

**ROSS TOWNSHIP
JOINT
TOWNSHIP BOARD/PLANNING COMMISSION/
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
MINUTES
October 19, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE

Supervisor Hutchings, Chairperson Lauderdale, and Acting Chairperson DeKruyter called the joint meeting of the Ross Township Board, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals to order at 5:00 p.m. at the Ross Township Hall.

ROLL CALL

Township Board:

Present: Supervisor, Christina Hutchings
Clerk, Carin Louis
Treasurer, Syndee Genung
Trustee, Mike Bekes
Trustee, Lynn Harmon
Trustee, Diana Langshaw
Trustee, Mike Sulka

Absent: None

Planning Commission:

Present: Chairperson, Jim Lauderdale
Mike Bekes
Mark Markillie
Pam Sager
Sherri Snyder

Absent: Steve Maslen
Michael Moore

Zoning Board of Appeals:

Present: Acting Chairperson, Jim DeKruyter
Jim Lauderdale

Also Present: Rebecca Harvey – Township Planning Consultant
Rob Thall – Township Attorney

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Bekes moved to approve the agenda as presented. Langshaw seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jean Hanson stated that she supports current efforts to provide police protection and ordinance enforcement within the Township, citing current nuisance and law enforcement issues in the bay area.

No further public comment was offered.

INTRODUCTIONS

Brief introductions were provided by all members in attendance.

ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES – TB/PC/ZBA

Chairperson Lauderdale requested Harvey provide an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the Township's planning and zoning bodies, including a brief discussion of the master plan adoption process.

Harvey highlighted the powers, functions and responsibilities of the Township Board, Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and Administrative Staff related to planning and zoning in the Township. She explained how the separate roles of the boards serve to ensure the integrity of the decision-making process.

Harvey referenced the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, noting the authority of the Township to adopt a master plan; the purpose of the master plan; and the required review and adoption process, specifically as it relates to the roles of the Township Board and the Planning Commission.

PLANNING COMMISSION OVERVIEW/ANNUAL REPORT

Chairperson Lauderdale provided an overview of the process employed by the Planning Commission in the conduct of its business, highlighting the effective relationship between the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals in the identification of Ordinance issues.

Chairperson Lauderdale then explained the statutory basis for the Planning Commission Annual Report and the use of the Report in the development of the Work Plan each year.

He provided an overview of the recently approved 2020-2021 Annual Report and 2021-2022 Work Plan. The following was noted:

- Upon completion of the update to the Township Master Plan, the Planning Commission conducted a 'technical review' of the Zoning Ordinance and identified existing provisions that inhibit/prohibit implementation of the Plan, as well as proposed provisions that could improve implementation of the Plan. The findings of the 'technical review' were then used to update the Work Plan.
- Township Board requested work items were also added to the Work Plan, namely the definition of 'fence' as related to sight lines; medical marihuana caregivers; Board review of projects of a certain size/complexity (specifically related to condominium development); and, development agreements.
- The Work Plan was prioritized as follows: 1 – medical marihuana caregivers; 2 – condominium development standards; and 3 – development agreements. Additional priority work items will be identified as work items are completed.
- Supervisor Hutchings expressed concern with feedback she has received from Township residents regarding the recently approved multiple-family development project on M-89. She questioned if the design standards in the Ordinance are adequate, specifically regarding screening and landscaping.
- Harmon noted that there may be a need to improve other design standards applicable to multiple-family development, such as building size standards. She stated that the standards should result in high-end development.
- Sulka expressed support for applying the standards demonstrated in the Allendale Park site condominium proposal to a multiple-family development. It was noted that the three (3) single-family residential site condominiums of Allendale Park were approved through a conditional rezoning where compliance with the design standards of the C-1 District were offered.
- Chairperson Lauderdale asked if Township Board members considered a review of the use standards for multiple-family development, specifically related to screening/landscaping, a priority matter for the Work Plan. A modification of the Work Plan was not requested.
- Sulka asked when the definition of 'fence' would be addressed by the Planning Commission. Attorney Thall advised that the issue could not be considered by the Planning Commission until existing litigation related to the question is concluded. Chairperson Lauderdale acknowledged that it is not currently a 'priority' work item.

MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Chairperson Lauderdale stated that the Master Plan, last reviewed in 2011 with minor updates made, was reviewed again in 2018. It was determined that an update would be completed in order to accomplish the following: update demographic data with mid-Census estimates; respond to new planning law and land use regulatory options; and, recognize recent development activity and changes to 'existing conditions'. He noted that the draft plan currently being considered for adoption represents this 'update'.

Chairperson Lauderdale added that it had been reasoned that once the 2020 Census information was released, a rewrite of the Plan would be in order . . . considering the original Plan was adopted in 2002 and no significant public engagement on the Plan has been conducted since that time. Given the Census results will be available soon, he inquired as to the Board's position on moving forward with a rewrite of the Plan.

Board members expressed a desire to first complete the current update of the Plan and then to plan only to review the document in five (5) years, as required, with no commitment on a full rewrite.

TOWNSHIP BOARD VISION/PERSPECTIVE

Supervisor Hutchings stated that she desires all of the boards to be heading in the same direction and thought there would be merit in a discussion of the Township Board's vision for the Township. She asked for comments on the draft Master Plan presented for review:

- Sulka inquired about the concepts of 'cluster development' and 'open space preservation development'. He stated he would rather see the Township promote traditional platting.
- Harmon stated she feels the Plan is driving development throughout the Township. Further, she would like to see the Plan speak to 'corridor buffers'.
- Lewis expressed concern that the FLU Map and Zoning Map were not consistent with each other, specifically regarding the 'industrial' area near Fort Custer.

Harmon asked how specific review comments on the draft plan should best be forwarded to the Planning Commission. Harvey responded that review comments should be developed/agreed upon by the Board as a whole and then provided to the Planning Commission prior to the public hearing. This will allow the Planning Commission to discuss the comments and make any desired changes at the public hearing. Township Board members agreed to place the matter on the November agenda.

Harmon expressed her appreciation for the work of the Planning Commission, acknowledging it is not an easy job. She thanked the members for the opportunity to talk about the hard questions.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Establish Fire Board of Appeals

Langshaw moved to establish the Ross Township Fire Board of Appeals. Bekes seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Ordinance Amendments

Supervisor Hutchings distributed copies of Ordinance No. 179 and Ordinance No. 192, noting amendments to same will be considered at a special meeting of the Board scheduled for November 9, 2021.

MEMBERS, CONSULTANTS, ADVISORS

Acting Chairperson DeKruyter expressed the need for appointments to the ZBA given the recent resignation of Chairperson Carpenter and the longstanding vacant Alternate position.

No further comments were offered.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

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