

**ROSS TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
May 24, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE

Chairperson Lauderdale called the regular meeting of the Ross Township Planning Commission to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Ross Township Hall.

ROLL CALL

Present: Chairperson Lauderdale
Michael Bekes
Mark Markillie
Steve Maslen
Michael Moore
Pam Sager
Sherri Snyder

Absent: None

Also Present: Bert Gale, AGS – Township Zoning Administrator
Rebecca Harvey – Township Planning Consultant

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented.

APPROVAL OF PRIOR MEETING MINUTES

The Commission proceeded with consideration of the **April 26, 2021** regular Planning Commission meeting minutes. Bekes moved to approve the minutes as presented. Snyder seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Planning Commission Work Plan – Address ‘fence’ definition as related to sight lines . . . should it be restricted to waterfront lots?

Chairperson Lauderdale reminded that the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals have considered the issue of ‘fences’ for the past several

months, resulting in the matter being placed on the Planning Commission’s 2021-2022 Work Plan. He provided a summary of the issues raised.

He distributed a narrative outlining a ‘potential approach to addressing watershed viewsheds’ that involved suggested amendments to Sections 2.2, 17.3 C., and 18.6. Planning Commission discussion ensued, wherein viewshed objectives were defined and distinctions between waterfront lots and non-waterfront lots were articulated.

Bekes confirmed that the Township Board was seeking Zoning Ordinance text that provides clarity to Township residents that general landscaping/vegetation is not subject to the elements of the ‘fence standard’.

Markillie shared material obtained that offered solutions to ‘spite fencing’ issues.

Sager stated that ‘spite fence’ regulations are not **generally** upheld by the courts in Michigan and that the best way to regulate the impacts of fencing is with height standards.

The Planning Commission agreed to continue to think about the issues raised and suggested solutions . . . and to keep the matter as a priority item on the Work Plan.

2. Master Plan Action Plan (Section VIII) – Technical Review of Zoning Ordinance

Chairperson Lauderdale noted that the Action Plan Item ‘Conduct a technical review of the Zoning Ordinance’ was a Priority #1 item and was identified as key to informing the Planning Commission Work Plan.

He noted that in recent past the Planning Commission members conducted a review of the Zoning Ordinance by allocating specific sections of the Ordinance to each member for review/report. He questioned if there was interest in using a similar approach to completing the Technical Review.

Harvey noted that the objectives of the Technical Review are to review the Zoning Ordinance in its entirety in the framework of the following two questions:

- 1) Does the standard effectively advance implementation of (an) objective(s) in the Master Plan?
- 2) Does the standard prohibit or disrupt implementation of (an) objective(s) in the Master Plan?

Planning Commission members agreed to review the Master Plan goals/objectives outlined in Section VI to identify those of highest interest/impact to help focus and guide the conduct of the Technical Review.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Master Plan Update

Harvey reported that she has finished incorporating the requested edits and updated Existing Land Use data/map into the final draft of the Plan. She noted the draft of the Plan was submitted electronically to the Township Office and Planning Commission members, with a request for hard copies of the document to be made available to both Township Board and Planning Commission members.

Harvey confirmed that the next step is for the Township Board to act to ‘authorize distribution of the draft Master Plan for review’. This will initiate the 63-day review period and the start of the adoption process.

REPORT FROM TOWNSHIP BOARD

Bekes reported the following:

- Trustee Sulka has suggested that clarity is needed in the Zoning Ordinance that ‘water frontage’ is intended to apply to lakes and not all surface water bodies.
- The Township had hired a part-time Park Deputy to provide oversight to park activities, grants, etc.
- Allendale Park requested postponement of Township Board consideration of the conditional rezoning request recommended for approval by the Planning Commission. It was confirmed that any proposed change to the conditions recommended for approval will require the request be returned to the Planning Commission for further consideration.
- The Township is actively working to resolve the issues currently present on the Township website.

REPORT FROM ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

Chairperson Lauderdale reported that the ZBA met on May 5, 2021 and considered a variance request from the waterfront setback requirement for a proposed retaining wall/steps. The variance was granted after a finding of justification per Section 23.8.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment was offered.

MEMBERS, CONSULTANTS, ADVISORS

Chairperson Lauderdale noted receipt of correspondence received from Cheri Rose-Jones stating her opposition to the Bluffs at Gull Lake development. In response to a request for clarification from Snyder, it was confirmed that the site plan for Bluffs at Gull Lake was considered and approved at the March meeting.

Markillie reported that the remaining parcel of private property along the North Country Trail was recently sold (before NCT could act) but that the new owner has expressed a willingness to grant an easement over the property to facilitate connection of the remaining trail segment.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rebecca Harvey, AICP, PCP
Township Planning Consultant