

Minutes of the Gaines Charter Township Planning Commission

Regular Meeting held September 25th, 2025, at 7 pm

8555 Kalamazoo Ave., SE, Caledonia, MI 49316

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Wiersema, 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 August 28th, 2025, regular Planning Commission meeting minutes.

Motion: Motion by Waayenberg, supported by Rober to approve the minutes of August 28th, 2025, with corrections.

DISCUSSION:

AYES: All

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (6-0)

IV. INQUIRY OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Public Hearings

a. None

2. Site Plan Review

a. Amazon DGX2 Facility

Kyle Schott of Ryan Companies explained that Amazon is seeking site plan approval for a new warehouse at 4495 68th Street which is anticipated to work in tandem with the existing GRR5 facility to the north. Schott was joined by Josh Manion and Jason Vincent, the engineer and project manager for this project, respectively. Schott noted that the site plan for this facility was previously approved by the Planning Commission, but the project was put on hold due to internal changes at Amazon. Changes have been made to their program and Amazon is picking this project back up, however, the site plan has changed, therefore the developer must seek reconsideration and approval from the Planning Commission.

The biggest changes to the site plan pertain to parking, accessory buildings, and the size of the main building. Originally the site plan included approximately 1,500 parking spaces; the updated plan includes 941 parking spaces. The site plan also includes two accessory buildings – a fleet service center and an auto inspection center. The fleet service center will service delivery vans and perform minor repairs and maintenance, and the auto inspection center will electronically scan vehicles to check for damages and keep fleet vehicles up to a high standard. The building also shrunk in size; previously the site plan accounted for a 219,000 square foot building, and the new proposed building is approximately 216,000 square feet. Planner Wells noted that staff didn't feel as though the addition of these accessory buildings necessitated a PUD amendment or special use permit.

Chair Giarmo inquired about whether electrical vehicle (EV) charging was as significant on the previous plan; Manion responded that EV chargers were accounted for in the previous plan, and that since the parking has been reduced, the number of EV chargers has also been reduced.

Planner Wells asked Schott to elaborate on how the two buildings interact with one another to support Amazon's operations; Schott responded that the intent is for items to get packaged for shipping in the existing building and then relocated to the DGX2 delivery station to be sorted prior to delivery. Schott added that some products from GRR5 will move to the proposed DGX2 station before delivery, and some products will move from GRR5 to other delivery stations in the region.

Chair Giarmo inquired about how the items will be transported between buildings; Schott responded that the items will be transported at night using 10-15 trucks. Schott stated that the primary source of traffic will be delivery vans; van traffic leaves the facility in waves of 20-minute increments from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM, and they return to the facility between 6:00 PM and 8:00 PM in an effort to avoid peak traffic hours.

Planner Wells noted that staff evaluated this request as a site plan review; the Steelcase PUD was defined in broad terms upon its inception and covers a wide range of industrial uses. Signage plans may require an amendment to the PUD once the applicant provides signage details. Wells said that all dimensional requirements have been satisfied, including setbacks, and added that parking lots are also in compliance. With regard to lighting, color temperature, fixture height, and illumination levels were all found to be compliant with the requirements of Chapter 19 of the Zoning Ordinance. Requirements for parking and loading areas have also been satisfied; since the proposed number of parking spaces

exceeds 25% of the minimum parking spaces required, the Planning Commission must approve the overage.

Wells said that the Fire Marshal and Township Engineer have both reviewed the plans provided and the applicant must adhere to feedback provided by both agencies. The Township Engineer has reviewed the runoff calculations and Wells noted it seems as though there were few issues with the calculations provided. Wells added that the Township's Water and Sewer Department is currently reviewing utility plans, and that the applicant must obtain all outside agency approvals.

With regard to access and mobility, Wells noted that the site plan is seemingly lacking in on-site pedestrian connections; one driveway connects the existing GRR5 facility to the proposed DGX2 facility. Although the proposed use is highly vehicle-oriented, Wells said that the Planning Commission could require a pedestrian connection to be integrated into the design if they find it is appropriate.

Vice Chair Rober inquired about what Amazon intends to do to address the truck traffic on 68th Street; Schott responded that Amazon has been trying to enforce "operational excellence" by implementing punitive damage to drivers who don't obey traffic guidelines, which has improved traffic issues in other communities. Schott clarified that most of the traffic issues in the area pertain to delivery vans rather than semi-trucks and added that Planner Wells had previously been in communication with Kyle DeGiulio of Amazon about holding drivers accountable for poor behavior.

Commissioner Haagsma expressed his displeasure with the fact that a representative from Amazon was not present at the meeting. The Traffic Impact Analysis provided by the applicant indicates that 50% of traffic departing the facility is anticipated to go west, and 23% to get on M-6. Haagsma also expressed frustration that the Kent County Road Commission was not provided with the traffic study by the applicant; at a cursory glance, Haagsma doesn't believe that the traffic study is not entirely in line with the Traffic Engineer's recommendations. Haagsma noted that contacting Amazon has been tedious, and he is unsure what the Planning Commission is able to do during a site plan review to resolve these issues.

Chair Giarmo suggested that the Township establish a direct line of communication with a representative from Amazon; Planner Wells responded that the designated contact from Amazon is DeGiulio, who answers to higher-ups that are not in contact with the Township in any capacity. Wells noted that although this issue is not necessarily pertinent to the site plan review, it is pertinent to the larger ecosystem of Amazon's operations in the Township and has not been addressed.

Ongoing issues regarding the parking of heavy trucks on Rapids Drive were discussed; Wells said that he does not understand Amazon's unwillingness to discuss this matter. Chair Giarmo responded that the Planning Commission owes it to other industrial users in the area to hold Amazon accountable. Wells added that once other construction is picked up in the area, and especially after Microsoft begins site preparation, the immediate area will become very busy, and these issues are worth addressing as soon as possible.

MOTION: Motion by Waayenberg, supported by Haagsma to postpone the request with the following conditions:

1. Require a traffic study to be completed and fully reviewed by the Kent County Road Commission.

2. Require a representative from Amazon to attend when this request returns to the Planning Commission for reconsideration.
3. Planning Commission recommends adding additional truck parking to the site plan that is visible to truckers and compliant with the requirements of Chapters 19 "Lighting" and Chapter 23 "Landscaping" of the Zoning Ordinance.
4. Amazon must provide a reliable staff contact and update any staff changes to the Township's Community Development Director.

DISCUSSION: Schott stated that he will talk to Amazon and have them review the number of trucks using existing off-site parking to monitor the issue; information gained from this will help to inform a solution, whether the parking issues persist on the GRR1 campus or elsewhere. Wells added that modifications to parking or circulation on other parcels can be reviewed administratively with the Planning Commission's authority.

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (6-0)

3. Items not requiring a Public Hearing

a. 3429 Loretta View – Special Use Permit

Brad Miedema, the homeowner and applicant for this project, explained that he has since revised the plans provided at the August 28th Planning Commission meeting based on the feedback provided. The size of the proposed building was reduced from 15,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet, and design elements have been enhanced. Miedema has incorporated windows and stone siding into the design of the accessory building to enhance the aesthetic appearance and has also provided an updated landscape plan.

Planner Wells noted that the size of the building has been reduced by about a third, and that the height and intended use remain the same. The items left undetermined at the August 28th meeting pertained to whether the size of the building is compatible with the surrounding neighborhood, and whether the visual impact of the building would be overly obtrusive.

Commissioner Waayenberg stated that he is a lot more comfortable with the size of the building being reduced; although this ten-acre parcel does lend itself to something large, the fear is that a future homeowner may use the building for an unpermitted use, or if another homeowner in the area may request something similar.

Commissioner Billips echoed Waayenberg's comments and added that this seems to be a decent compromise.

Commissioner Haagsma advised that staff ensure the building is screened properly and suggested arranging tree plantings in a more organic fashion rather than in a straight line. Commissioner Thomas agreed and noted that the landscaping plan provided is a huge improvement as compared to the previous iteration.

Planner Wells assured the Planning Commission that if the building were to be used for commercial purposes or anything beyond the scale of residential accessory use, it would be enforced upon, and the Township would likely get news of this very quickly.

MOTION:	Motion by Rober, supported by Thomas, to approve the request for a Special Use Permit with the condition that staff review and approve revisions made to the landscaping plan.
DISCUSSION:	None
AYES:	ALL
NAYS:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
DECISION:	Motion Carried (6-0)

b. Zoning Ordinance Text Amendment – LED Message Centers in SR Zoning District

Planner Wells explained that this request was for an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to allow for Electronic Changeable Messaging (ECM) signs in residential zoning districts for institutional uses, such as schools and churches. Under the old Zoning Ordinance, ECM's were permitted in residential zoning district so long as a Special Use Permit was obtained; the updated Zoning Ordinance prohibits ECM's in residential zoning districts, as the steering committee that worked on the ordinance update found them to be a nuisance. Feedback from the community captured during the 2023 Master Plan update indicate that overly obtrusive lighting is also a concern for residents. Wells noted that the biggest concerns are light spill, glare, and a lack of shielding for ECM's. Staff provided language from the Zoning Ordinance on both signage and lighting to guide the discussion on this request, since the two chapters aren't entirely compatible; something that would be permissible under the lighting ordinance may not be allowed under the sign ordinance. Wells noted that there is overlap between the two chapters, and although the Zoning Ordinance steering committee thoroughly considered all updates to the ordinance, these two chapters were not necessarily considered in conjunction with one another.

Measures for enforcing lighting regulations do exist in the Zoning Ordinance, which grants staff the authority to use a light meter at property lines to determine how much light may be spilling onto an adjacent property. Although there is a mechanism for enforcement, Planner Wells noted that the larger question at hand is whether the Planning Commission wants to allow ECM's in residential areas after engaging in extensive discussion on restricting them during the Zoning Ordinance update. Staff is of the opinion that during the Master Plan update in 2023, light pollution was identified as an issue that

needed to be addressed and limited in suburban and rural areas; ECM's were then restricted in the updated Zoning Ordinance since they are a source of light pollution. Planner Wells said that the Planning Commission could make an argument to the Township Board that ECM's are not a source of extensive light pollution and added that staff does have the ability to inspect and enforce on businesses not following ECM guidelines, however, staff will never have the capacity to closely monitor non-compliant displays and graphics on ECM's.

Chair Giarmo noted that over the last three years, the Planning Commission has only received two requests for Special Use Permits to allow institutional users ECM's; she added that the Special Use Permit is an appropriate way to analyze a request based on its own merits, and that she would prefer to have a mechanism to consider these requests.

Vice Chair Rober inquired about whether the Township has any authority to regulate the content displayed on ECM's or time timeframe in which certain messages are displayed; Wells responded that the Township has little to no authority to regulate content displayed on ECM's. Wells mentioned that if a zoning administrator or zoning ordinance attempts to regulate content displayed on ECM's, issues may arise regarding infringement of the first amendment and the right to free speech. There is a

Commissioner Haagsma said that from his perspective, this is a traffic safety issue; not only the light emitted from the signs, but also the way in which ECM's are operated. Haagsma suggested modifications the hours ECM's are permitted to be on; Chair Giarmo suggested requiring ECM's to be off from 10 PM to 7 AM, which Haagsma and Rober agreed was appropriate. Planner Wells noted that this would require an adjustment to the proposed ordinance amendment and a recommendation to the Township Board.

MOTION: Motion by Haagsma, supported by Waayenberg, to approve the proposed text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance which will allow institutional users in residential zoning districts to use ECM's with the issuance of a Special Use Permit, with the modification that operation of ECM's shall not be permitted from 10:00 PM to 7:00 AM.

DISCUSSION: None

AYES: ALL

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: None

DECISION: Motion Carried (6-0)

VII. GENERAL DISCUSSION

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:26 PM.

CERTIFICATION:

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of the minutes from the September 25th, 2025, 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: November 25, 2025