

# NORTHFIELD TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION Minutes of Regular Meeting September 21, 2011

## 1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Marlene Chockley at 7:04 P.M. at 8350 Main Street.

## 2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

## 3. ROLL CALL AND DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Roll call:

Janet Chick	Present
Marlene Chockley	Present
Glen Ewald	Present
Sam Iaquinto	Absent with notice
John Mayleben	Absent with notice
Larry Roman	Present
Tracy Thomas	Present (arrived at 7:07 P.M.)

Also present:  
Planning Consultant Douglas Lewan,  
Carlisle/Wortman Associates  
Recording Secretary Lisa Lemble  
Members of the Community

## 4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- **Motion:** Roman moved, Chick supported, that the agenda be adopted as presented.  
**Motion carried 4—0 on a voice vote.**

## 5. FIRST CALL TO THE PUBLIC

No comments.

## 6. CORRESPONDENCE

**Conference.** Chockley noted the Michigan Association of Planning will hold its annual planning conference on October 19-21 in Grand Rapids and noted there is some funding for Commissioners to attend.

## 7. REPORTS

### 7A. Board of Trustees

No report.

### 7B. ZBA

Roman reported that front yard setbacks were granted in two requests on September 19<sup>th</sup>.

### 7C. Staff Report

Nothing to report.

### 7D. Planning Consultant

Lewan said he has been attending the Michigan Association of Planning conference annually since 1988 and there is a great deal of useful information presented for Planning Commissioners.

He referred to the recent Michigan Court of Appeals decision regarding medical marijuana dispensaries and said there will very likely continue to be additional rulings about the Medical Marijuana Act.

## 8. PUBLIC HEARINGS

None.

## 9. OLD BUSINESS

**9A. Master Plan—Review of Goals and Policies, Future Land Use Categories, and Future Land Use Map.** Lewan said the Plan is close to being ready for review and comment by the Township Board and surrounding communities, but before that he wants to review the Goals and Policies, Future Land Use Categories, and Future Land Use Map to make sure there is agreement among Commissioners.

*Community Goals and Policies.* Lewan said this describes the community planning sessions held last year, the survey community members were invited to complete, and eight goals for the Township. He read the eight Primary Goals, noting that the eighth one is being revised to make it clear that it deals with provision of utilities.

Lewan asked if the goals accurately and adequately represent what was discussed at the community planning sessions and the results of the community survey. Chick questioned whether the first two goals are too similar, but said overall they do represent the planning sessions and survey. Lewan explained that the first goal centers on agriculture and open space while the second addresses natural resources.

**Goal 1; Agricultural/Open Space.** There was discussion about non-traditional farming and ways to support and encourage those efforts. Chockley questioned the policy to "Maintain a pattern of development with clear edges...". She said she is concerned about lack of transitional areas between urban and rural uses and suggested including wording about appropriate transitions.

**Northfield Township Planning Commission  
Minutes of Regular Meeting  
Public Safety Building; 8350 Main Street  
September 21, 2011**

**Goal 2; Natural Resources.** Chockley questioned whether there is an existing map showing the “interconnected system of riparian corridors, woodlands, tree rows, and open spaces.” Lewan said there are a variety of maps available, but there is not a “greenway” map showing important greenways or throughways. He said developing such a map could be stated as a policy.

**Goal 3; Residential Development.** Chick said Chockley’s comment regarding the need for transitions applies here as well. Thomas suggested separating the policy “Provide diversity in housing opportunities while retaining an attractive rural character using clustered residential development” into two statements about housing diversity and clustering to preserve open space. Lewan agreed that makes sense.

**Goal 4; Downtown Development.** Lewan said through the form-based code ordinance for the downtown area the Commission is addressing many of these items. It was agreed that the statement about housing diversity and clustered residential development are not necessary in this section, and that the statement referencing clustered housing should be reworded to make clear the relationship between denser downtown development and the preservation of open space.

**Goal 5; Mixed Use Development.** Thomas asked whether a term or phrase should be included about the desire to avoid ending up with very large commercial buildings that have been vacated. He said that has been a topic of concern at Commission meetings in the past. Lewan said he understands the desire to avoid those situations, but said that is simply a problem with the way retail operations are currently conducted. Thomas said it seems that the Tractor Supply building could more easily be reused than a much larger operation, such as a Lowe’s. He said it has less to do with the use than the amount of space left vacant. He said he is not necessarily talking about banning larger buildings; rather he would like policies to address the issue. Lewan said he will think about possible ways to address this.

**Goal 6; Commercial/Industrial Development.** Chockley referred to the statement about highway commercial development being limited to the area of US-23 and Six Mile Road. She questioned whether US-23 and Eight Mile Road should be another area for that type development. She also said the Township Supervisor questioned the need for the HC zoning district. Lewan said it would be possible to address those types of uses in some other way in the zoning ordinances. He added that the policy could be restated to indicate those uses should be limited to expressway interchanges.

**Goal 7; Transportation.** Lewan noted that the words “Complete Streets” should be included in this section to reflect the ordinance the Township has adopted. Chockley questioned whether the statement “Provide a variety of transportation choices including public transit....” would mean the Township must provide

such services. Lewan said “Provide” could be changed to “Promote” or “Consider.”

**Goal 8; Municipal Service Expansion.** Lewan said there are currently no clear policies about sewer expansion, including responding to requests for special assessment districts (SADs). He said avoiding leap-frogging of sewer service, requiring studies concerning demand and ability of the Township to provide services, and requiring developers to contribute a fair share of costs should be included in the plan.

Chockley said it is currently unclear how much of the development that would be allowed according to the zoning ordinance could be accommodated with the current capacity of the sewage treatment plant. Lewan said the phrase requiring the Township to

“undertake and/or require studies to determine the estimated sewer demand of the proposed areas to be included within an expanded service district and the Township’s ability to service such demand”

addresses that. Thomas said he understands this is only a policy, but that language does not seem sufficient to address the issue. He said service is provided essentially on a first-come/first-served basis because there is no way to know the levels and timing of demand.

Thomas said he could see that it would be legitimate to deny a request that would use up 95% of the remaining capacity of the plant. Roman disagreed, saying that is what the capacity is there for, and capacity for the next developer would be addressed in the statement, “Where expansion of facilities is proposed the Township shall require developers to provide a fair share of the cost....”.

Lewan said it would be interesting to find out the current capacity, although it might not change the conversation. He said he will talk to the Wastewater Treatment Plant Superintendent James Cox, but he thinks it is unlikely that the existing sewer capacity will be close to being used up in the next five years. Chick said she interviewed Cox several years ago for a newspaper article, and he said at that time that there is a large amount of capacity left.

Thomas said he recognizes that this issue goes beyond the scope of this plan, but he questioned whether sewer capacity has to be given out on a first-come/first-served policy. Lewan said it would be an interesting and appropriate subject for a task force to consider.

*Future Land Use Plan and Map.* Lewan referred to the Future Land Use Map and said the Township could have a lengthy Plan representing a large amount of thought and work, but people will look at the map first, so great care must taken with it.

Ewald questioned why an area directly south of Whitmore Lake is indicated as HDR rather than being MDR which is the designation of the surrounding area. Lewan said that may reflect the current zoning, but he will check.

Chockley asked why the area north of Five Mile east of US-23 is designated HDR. She said it is currently open space. Thomas said if an argument can be made to support the HDR designation he is willing to consider it, but otherwise the surrounding LDR appears to be more appropriate. Chockley questioned whether the property was rezoned for a specific used at some point. Lewan said he will also look at that.

In answer to a question from Chick, Lewan said the future land use plan is supposed to link future land uses with existing zoning, but the designations—for instance AR (in the current zoning ordinance) vs. AG (in the proposed Land Use Plan)—are not always the same.

Lewan noted that in some areas—for instance, west of Nollar—the Future Land Use map designation differs significantly from the current zoning map and he asked for comments from Commissioners. Roman asked about the large LDR area northeast of Northfield Church Road and US-23. Chick said she thinks that may have been what the residents of the area wanted. Lewan said he will check on that area, too.

Thomas asked if clustering is an option in the MDR areas. Lewan said it would be an option in the Open Space ordinance that has not yet been adopted, and he confirmed that that means the density in those areas could increase. He noted, however, that if the sewer policy which does not allow leap-frogging of service is approved, one acre minimums would probably apply in those areas. Thomas said that would indicate that these areas deserve some critical reconsideration in the future.

Chockley said the MDR designation encompasses areas that range from one-quarter acre to one acre and some areas that are sewered and others that area not. She said it seems there should be some differentiation.

Chockley questioned designating commercial development for expressway interchanges where there is no sewer service. Lewan said if the intent is to limit development, holding strictly to sewer district boundaries is a great way to do that because development is definitely constrained by lack of sewer services. He said that is an excellent policy discussion subject, and comparing available sewer capacity with the district boundaries and considering the possible density of the MDR areas would be a good area for discussion and research for a subcommittee.

Roman asked if the school's ball fields south of the lake should be designated RC. He said those are the only usable recreational facilities in the Township.

Thomas said in addition to asking whether the map has gone too far, the Commission should also ask whether it goes far enough; for instance, should more of the AG area be LDR or MDR. He said the map as currently proposed is the planning consultant's judgment about what was expressed at community meetings and in the community survey, but it is the Commission's responsibility to determine whether it is correct. Thomas said there were mixed comments from the public, and said it is likely that some people will wonder why five acre zoning is retained. Ewald and Roman said they are happy with the proposal. Chockley said transitions seem appropriate and she is happy with the proposal, but the public hearing will allow people to comment.

In answer to a question from Chick, Lewan said neighborhood commercial uses are those typically used by people in the surrounding neighborhoods rather than by people driving through. He confirmed that a satellite business office would fall into that category. She also suggested that a description of how the downtown subareas were developed be included. Thomas agreed that including some information about that to show that this was not arrived at randomly would be a good idea.

It was agreed that any comments about the written descriptions of the areas should be e-mailed to Lewan.

## **10. NEW BUSINESS**

None.

## **11. MINUTES**

### **September 7, 2011, Regular Meeting**

- ▶ **Motion:** Roman moved, Chick supported, that the minutes of September 7, 2011, regular meeting be approved as presented, and to dispense with the reading. **Motion carried 5—0 on a voice vote.**

## **12. POLICY REVIEW & DISCUSSION**

**A. Sign and Billboard Ordinance.** Chockley said it was eye-opening to compare actual existing signs in the downtown area to the ordinance requirements. She said earlier in the day she sat in on a meeting with Lewan and CBS Outdoor about the request by CBS to replace an existing billboard on school property with a digital billboard. She said the request was denied because it does comply with the ordinance, but she learned from the conversation that the State capped the number of billboards, resulting in CBS being allowed a specific number of them. She said she also learned that standard billboards are now 14' x 48', which is 672 sq. ft., while the Township's ordinance allows a maximum of only 300 sq. ft., and the height of most billboards currently being erected is 40', whereas the Township's ordinance allows only 30'.

She said the LEDs in the billboard proposed by CBS have sensors in them which reduce the amount of glare at night and also save energy, and they also allow for changeable messages.

Chockley said a number of existing billboards in the Township are grandfathered. She questioned whether the ordinance should be changed to be brought into line with current practices. Lewan said these are issues with all sign companies, not just CBS. Chockley said there are a lot of older, unsightly billboards in the Township.

Regarding downtown, Chockley said while the sign ordinance was revised last year to allow sandwich board signs in that area, there are signs being put up that do not comply with the ordinance.

In answer to a question from Chick, Lewan said no permits for additional billboards are being issued in the State of Michigan, but billboard companies can get credits for removing old signs which allow them to build new ones. Regarding the changeable messages, Lewan said they can be distracting when the messages change quickly. Chockley said the newer LED billboards are more attractive than the outdated ones. She said she is interested in looking at changing the ordinance. She noted that the representative from CBS Outdoor referred to a court ruling which he said allows them to upgrade existing signs to digital and she would like to see that. She said would also like to discuss enforcement of the sign ordinance in the downtown area. She asked Commissioners to review the current ordinance and e-mail her and Lewan any thoughts they have on the subject.

**B. Bed and Breakfast Ordinance.** Chockley said a lot of the existing language seems unnecessary and too restrictive, including restrictions about meals and alcohol. She noted B&Bs will be a permitted use in the downtown zoning district. Lewan agreed the current ordinance does not fit for the downtown area. Chick questioned whether there should be a requirement for annual inspections for safety purposes. Chockley said

there are some State rules that apply, and it would be good to know what those are.

Lewan said some of the current ordinance language is very good, but agreed that other parts are overly restrictive. He said many such ordinances were developed quickly when the B&B concept first became popular. He said he will look at more recently developed ordinances in other communities. It was agreed to consider changes to this ordinance when time permits.

### 13. COMMENTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS

No comments.

### 14. SECOND CALL TO THE PUBLIC

No comments.

### 15. ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT MEETING

**October 5, 2011**, at 7:00 P.M. at the Public Safety Building was announced as the next regular Commission meeting time and location. Chockley distributed copies of a flyer inviting the public to attend this meeting which will include a presentation by Lewan about the proposed downtown zoning districts. Lewan said this will be similar to his previous presentation, but will be more interactive.

### 16. ADJOURNMENT

- ▶ **Motion:** Thomas moved, Roman supported that the meeting be adjourned.  
**Motion carried 6—0 on a voice vote.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:19 P.M.

---

Prepared by Lisa Lemble.

Corrections to the originally issued minutes are indicated as follows:

Wording removed is ~~stricken through~~;

Wording added is underlined.

Adopted on \_\_\_\_\_, 2011.

---

Marlene Chockley, Chair

---

John Mayleben, Secretary

Official minutes of all meetings are available on the Township's website at [http://twp-northfield.org/boards/planning\\_commission/minutes](http://twp-northfield.org/boards/planning_commission/minutes).