Planning Commission Meeting Minutes

April 26, 2023

1. **Call to Order at 6:00pm**
2. **Roll Call –** Chairperson DeBoer, Commissioners Lyon-Jenness, Dean, and Bliesener, City Manager Stoddard, and ZA Harvey.
* Motion to excuse Commissioner Tecca by Chairperson DeBoer and supported by Commissioner Dean. All ayes.
1. **Approval of Minutes – March 22, 2023**
* DeBoer expressed kudos to Deputy Clerk Smith for the thoroughness of the minutes.
* Motion to accept the minutes by Lyon-Jenness and supported by Bliesener. All ayes.
1. **Citizen Comments**
* No comments
1. **Public Hearing Continuation**
* DeBoer spoke to the conversation about the location of solar panels – free standing, backyard acceptable, not placing them in the front yard.
* Bliesener stated that the Accessory Building section addresses the location of solar panels.
* DeBoer asked the Zoning Administrator (ZA) Harvey if the language in the Accessory Building section take care of the placement concerns.
* ZA Harvey stated that the Accessory Building section does take care of that concern. She reflected on the previous conversation of the PC members regarding the use of free standing solar panel units, which was added to the ordinance language. She reminded the PC that the public notice gave latitude to the PC so that the wording in the ordinance could be adjusted. (Public Hearing, Draft 2, side or back yard)
* ZA Harvey cited Section 2 Freestanding, #8 – This portion requires that a resident come before the PC if they fail to meet the height and setback requirements. The PC needs to decide the following: 1) Would the PC want to allow for site by site judgement calls? 2) Would the PC like the latitude to consider special use by adding the word location to the ordinance? 3) Does the PC want to leave the language, as is, and not allow the placement of solar panels in the front yard?
* Lyon-Jenness asked if Section 2 Freestanding, #7 was stating that all free-standing/building attachment solar panel requests would be handled through the PC or administratively. Administratively was preferred by the PC members.
* ZA Harvey said that requests would only come before the PC if a variation to the ordinance was needed. The request would be for a conditional use.
* Bliesener likes that the PC would keep their ability to be involved with the decision regarding free standing solar panels.
* DeBoer stated that Section 2, #7 states that the PC must review through a request for conditional use if the height and setback requirements are not met.
* ZA Harvey stated that sometimes trees are in a backyard and there is no space for a solar panel span, so a resident requests that they be placed in the front yard. The PC could approve of a Conditional Use. The PC could require landscape around the panels in the front yard. The resident would be granted a special use, in this instance.
* DeBoer said that Accessory Building requirements needed to be reviewed/tabled.
* Becky spoke to corner lot residences and their ability to put solar panels in their side yards. These residents are considered to have two front yards.
* Bliesener stated that there are some homes in the community that have borders on two streets – thus giving them two front yards.
* ZA Harvey said that those who live on corners would not be included for Conditional Use because they could only use their back yards – very limiting.
* Bliesener said that some houses are placed too close together so there is not enough side yard for placement.
* ZA Harvey said that the required setbacks would not provide for solar panel use to homes that were placed close together.
* Lyon-Jenness asked if they would be allowed on roofs.
* ZA Harvey asked if the PC wants the Conditional Use option.
* Bliesener likes the addition of the word “location” to the ordinance.
* ZA Harvey reported that the MSU Extension put together a guide book for solar panels. The theory is that underneath the panels there is a dual use which can be used for pollination and agricultural uses. This is seen as a benefit to the community. The property is in use but not completely covered. Section 2b stated that the surface area shall be included in the lot calculation. This would minimize the solar array so as not to cover the back yard.
* Bliesener stated that this makes sense to her.
* DeBoer asked if they need to open the Public Hearing again at the next meeting.
* ZA Harvey said no, they can take it off the table. Once discussed the PC may make a motion to recommend approval with the following (listed) changes.
* Bliesener asked about page 5, 8d: When does the deposit money get released?
* ZA Harvey stated that it is before the building permit is released.
* Bliesener asked if the property changes hands does the city continue to hold the money.
* ZA Harvey said that the seller would ask for the money back. The city would want an established decommissioning amount and would get it from the buyer, thus returning the seller’s money.
* Chairperson DeBoer re-opened the Public Hearing at 6:28pm. He reminded the PC that this was a listening opportunity for them with comments from the public.
* No comments were received and the Public Hearing was closed at 6:31pm.
* Bliesener motioned to approve the Zoning Ordinance text amendments to Article 12 - General Provisions, Section 12.32 - Solar Panels with the addition of the word “location” (#2-8 Freestanding), 12:33 Solar Farms, Article 2, Section 2.2 Language and Definitions for solar panel and solar farm. Lyon-Jenness supported. Roll call vote: Bliesener – Aye

 Lyon-Jenness – Aye

 Dean – Aye

 DeBoer – Aye Motion Carried

1. **Old Business**
2. Status of Fishbeck (formerly Envirologic) grant application
* City Manager (CM) Stoddard informed the PC that the City of Parchment will be featured in a 15 minute presentation by David Stegink of Fishbeck at the National Brownfield Redevelopment Authority Conference in August 2023.
* The EPA Multipurpose grant will be awarded in late spring.
1. Driveways within Mill Site – Discussion
* DeBoer welcomed Mayor Britigan and stated that the PC would like more direction including any specifics that the City Commission would like addressed.
* Mayor Britigan stated that the City Commission wanted to make decisions with the Master Plan in mind for sustainable businesses within the mill site. The City has a site that is attractive to some developers, and the Commission only wants to consider good proposals for the site.
* Mayor said that there are three priorities:
1. Clearing away of the blight
2. There has been expressed interest by developers on the north and south buildings of the mill site. Work is needed on these buildings to make them more desirable. There are some other buildings that could be salvaged and some to be demolished. The storage tanks may bring some creative use to the property. The EPA grant did include the demolishing of the tanks along with the work on the east side of the mill property.
3. Housing (Vision) – The tract of land on the east side of the mill property has been identified (on Wilson and G Avenue) as a residential area. We have spoken with a residential developer about this area-what is needed such as smaller houses, smaller lots, and common areas for play areas, row housing, and senior housing. A meeting has been scheduled for Friday with Mary Balkema, Kalamazoo County Housing Director regarding the housing needs in the county.
* With the driveways through the mill site, the City Commission is looking for access to residential areas with a buffer between the commercial and residential properties.
* Looking for what infrastructure would entice a developer. The developer could bring the utilities into the site, but the City would like to have the property ready for this development.
* The Mayor said that the PUD zoning was a great move by the PC as it provided for flexibility.
* The City is looking for ways to make the property more attractive and yet not too expensive. Demolishing the non-save-able buildings and making the surface pad ready for development is a good plan.
* The City is looking for good access points into the mill property. What areas would be recommended by the PC.
* Lyon-Jenness wondered about the areas between buildings. Would putting in an insubstantial pathway while cleaning up the area, from that which obscures the view, help with the layout to separate residential from commercial property.
* The Mayor stated that developers that have a good vision of sites know that the cost is a concern.
* Lyon-Jenness asked if there were any resources from the City that could be used to clean up the area.
* The Mayor stated that the EPA Grant named the east side of the mill property for clean-up. The City is not looking to over-improve the site. The Bellisle Boulevard project had to stop because of the cost, they were unable to extend the roadway.
* DeBoer asked if the City Commission wanted the PC to name access points for the drives in the mill.
* The Mayor said that a drawing of the proposed roadway/driveway into the mill site with entry points would be helpful.
* DeBoer asked if Bliesener’s drawings of the roads would be helpful.
* The Mayor said that he liked the green space that was provided in Bliesener’s drawing.
* Bliesener stated that they have to start with an understanding of the scale of the site. Also, areas around Dollar General and the parking lots. They need to factor in the buildings that can stay (rehabs) and the storm water retention pond. Thinking about access points is a good idea and also where water will go on the property.
* The Mayor said that it would be helpful to know the districts within the site: residential, commercial, etc. – a layout of the areas/districts would be helpful. Possible access points instead of actual drawings of roadways and natural extensions of roadways. It’s a blank slate now; making it attractive to developers will help.
* Lyon-Jenness said that G Avenue access (north to south) behind Wilson Avenue is a simplistic plan to divide residential from the rest of the mill.
* The Mayor said that providing a barrier from Commercial use is a must. Not sure to what extent that roadways were needed by the residential district.
* Bliesener commented that the storm water basin appears to be an amenity to some.
* Lyon-Jenness said that the trail could be part of the walk by the residential development.
* The Mayor said that if he looks at the site with a developer’s eye he thinks the following: How do I make a profit? Will the infrastructure piece cost be shared with the City of Parchment? The City wants to have a plan so that it will help when working with developers.
* DeBoer stated that this should be a conceptual plan, as is the Master Plan. Do developers need to know more about roadways?
* Mayor said that the City could spend a lot of money to design buildings but it may not be what developers want. The City should pick what it wants in the community.
* ZA Harvey said that the design should be the basic bones with a structure that could be modified to allow a shift in the road grid to match the development.
* The Mayor stated that the developer should be guided by the plan for development. The developer can propose what they want.
* Lyon-Jenness asked if there would be any access through the interior of the site. Access will come from the east for residential and from the west and north for commercial.
* ZA Harvey mentioned that LC Howard owned Eunice right up to the buildings on the site.
* Bliesener stated that the roadways needed to come out to the north and east sides of the property.
* The Mayor stated that the right of way through the mill property was abandoned.
* Manager Stoddard stated that the right of way was added to the southeast parcel that has the loading docks.
* Bliesener stated that if Noah’s Ark (northeastern most building) was preserved, a drive would be needed on the east side.
* ZA Harvey said that it would be helpful if the northeast route, even, though it can be shifted, is a key corridor. Draw a site with dashed lines to show how additional roadways could be added. Show a general north to southeast general roadway. It will give an idea to developers.
* The Mayor said that he likes zones (residential, commercial, light industrial). We are looking to see how quickly a developer can get through the process of the asking for a project review. He wants the developer’s packet to be easily understood so that they know what is expected of them.
* DeBoer asked if there were diagrams within the Developer’s Packet. Manager Stoddard confirmed.
* DeBoer asked if the PC wants to attack this roadway project and draw up a conceptual design.
* The Mayor said that monies set aside for marketing ($10k) could be used for the clearer vision for roadways.
* DeBoer encouraged the Mayor and Commission members to ask the PC questions and to help with the brainstorming.
* The Mayor suggested that the developers meet with the PC to have them arrive at something that can be approved. We will be vetting the developers, checking for ideas and capital money available, and for consistency with the Master Plan.
* DeBoer asked the Planning Commission members to start the thought process regarding roadways in the mill site.
* The Mayor talked about all the improvements that are coming to this area: Arena, Graphic Packaging, funding from Senator Peters to help with development of the mill area. There are lots of opportunities out there. We need to get rid of the blighted buildings first. The housing stock in the community is aging and he feels like it will take off because of the need.
* DeBoer thanked and congratulated the Mayor for putting in a plug for the City at various places.
* Mayor said that we could have this sold tomorrow but the use would not be what we would want.
* DeBoer stated that piecemealing the sales to developers is a good approach.
* Mayor – The PC and City Commission can work together to find a solution to the offers we receive. The more input from the PC the better chance of success.
1. 2023 Work Plan for Planning Commission
* DeBoer suggested that an early December meeting would be scheduled for the PC to prevent such a long time between meetings.
* Lyon-Jenness suggested that the meeting minutes be provided to PC members as soon as they have been prepared.
* Dean stated the lack of meetings in December, January, and February made it hard to remember the conversations.
* DeBoer asked for the meeting minutes of November by the 15th of December. No December meeting would be scheduled.
* CM Stoddard asked if the Annual Report could be given to the City Commission. DeBoer confirmed.
* ZA Harvey said that the Work Plan was generated from the Master Plan. Excerpts from the zoning map were used to emphasize that 98% of the non-residential use is on Riverview Drive. The Master Plan alternates between the uses of the words: commercial land use, Commercial District, and land use on Riverview Drive to describe the same thing. She referred to the four bullet points on the Work Plan #2.
* ZA Harvey – The PC could cut to the quick by working on the Work Plan item #2; it would take care of 3 out of 5 of the items on the list or they could be done separately. The Development of the Design Overlay District would cover the setbacks on Riverview and the maximum building size. The PC bit off a huge chunk by putting in the PUD. Now the form standards need to be tied to the Planned Unit Development (PUD). #5 was completed by creating the PUD. The PC’s focus will be on #2 Commercial Work Plan Items which will take care of #1, #3, and #4)
* ZA Harvey shared information about another community – unrelated to the overlay district. They conducted a historical architectural walk which told of the modifications to buildings. Each building had an existing, correct renovations, or things you could do slowly. This village created their form based code based on it. Their DDA gave points to those that build according to historical architectural design. The PC could modify if they wanted.
* DeBoer said that all agreed to have #2 Commercial/Industrial Districts put on the Work Plan.
* ZA Harvey stated that she will send the standard overlay information to the City Manager.
* CM Stoddard asked that the PC consider ordinance language for Short Term Rentals (AirB&B, VRBO, etc.)
* ZA Harvey said that the PC would define, through the zoning ordinances, where they would be allowed and identify it as an accessory use to a residential home or limit it by district. General ordinances regulate all other use. A registration process with an inspection is utilized. There are codes to be met and an administration fee is established. These items vary from community to community.
* DeBoer asked how much time it will take.
* ZA Harvey said that the PC may be able to do the Short Term Rental and Commercial/Industrial districts at the same time. The City does not have hotels; small communities rely on Short Term Rentals to fill the need for lodging.
* Bliesener said that AirB&B’s are going on and the PC should prioritize regulations for them.
* Lyon-Jenness said that one room in a house is rented in a residential area.
* DeBoer asked ZA Harvey if she can lead the PC through the Short Term Rentals subject matter.
1. **New Business –** none
2. **Comments from Planning Commissioners –** none
3. **Next Meeting** – The next meeting will be on Wednesday, May 24, 2023 at 6pm.
4. **Adjournment** – Motion by Lyon-Jenness, supported by Dean. All ayes. Meeting ended at 7:40 pm.