



Minutes

THOMAS TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

Thomas Township Public Safety Building, 8215 Shields Drive, Saginaw, MI 48609

December 17, 2014 at 7:00 p.m.

Ruth McDonald called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Present in addition to Mrs. McDonald were: Rod Iamurri, Rick Lorentzen, Dale Halm, Chris Thompson and Diane LaMountain. Also present were Dan Sika, Director of Community Development, Connie Watt, Planning Assistant/Code Enforcement Officer, John Corriveau, Parks Director, John Eggers, Sign Image, Vern Weber and Ellen Petre.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

2. Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Approval of Agenda:

It was moved by Thompson, seconded by Iamurri to approve the agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Approval of Minutes:

It was moved by Halm seconded by Iamurri to approve the minutes of November 12, 2014 as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Communications – Petitions – Citizens Comments – None.

6. Hearings-None

7. Sign Board of Appeals-Sign Image on behalf of St. Mark Lutheran Church

Sika explained that Sign Image is applying for a variance on behalf of St. Mark Lutheran Church to replace twenty-four (24') feet of their existing sign with an electronic message board. This needs to come before the Sign Board of Appeals because electronic message boards are not allowed in the zoning district of the church which is residential. They are however, allowed in business zoned districts. As required notices were sent to those residents and/or businesses within 300' of the St. Mark Lutheran Church. Two letters and one phone call have been received in response. Sika also explained that the Sign Board of Appeals checklist must be completed after the Public Hearing is closed before a vote is taken.

McDonald opened the Public Hearing at 7:05 p.m. At that time, John Eggers of Sign Image representing St. Mark Lutheran Church offered an explanation as to why the variance is needed. He said the desire was to refresh the sign and bring it up to new standards and give it a tasteful, classy look without changeable copy. The church wanted a "Welcome" look with some color so they went with the electronic message board then found out that residential zoning did not allow for this. The church wants an easy to read, up to date, user friendly sign with an easy to change message. They do not and will not have a party store felling to the sign. They have chosen a top of the line, self-dimming sign as to not be intrusive. The sign would run at approximately 10,000 nits in the bright sun and self-dim at night to about 300 nits. The church was concerned enough with the project that they made it "soft" and non-intrusive so when you drive by it's not that "in your face" effect. The area in question is actually smaller than the existing area now covering one side of the sign.

Thompson questioned Eggers as to what he was referring to by "nits". Eggers responded that this was a new gauge of brightness similar to lumens or candlepower of the past. Eggers added that a lot of these types of signs do not have the self-dimming capabilities but this particular one does. The sign will "go to sleep" and transition into the church logo at 11 p.m. and then begin again at about 5 a.m. The church realizes it is in their best interest for the neighbors to be ok with the sign.

Thompson noted that his concern is that the Sign Board of Appeals will be setting a precedence and needs to insure that they do it right.

McDonald noted the receipt of two (2) letters of opposition from Randy & Lori Cupp of 2545 North River Road, Saginaw, MI 48609 and Mr. & Mrs. Grohman of 2650 North River Road, Saginaw, MI 48609. She read the contents of both letters aloud. Eggers defended that any kind of change is usually met with some objection. He added that the message board is tasteful, the message can be remotely changed, the sign is self-dimming and is meant to be "friendly".

Halm noted that those present can understand this however, those who objected are not present to hear this and they did express their concerns in writing. Halm asked Watt about the phone call that was received in opposition to the sign. Watt informed him that the particular concern the neighbor had was with the brightness of the sign, however, that person did not follow-up with anything in writing.

Iamurri asked that if the old sign was simply refreshed would it not be as bright as a new one? Eggers stated that due to the white color of the existing sign it would be just as bright and wouldn't have any self-dimming feature.

LaMountain questioned if the sign would be changing throughout the day. Eggers said he would imagine it will have changing and scrolling messages. LaMountain noted her concern that she'd not want to live across from it because it is a residentially zoned area and they would be setting a precedence. Her feeling is that before you know it, you have a sign like this every block and a half. Eggers said the reality of River Road is that other conditions exist that are worse, bright street lights, headlights, cars and bikes racing up and down the street, the sign wouldn't even register next to any of these.

Thompson asked if Eggers could have a presentation of what this sign would look like to show the concerned residents and so the Sign Board of Appeals would have a base to establish their decision on. Eggers said this creates a struggle because the threshold of light in different areas varies so it would be difficult to demonstrate the brightness here for what would go on with the sign over on River Road. He did add that the sign is self-dimming and will adjust accordingly. He stated that from Royal Oak to Mackinac Island and even in Midland's residential areas this type of sign has been used.

McDonald noted besides the brightness, she believes the concern is also with the amount of messages flashing all day. Eggers said there would be a 3-6 second change out, which is average. There will be no bright flashing of red and blue lights.

Thompson asked Sika if there were any examples in residential areas nearby that could be viewed. Sika stated not at this time but he may be able to get that information from if they wished to view examples.

Halm asked what the number of letters that had been sent to residents notifying them of the sign. Watt responded approximately twenty (20). Eggers then offered that at Bethlehem Lutheran, Christian Celebration and Chapel Lane this type of sign had been used.

Thompson noted that he wants to make sure this is done the right way. He suggested they "table" the matter until such a time they could make an informed decision. He agrees that it will make changing the sign a lot easier but does have concerns for those driving by it. Halm noted the residents need to be educated on how these signs work, but how can that be done. He also agrees on the suggestion to "table" the matter. Lorentzen asked if there were addresses available for existing examples Eggers mentioned. He thought maybe they should be viewed.

Halm asked if it was appropriate to send another letter to educate the residents of how these signs work, explaining brightness, self-dimming capabilities etc. Sika said if the Sign Board of Appeals decides to do that they are within their power or they can place certain stipulations on the sign as well. Eggers felt that sending a letter probably would not make much of a difference.

LaMountain noted that the agenda item reads that the church would work with residents and said she feels that is the key. She said the church needs to address the concerns with the three families who had opposition.

Iamurri questioned Sika as to why the Frost Road Market was able to have an electronic sign right around all of those residents. Sika noted that it is zoned Business. Iamurri said technology says you need to update and move on. This new sign would give the church such an ease in changing messages.

Lorentzen said he agrees with LaMountain that the church needs to address the concerns of these residents. Maybe by having an informative meeting at the church. Public comment was offered by Ellen Petre, a member of St. Mark Lutheran Church, who stated for the record that she was on the council and had the same concerns with brightness of the sign. She added a lot of

work has gone into this and the church wants to present something positive and beautiful to the community.

Vern Weber, also a member, said the old sign does not look good any longer. They need to do something to update it. He added that LED is the new way, it's taking over. 40% of all fixtures sold are LED. They are easier on the eyes. In changing the existing sign out, if that's what was to be done, it would still have lights on it.

McDonald talked about the safety factor. She said in her opinion due to the ease of reading the LED messages it would be safer than the existing sign. Thompson noted LED's are certainly more pleasing. He said at some point we need to move ahead on this sort of thing. We just have to make sure we have the proper stipulations. Halm noted he wanted the sign "asleep" before 11 p.m.

A motion by Thompson, supported by Halm to close the Public Hearing at 7:35 p.m. Motion carried unanimously. McDonald reviewed the Sign Board of Appeals Checklist of Affirmative Findings. A vote was taken for each of the following statements:

- The alleged hardships or practical difficulties are: Exceptional and peculiar to the property or the person requesting the variance and result from conditions that do not generally exist throughout the Township. Yes-four, No-two
- The alleged hardships or practical difficulties or both that will result from a failure to grant the variance will include: Substantially more than inconvenience or an inability to attain a higher financial return. Yes-four, No-two
- By not allowing the variance, it will result in a substantial injustice being done considering the following: The public benefits intended to be secured by the code, the individual hardships that will be suffered by a failure of the Sign Board of Appeals to grant a variance, and the rights of others whose property would be affected by allowing this variance, and will not be contrary to the public purpose of this chapter. Yes-four, No-two.

Iamurri suggested future stipulations for residential areas to Sika. Sika responded that the Ordinance would not be changed for one incident. Halm and McDonald questioned the standards for dimming. Eggers said generally for them in a residential area it has been 11 p.m. Sika added to be sure they are clear on stipulations since they are setting a precedence for the future.

Thompson additionally questioned if there was to be any noise at all from the sign to which Eggers replied there was not. At that time a motion was made by Halm and supported by Thompson to have the sign dimmed at 9 p.m. and back on at 7 a.m. with a minimum of 15 seconds between messages. Motion did not pass. A second motion was made by Lorentzen, supported by Iamurri for the sign to dim at 11 p.m. and come back on at 7 a.m. with a three second time change between messages. Yes votes were 5, No votes 1. Motion passed.

St. Mark Lutheran Church was granted a variance to add an electronic message board to twenty-four square feet of the existing sign with the stipulations that the sign will be dimmed at 11 p.m.

each night and turn back on at 7 a.m. each morning. The time allotted between message changes is three seconds.

8. Presentations-Parks & Recreation 5 Year Recreation Plan

John Corriveau, Thomas Township Parks Director, did a presentation for the Planning Commission explaining his Five (5) Year Recreation Plan. The plan is necessary to apply for grants relating to financial assistance from the State of Michigan for projects that are desired concerning recreation. Corriveau discussed desired projects on the “wish list” including the Nature Preserve. Resolution 15-03 was presented by McDonald noting that the plan had been reviewed and accepted by the Planning Commission. Motion was made by Iamurri, supported by Thompson to accept the Five Year Recreation Plan as presented and to make note on Resolution 15-03 thereof. Motion passed unanimously.

9. Old Business-None

10. New Business A-Proposed 2015 Thomas Township Planning Commission Meeting Schedule.

The 2015 meeting schedule for the Thomas Township Planning Commission was presented. After review by the members a motion was made by Iamurri, supported by Lorentzen to accept the meeting schedule for 2015 as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

11. Receive and File All Correspondence-None

12. Adjournment

Motion by LaMountain seconded by Halm to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m. Motion carried unanimously. ***The next meeting date is January 21, 2015.***

Respectfully submitted by Connie Watt, Planning Assistant/Code Enforcement Officer