

**ROSS TOWNSHIP  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES  
July 26, 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

Absent:            Sherri Snyder

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 **June 28, 2021** regular Planning Commission meeting minutes. Bekes moved to approve the minutes as modified. Sager seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Chairperson Lauderdale noted that no New Business or Public Hearing Item was scheduled for consideration.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

Chairperson Lauderdale noted that the Planning Commission members reviewed the Master Plan goals/objectives outlined in Section VI in May in preparation for the conduct of the Technical Review, a Master Plan action item. He reminded that the ‘technical review’ would consider if the Zoning Ordinance standards: 1) effectively advance implementation of the goal/objective; or 2) prohibit or disrupt implementation of the goal/objective.

Chairperson Lauderdale stated that the Planning Commission had effectively completed review of Goal 1 (and the six related objectives) at the June meeting. He suggested that the Commission pick back up with Goal 2 and continue the review discussion.

The following comments/findings were noted:

#### **Goal 2: Preserve the Township’s Open Space**

##### **Objectives:**

- a. *Establish both land use regulations and development incentives that facilitate open space preservation. These should range from open space standards for individual development to the use of open space zoning in areas of sensitive natural features.*
  - The Zoning Ordinance currently provides the OSPD and Cluster Development options in the residential districts; both offer options and incentives for preservation-based residential development.
- b. *Establish the site plan review process as an effective mechanism through which to achieve open space preservation and enhancement.*
  - The current site plan review criteria and the method of application of those criteria by the Planning Commission achieve this objective.
- c. *Educate property owners and developers on the value of open space enhancement and how to achieve quality open space preservation through site design and construction.*
  - Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.
  - It was recognized that staff (Zoning Administrator/Planner) interaction with property owners/developers was a key mechanism in the ‘education’ effort; it was noted the Township’s existing ‘team’ was effective in this area.

- d. *Promote the establishment of conservation easements in the Township through education.*
  - Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.
  - General discussion occurred regarding the incentives for a property owner to use this tool.
- e. *Establish the ‘purchase of development rights’ as an option in the Zoning Ordinance.*
  - This option is not available in the Zoning Ordinance.

### **Goal 3: Protect the Township’s Natural Resources**

#### **Objectives:**

- a. *Incorporate measures to protect the Township’s natural resources, including viewsheds, woodlands, steeper slopes, surface water and groundwater, through Township development standards.*
  - Viewsheds – the Zoning Ordinance currently provides waterfront setbacks and front yard fence height standards; not sure other viewsheds require same attention.
  - Surface Water – the Zoning Ordinance currently provides waterfront setback standards.
  - The remaining ‘natural resources’ noted are not specifically addressed by Zoning Ordinance standards, but are considered effectively through application of the site plan review criteria.
- b. *Establish the site plan review process as an effective mechanism through which to achieve natural resource preservation.*
  - The current site plan review criteria and the method of application of those criteria by the Planning Commission achieve this objective.
- c. *Encourage and support innovative site design measures that will optimize protection and enhancement of natural resources.*
  - The current site plan review criteria and the method of application of those criteria by the Planning Commission achieve this objective at this time.
- d. *Facilitate access to local resources for technical assistance in natural resource protection techniques and practices.*
  - Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.

#### Goal 4: Protect the Quality of the Township's Surface and Ground Waters

##### Objectives:

- a. *Identify environmentally sensitive areas along the Kalamazoo River, Augusta Creek and Township lakes, ponds, tributaries and wetlands for protection efforts.*
  - Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.
  - It was noted the 4TWRC is currently engaged in an inventory related to this topic that should serve as a valuable resource for future consideration.
- b. *Preserve surface water quality by establishing waterfront zones and buffer regulation along rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands.*
  - Discussion ensued regarding the elements of waterfront zones.
  - **Requested to be placed on PC Work Plan.**
- c. Deleted
- d. *Engage in training on storm water management and groundwater protection best practices. Use the site plan review process and community outreach to educate property owners on acceptable storm water management, drainage, and secondary containment designs.*
  - Not a Zoning Ordinance issue.
- e. *Continue to be an active member in the 4TWRC, and support its mission of Farmland, Open Space and Water Quality Protection.*
  - Not a Zoning Ordinance issue.
  - Support for participation in the 4TWRC was expressed; **requested the grooming of a volunteer be placed on PC Work Plan.**
  - Noted as an appropriate discussion topic with the Township Board.
- f. *When demand requires, consider a wellhead protection program for potential municipal wells.*
  - **Requested to be placed on PC Work Plan.**
  - PC work on this item would include the confirmation of municipal wells in the Township and the presence of existing protection programs.
- g. *Develop a watershed protection strategy that will create the big picture framework for water quality protection through land use management.*
  - This may be more appropriate as an element of the Master Plan, **but could still be a PC Work Plan item.**

- Represents an opportunity to collaborate with the 4TWRC.

**Goal 5: Protect the Quality of the Gull Lake Watershed to Preserve the Health of Gull Lake as a Natural Resource and to Sustain the Viability of the Surrounding Area for Living, Working and Recreation.**

- Lengthy discussion ensued regarding the origin of this goal; its incorporation into the master plans of Barry Township, Prairieville Township, Richland Township, and Ross Township; and, the development of the Gull Lake Watershed Resource Protection Guidebook (7.15.11).
- **Chairperson Lauderdale agreed to arrange for the distribution of the Guidebook to all PC members.**

**Goal 6: Facilitate Residential Development that will Maintain the Rural Character of the Township.**

**Objectives:**

- Institute incentives for providing and sustaining open spaces within residential development, including innovative approaches such as the use of residential street design with reduced rights-of-way.*
  - The question of allowing private roads in the Township . . and the need for private road standards in the Zoning Ordinance was discussed.
  - **Harvey was directed to confirm KCRC's policy on new public roads.**
- Adopt flexible development metrics that allow overall development and individual site designs to respond to the natural environment and topography of the property.*
  - Existing standards in the Zoning Ordinance provide this flexibility.
- Allow cluster-/open space/conservation-based residential development concepts in all residential districts in the Township.*
  - The OSPD and Cluster Development options are allowed within the R-R, R-1 and R-2 Districts; **Harvey was directed to confirm if similar development options are available in the other residential districts.**
- Enhance the awareness of residents about the benefits of conservation-oriented design.*
  - Not a Zoning Ordinance issue.

- It was recognized that staff (Zoning Administrator/Planner) interaction with property owners/developers was a key mechanism in the ‘education’ effort; it was noted the Township’s existing ‘team’ was effective in this area.
- e. *Protect the Township from residential ‘sprawl’ and reduce conventional plat and land division development through the use of flexible land management techniques that will encourage creative design, concentrated (clustered) development, maximum preservation of natural areas and use of open space.*
- The Zoning Ordinance currently provides the OSPD and Cluster Development options in the residential districts; both offer options and incentives for preservation-based residential development.
  - The Zoning Ordinance also effectively provides for the division of land using the Condominium Act (site condominiums) instead of the Land Division Act (platting).
- f. *Concentrate high-density residential development in designated locations and promote site designs that fit into the rural character of the Township. Investigate land use mechanisms for introducing desired housing types currently lacking in the Township, such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs) or cottage developments.*
- **ADUs requested to placed on PC Work Plan.**

**Goal 7: Develop and Apply Innovative Development Standards and Techniques**

**Objectives:**

- a. *Provide continuous opportunities for the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and Township Board to be informed and educated about ‘state of the art’ planning and zoning techniques.*
- Not a Zoning Ordinance issue.
- b. *Establish a pro-active approach to implementing the programs and recommendations set forth in this Plan.*
- Not a Zoning Ordinance issue.
- c. *Encourage creative development patterns that accommodate and enhance natural features while providing for efficient circulation and aesthetic design within site plan review standards.*
- Existing provisions in the Zoning Ordinance provide this encouragement.

## Goal 8: Assure a Safe and Efficient Network of Streets and Roads

### Objectives:

- a. *Work with KCRC to identify existing and anticipated future transportation needs on County-maintained facilities. Work together to ensure that adequate funding is available for proper maintenance of roads within the Township.*
  - Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.
  - Bekes provided an update on road-related activity in the Township.
- b. *Maintain the natural beauty and rural character of roads within the Township . . . Work with KCRC to establish Natural Beauty Roads on designated County roads within the Township.*
  - Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.
- c. *Develop regulations for private roads that ensure desired land use patterns result and road meet appropriate construction and maintenance standards.*
  - The previous discussion regarding allowing private roads in the Township and the need for private road standards in the Zoning Ordinance was noted.
- d. *Establish setback and natural buffer standards along County roads in the agricultural and rural residential districts to enhance and preserve the Township's rural character.*
  - **Requested to be placed on PC Work Plan.**
- e. Deleted
- f. *In recognition of Michigan's Complete Streets policies, actively support the establishment of bike lanes along Township roads that connect community activity centers.*
  - Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.
  - Markillie stressed the importance of this objective and noted the need for a map with 'activity centers' and existing/proposed 'connecting travel routes' identified. It was agreed this would be an appropriate element for both the Township's Master Plan and Parks/Recreation Plan.
- g. *Promote a coordinated hiking/biking/cross-country skiing trail system, including enhancement of the North County Trail, and coordination with the large institutional property owners, as well as County and State transportation agencies.*

- Not a Planning Commission or Zoning Ordinance issue.
- It was agreed this would be an appropriate element for both the Township's Master Plan and Parks/Recreation Plan.

Bekes agreed to follow up on the status of the Parks Committee and the update of the Parks/Recreation Plan.

Due to the lateness of the hour, it was agreed that the discussion of the remaining two goals and their related objectives would be continued at the next available meeting.

## 2. Master Plan Action Plan (Section VIII) – Fences/Sight Lines

Chairperson Lauderdale stated this item is on the agenda as a 'continued item', placed on hold pending the outcome of the August ZBA meeting and direction from the Township Attorney.

## REPORT FROM TOWNSHIP BOARD

Bekes reported the following:

- Two Township Board meetings were held in July.
- Township Board members had requested time to review the draft Master Plan prior to its required 'distribution for review' . . with a review deadline of July 30. He noted that he had not received any feedback to date. He noted that the distribution can occur after the deadline and so the Planning Commission may want to consider a tentative date for the public hearing.
- The Township Board has requested Attorney Thall review the performance bond provision in the Zoning Ordinance for adequacy.
- A Township Board/Planning Commission joint meeting is being scheduled and attendance by Harvey is requested.
- An update on Township staffing was provided, including work in progress on the contract with the Sheriff's Department.

## REPORT FROM ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

Chairperson Lauderdale reported that the ZBA met on July 7, 2021 and considered a variance request from the rear (streetside) setback requirement to allow a 3 ft setback for a detached accessory building. The variance was granted after a finding of justification per Section 23.8. He noted the ZBA also received testimony and supporting information on an application for appeal from a decision of the Township Zoning Administrator. The



item was tabled to the August meeting to allow consideration of the information presented and consult from the Township Attorney.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

Connie Lavender opined that private roads are a problem and that she appreciated the Township's current road standards.

She added that the Biden administration is pushing communities to provide housing options for illegal immigrants and she wondered how Ross Township intend to respond.

#### MEMBERS, CONSULTANTS, ADVISORS

No member or advisor comments were offered.

#### ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

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