

Laketon Township Planning Commission
February 8, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes – APPROVED 03/08/2023

CALL TO ORDER: Chairperson Bob Marine called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

ROLL CALL:

- Present: Paul Hoppa, Chris Simpson, Dave Mieras, Eric Anderson, Suzanne Hayes and Bob Marine.
- Absent: June Earhart, w/notice.
- Also present: Zoning Administrator Heidi Tice, Recording Secretary Veronica West, and VFW Representatives Rod Siegel and Steve Allen.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Eric Anderson moved to approve the agenda as presented. Paul Hoppa supported the motion and the motion carried by voice vote.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Suzanne Hayes pointed out a typographical/spelling error in the minutes and then moved to approve them with the correction. Dave Mieras supported the motion. The motion carried by voice vote.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS ONLY: **NONE**

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- **Chairperson:** Paul Hoppa moved to nominate Bob Marine to continue as Chairperson. Eric Anderson asked Bob Marine if he was accepting of the nomination and when he responded he was, Eric Anderson supported the motion. The motion carried by voice vote.
- **Vice-Chairperson:** ZA Heidi Tice informed the members that June Earhart had told her she would be accepting of a nomination to continue as Vice-Chairperson if no one else wanted the position. Eric Anderson then nominated June Earhart to continue as Vice-Chairperson. Paul Hoppa supported the motion. The motion carried by voice vote.
- **Secretary:** Chris Simpson moved to nominate Dave Mieras to continue as Secretary after he stated he was willing to continue in that position. Paul Hoppa supported the motion. The motion carried by voice vote.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- **Monthly Permit Report:** provided for informational purposes.
- **Annual PC Activity Report/Summary:** ZA H. Tice put together this summary of the 2022 PC activities and asked for the PC to make an official motion to send it on to the Township Board. Eric Anderson stated he had not yet had enough time to read it thoroughly and moved to delay any action on this until next month when everyone has plenty of time to review it. Suzanne Hayes supported the motion. The motion carried by voice vote.
- **Court/Citations Update:** ZA H. Tice informed the PC on the citation on Glenwood Ave relating to an illegal car repair business being operated out of a home – stating that the owner signed another “cease and desist” agreement, one other being signed in 2015. She did also add that the owner stated he had experienced a period of unemployment and now he is back to work and will not be repairing cars at his home. The other citation that was issued to an address on Peterson Rd has not yet been scheduled for a court hearing and staff is in the process of contacting the court for information to find out why or if the citation needs to be re-issued.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Site Plan Review for replacement sign at the VFW at 10631 Witham Dr (pp# 61-09-012-200-0054-00)** – ZA H. Tice gave a brief synopsis of the project for the VFW to replace their old/existing sign with a new digital sign – in the same location. She touched on some of the ordinance rules; no flashing lights, no continuously moving/scrolling text or lights and lights cannot shine onto neighboring properties. Steve Allen of 2081 Deerwood Dr, Twin Lake representing the VFW spoke on the project. He stated the new sign is a monument style about 3 feet tall by 8 feet wide, which is a little smaller than the current sign which is about 4 feet by 8 feet. The new digital sign can hold up to 4 lines of text and while it is capable of scrolling or flashing, they have no intention of doing so and will follow the ordinance regulations. There was some brief discussion on maximum height of the sign and the ordinance calls for no more than a 6 foot height on monument style signs. Mr. Allen stated they were concerned about overall height and don't

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plan to be any taller than the existing sign is. Eric Anderson commented that the VFW property always being well maintained and he moved to approve the site plan for a new sign as presented with the stipulation that the sign be in conformance with all zoning ordinance regulations as written. Some comments on the appearance of the sign were made and Mr. Allen showed a photo of the type of sign they are looking at installing. Paul Hoppa supported the motion to approve the site plan and the motion carried by a voice vote.

- **Parks and Recreation Plan Update** – ZA H. Tice informed the PC members that while the Parks & Rec plan is a chapter of the Master Plan, it has historically been updated and adopted separately and is on a different schedule for the state required 5 year review/update. She commented on it needing to be completed by 2024 in order to be able to apply for state grant funding. She also talked about how the process has historically been undertaken, with an open house and a community survey. There was discussion about which to do first, the survey or the open house. Consensus was to do the open house first which would help gather information to create a short survey. Eric Anderson commented that his understanding are that surveys and open houses are not mandatory, nor is anything but a review and update, not a complete re-write of the plan. ZA H. Tice agreed but feels an open house at least is fundamental to gather information from the public on their wants/needs. There was discussion of when to hold an open house and consensus was late April to May and that would give time to get a survey together for the newsletter that typically goes out with the summer tax bill. ZA H. Tice will bring several possible open house dates to choose from to the next meeting. Bob Marine commented on the Horton Park boat launch and changing that to just a kayak launch area due to lack of parking for cars/boat trailers etc. That led to discussion of a grant project that was approved by the State of Michigan/DNR that has funding and a plan to be followed to upgrade the parking, boat launch and include a kayak/canoe launch. There was discussion of the grant funding, increased costs since being approved and waiting on contractor bids to even know what the costs will be and how much more it may cost the township until those bids come in.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

- **Capital Improvement Plan Update:** ZA H. Tice provided a new/updated document based on the discussions of the work session. There was some brief discussion with Eric Anderson noting that this plan is essentially a “wish list” of things that are wanted or needed and must be on this plan in order to apply for grant funding. Eric Anderson moved to recommend the updated CIP be adopted by the Laketon Township Board. Suzanne Hayes supported the motion. The motion carried by a voice vote.
- **Draft Solar Energy Ordinance:** ZA H. Tice provided a first draft of language working toward a solar energy ordinance. She reported that she took parts of other ordinances from other area jurisdictions to start putting together this rough draft. She commented that this language really only applies to the small scale/personal use solar and not the large scale or utility scale solar farms. Bob Marine commented that the township doesn’t really have the space for large solar farms, the land is needed for residential development. Suzanne Hayes commented there aren’t very many large parcels and she feels the rural character is too beautiful to be used for solar farms. Eric Anderson wondered why it would be a bad thing to allow solar farms so long as the proper restrictions are in place to protect the residents. He added he feels it’s important to be forward thinking as we don’t really know what the future holds as far as how the technology will improve or change over time. There was a good amount of discussion over the aesthetics of large solar farms and people not wanting to look at them or have them next door to their homes. There was also discussion of regulations for solar panels including setbacks and natural screening to limit the visual impacts and building codes that may apply to their construction. ZA H. Tice also touched on the science of solar energy and needing certain specific conditions to allow for it to be a viable location for utility scale solar farms. Small scale personal solar energy was also discussed in terms of ground mount and building mounted types, setbacks, where and how large could be allowed, maximum height, as well as property sizes where ground mount would be permitted etc. There was more discussion of technology, including battery storage and decommissioning requirements when the equipment is not longer used or functional. It was discussed that it is important to get regulations in place because without any regulating rules, there is essential a “free for all” and nothing to prevent any kind of installation of solar arrays, large or small or where they could be. It was agreed that both large- and small-scale solar energy regulations need to be tackled to prevent any potential negative impacts. ZA H. Tice asked the members to review the first draft and come back to the next meeting with suggestions for more discussion.

PUBLIC COMMENTS: NONE

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BOARD REPORTS:

- **Board of Trustees: Eric Anderson** reported the Township Board approved the C2/R4 mixed use zoning district and language for the Witham Rd corridor and the amendments to the Major Street setback language. The Twp Board also acted to make changes to the section of the pool ordinance relating to covers and barriers (aka fences). He commented he abstained from voting on that change as he let his conscience guide his decision as he feels the rest of the PC did on this issue. He further commented one board member expressed frustration that the PC did not follow the direction of the Board on this issue. He also added he does not feel the PC is not supposed to be a “puppet” of the Township Board, but to act independently and make decisions they feel are appropriate. Dave Mieras also commented that he felt the Township Attorney, when giving his opinion on the subject at the last meeting did so in a condescending manner. He added he appreciated the opinion, but was a little upset by the manner in which it was delivered.
- **Zoning Board of Appeals – Suzanne Hayes** - No activity to report.

ADJOURNMENT:

- Chris Simpson moved to adjourn. Dave Mieras supported the motion. The motion carried and the adjournment occurred at 7:21 pm.

Respectfully Submitted:

Veronica West
Recording Secretary