
DECISION: 5-0

VII. GENERAL DISCUSSION

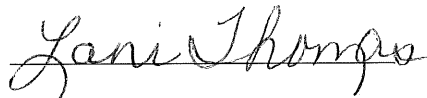
VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:38 PM.

CERTIFICATION:

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the minutes from the June 27th, 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.

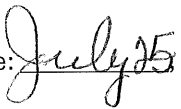
Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lani Thomas".

Lani Thomas,

Secretary

Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Date:  2024