

PARK TOWNSHIP

PLANNING COMMISSION

Special Meeting
January 31, 2011

Chair Nicki Arendshorst called the special meeting of the Park Township Planning Commission to order at 6:35 PM.

Present: Nicki Arendshorst, Bill Cole, Bob Ellis, LeeAnne Jachim, Joe Lampen

Absent: Steve Schaftenaar

Others: Andy Bowman, Jerry Felix, Val Lazdins

MOTION

A motion was made by Ms. Jachim and supported by Mr. Cole to approve the agenda.

VOTE

Motion carried: 5-0

AGENDA ITEM

Item # 1 – Update on Integrated Master Plan Process

Ms. Arendshorst introduced Mr. Lazdins, Principal Planner for the Township, who presented a slide show with accompanying recommendations for the Master Plan Process. He thanked the Steering Committee for their assistance and hard work.

He gave an overview of the demographic data for the Township and the results of surveys and interviews of residents. A final draft will be prepared with the Capital Improvement Plan proposal which the Planning Commission will have an opportunity to review. The procedure will be to refer the document to the Township Board, a public hearing will be scheduled for review and comment, then the document will go back to the Township Board for any necessary changes and ultimate adoption.

Demographic Snapshot:

Currently the Township population is 18,323 with a projected increase by 2020 to approximately 30,000. Household size has dropped with the median age at 35-40. The most significant increase in age is in the 35-54 year old bracket

reflecting an increase of 45.7% since 2000. The age bracket of 20-34 has decreased by 10% in the last ten years. Median income has adjusted slightly downward but the cost of housing has increased. With 2010 census estimates released about a month ago, the trends show that the age of the Township is increasing, population growth is flat, 18-34 year old residents are leaving, and the 35-54 year old bracket is on the rise. About 10% of the Township residences are seasonal. The overall character of the population shows an increase in singles and non-family households with the major household type as married.

Land Use Snapshot:

Based on information from assessment records, the single residential category takes up more than half of land use in the Township. The missing element is commercial; the Township relies on Holland and the region for commerce. Employment numbers are almost non-existent.

Building Permits and Housing Starts:

Permits peaked in 2003 with a precipitous drop to the present. The Township experienced high numbers of home foreclosures. When incomes were going up and the market was good the Township proved to be an attractive place because of the environment and schools. However, many residents have lost jobs, salaries have dropped and foreclosures have increased since the economy began to fail a few years ago.

Employment by Sector:

Employment in the area peaked in 1999 with numbers declining rapidly to the present time. The other significant shift has been services vs. goods produced with an early split of 50/50 to 70/30 at present. These shifts impact the Township as well as the entire area.

Impact on Commercial Development:

Several factors affect commercial development: lack of savings, the aging of America, home price depreciation, and overhang of debt. Salaries have not kept pace with the economy, median income of households has dropped, and home equity loans and extended credit have contributed to a decline in development. In the Holland area there is an oversupply of retail space which has had a negative impact on development.

What does it mean with regard to the Township: impacts on housing choices and municipal services, shrinking retail expenditures, greater demand for senior housing, and downward pressure on real estate values.

Interviews:

Mr. Lazdins gave an overview of interview sources for the Master Plan Process. These include the Planning Commission, Township Board, Committee for the Future, Community Stakeholders, and citizens at public meetings. Key interview questions addressed the strengths and weaknesses of the Township, priorities for change, key threats coming from outside, perceptions of the Township, and what should be addressed in the Master Plan. For example, transit service for the aging population came up in several of the interviews, along with concerns for improving Ottawa Beach Road.

Stakeholder Interview Summary:

Recommendations included: reduce regulation, define community principles, Park Township has a history of being anti-development so the development process needs to be predictable, and maintain property values in the Township. Also, with regard to the “regionalism” in the Township, work better with communities, develop a better sense of community, and set up a system to help more people participate in the community process.

Government Services:

Residents were asked to rank goals for the Township in order of importance. 275 participants responded and seven area public workshops were held. The goals addressed housing options, parks, transportation, environment, resources, open spaces, and a vision for 2030.

Priorities included protecting the environmental character and water quality of the Township, retaining its rural character, protecting the shoreline and improving access to the waterfront, preserving the treeline on Lakeshore Drive, and addressing parking and traffic issues on Ottawa Beach Road. Segways on trails showed 41% support and 59% non-support.

Issues and Ideas coming out of process

These include, in addition to the above: access to Lake Macatawa, low density development, town center development at 152nd and Ottawa Beach Road with no additional development west of 168th, and development of the Macatawa Legends area.

Subarea Concepts – Bay to Beach:

How can the Township improve targeted areas? Possibilities are: accommodate more green space along Ottawa Beach Road, establish more bike paths,

manage traffic more efficiently, and improve the areas around the Fairgrounds and the Airport.

Ms. Arendshorst asked for ideas on financing these suggestions. Mr. Lazdins recommended applying for grant funding.

Fairgrounds, Airport and Village Center:

The Fairgrounds can be improved by making better use of what we have with community events, equestrian activities, public campground, increase of off-season use and a farmer's market.

The Airport facilities can be more accessible and improved but we will need input from the Airport Board.

The Village Center can be improved with sidewalks, quality architecture, updating the total look of area along with new standards for gas stations.

Architectural Character of the Township:

Develop standards for materials, South Shore improvements can be made in public right of way with the South Shore ramp and parking could be better organized. Lake access can be improved with more walking traffic with bike racks, increased parking and a fishing dock. There are many different approaches to allow the public to better utilize the waterfront.

Historic Resort Neighborhoods:

Protect the Township's rural character was an important issue for most interviewees. There are distinct differences. Density is not the important issue – character is the crucial consideration. There are no rules to protect character in the zone ordinances. A recommendation is that the Township should develop a *form-based code* with a goal to have a predictable pattern of development. It's a regulatory tool to use to protect cottage areas. A *form-based code* (FBC) can be used to maintain existing character and historical quality, improve character and function of a district or neighborhood; and transform a community's image. This is an effective tool. Setbacks, roof pitches, porch placement, garage placement, etc. can all be included.

Ms. Arendshorst asked if the FBC is an effective tool for the cottages area in Park Township. Mr. Cole said we should consider all the possibilities. Ms. Arendshorst agreed this would be a good topic for public discussion.

Mr. Lazdins reviewed the implications for Growth/Utility Boundaries, Future Land Use, and Residential Low Density goals to preserve the single family character of 10,000 square foot lots.

Cottage Resort Residential – Preserve historic character, (Ottawa Beach and Macatawa Park), allow expansion or rebuilding if destroyed, and maintain development densities consistent with existing patterns (there is nothing in the regulations in the Township that would prevent someone from building something entirely different from the surrounding community.)

Inland Lakefront Residential – Preserve lake views and protect lake access, promote water quality, limit higher density, and keep single family character of area.

Other Community Areas:

Multiple Family Area – Spyglass community along Ottawa Beach Road includes manufactured housing parks, 6-8 units per acre, and buffers from single family homes.

General Commercial – Waukazoo Center and 160th Ave. on south side are small scale.

Resort Commercial – Preserve existing uses with no commercial expansion, resort focus, with emphasis on design and lake access.

Public/Open Space – Maintenance and access are issues here.

Agricultural – Township residents want to preserve this space with the density at one unit per 20 acres; smaller lots may be possible. Preservation of agricultural heritage is important to citizens. There is potential for cluster development. Sliding Scale Zoning establishes limit on splits, with minimum and maximum new lot sizes. The Township should look at environmental aspects to preserve natural features of land, but provide additional density allowed with development setback.

Ms. Arendshorst asked for the number of farm properties in the Township. Mr. Felix said there are about 30 properties.

Mr. Lazdins explained that agricultural buffers is a tool that can be used and development setbacks such as natural vegetation planted/preserved maintains the rural character along the roadways.

Agricultural Issues also include trespass issues, food safety impacting farming, “residential creep” that affects the farming community, conflicts between dairy and livestock operations, placement of bike paths, and flexible development with water and sewer issues.

Board member, Mr. Lampen, was excused from the meeting at 8:07 PM.

Next Steps

Mr. Lazdins outlined the steps to follow in the foreseeable future: complete the document draft, hold a review meeting, schedule a public open house, develop the parks and recreation plan, formalize the Capital Improvement Plan, and begin the adoption process (6 steps).

Mr. Felix said the Planning Commission will receive the final recommendations. The zoning code is down the line as it will interface with the Master Plan. In the final proposal Mr. Lazdins will include descriptions of what the Township could use as tools to address the issues of agriculture and preservation of the rural character. He emphasized that we need to look at good community design to implement goals. Mr. Lazdins has shared concepts of a park plan, subarea plans, etc. which will be integrated into a realistic proposal. Now is the time to provide input so changes won't have to be later in the process. In the meantime, there will be a lot of revision and wordsmithing leading to the final recommendations.

Ms. Arendshorst thanked Mr. Lazdins for his presentation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Wade Eldean , 2305 S. Shore Dr. – requested any rezoning is made clear to avoid public upset. He expressed concerns about changes in zoning for right of way for private lots.

Dan Mitchell, 2433 Michigan Walk – presented the Planning Commission Board with an opposition paper entitled “CR Cottage Resort Residential Land Use Classification.” He also referred to a petition signed with 227 signatures representing 80% of Macatawa households.

Bonnie Roberts, 657 Lakeside – asked for clarification of the role of the committee with regard to the Master Plan. She wanted to be sure that public input and involvement was given due process.

Sally Pollock, 2285 Ottawa Beach Road – requested historic designation to be honored in the cottage area. There is a difference between the north and south side.

Gina Leppink - asked about the public meeting she didn't attend and questioned the meeting procedure.

Mr. Lazdins addressed the concern in Public Comment about the public meetings that have been held to gather input from Township residents. These he has

included in his presentation. He reiterated that this has been an important part of the Master Plan Process.

Mr. Felix said about 500-600 residents have provided valuable input.

Mr. Ellis confirmed the meetings have been held in the public realm and have been a democratic process. The Planning Commission welcomes input from the public and that is the reason for the meeting this evening. There should be no implication of conspiracy or subterfuge in the handling of the Master Plan Process.

Ms. Arendshorst emphasized there must be trust in the entire process.

Dan Mitchell, 2433 Michigan Walk – asked what can trump what the property owners want based on this Master Plan Process.

Mr. Lazdins explained that the process is not a popularity contest; all opinions are welcome and become part of the input. The Planning Commission will then determine what the final document will be. All residents should understand they are part of this and their voices will be part of the considerations for the end result.

John Gronberg, 145 Crestwood – agreed that appropriate interaction from all groups is important and appreciated the Planning Commission providing some clarity to the process.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

MOTION

A motion was made by Mr. Ellis and supported by Ms. Jachim to adjourn the meeting at 9:03 PM.

VOTE

Motion carried: 4-0

Respectfully submitted,

Judith R. Hemwall
Recording Secretary
February 3, 2011