

**ADA TOWNSHIP
OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 10, 2008 MEETING**

The meeting was called to order at 4:05 p.m., by Chairperson Betty Jo Crosby.

PRESENT: Betty Jo Crosby, George Haga, Jamie Ladd, Matt Nygren, Bette Roberts, Elise Roe

ABSENT: Greg Forbes, Randy VanDragt, Mischelle Sytsma

STAFF PRESENT: Planning Director Jim Ferro; Parks Director Mark Fitzpatrick

PUBLIC PRESENT: Robert Lowry

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 13, 2007 MEETING MINUTES

It was moved by Ladd, seconded by Roe, to approve the minutes of the December 13 meeting, as presented.

Motion approved unanimously.

DISCUSSION OF NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION COMMUNITY HABITAT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Crosby noted that Bob Lowry, who was present, has expressed interest in heading up an effort to obtain the NWF Community Wildlife Habitat certification.

Lowry stated that an earlier pending time commitment he had has been removed, and he is willing to take on this challenge, with some assistance.

Mark Fitzpatrick noted that the certification process involves forming a local team and developing a written plan. Lowry also noted that annual re-certification is required by the NWF program.

A working group meeting was set for Friday, January 18, at 10:30 a.m., at the Ada Township Park offices, to begin work on this process.

STATUS OF OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION PROJECTS

7686 Forest Bend Property

Ferro reported that the Township closed on the property in December, with a provision by which the seller agrees to record a correcting deed, if needed based on the survey that is being completed.

Donations totaling \$68,000 were received for 2007, which is 100% of the amount that was pledged for 2007. Donation acknowledgment letters are being sent to all donors.

Ferro stated the conservation easement language still needs to be finalized with Aprill Scholtz from the Land Conservancy, including addressing legal counsel comments. Ferro noted that feedback from several Township Board members encouraged loosening up the easement restrictions somewhat, in areas such as specifying maximum number of parking spaces or park benches, for example.

Ferro stated when the easement is finalized and recorded, copies will be sent to the Forest Glen neighbors, so that they are familiar with the restrictions.

Crosby stated that a letter to Rick and Sue Steketee thanking them for their efforts on the project has been drafted. She read the letter and suggested it be signed by herself and Haga.

It was suggested by Roberts that when public access facilities are installed at the site, some type of recognition sign or plaque be installed, to recognize that the natural area was preserved through a partnership between the Township and neighboring property owners.

383 Pettis Ave. Property Acquisition

Ferro reported that the primary mortgage holder is now objecting to the proposed purchase price for the property, and the owner's realtor is working to convince them that it is a reasonable price they should accept.

Crosby asked whether we would be running into any concerns with the grant commitment expiring. Ferro indicated we have been making quarterly progress reports to the State on the status, and that he did not recall the grant expiration date, but believed that it was not an immediate concern.

Gilmore/MDOT Property on former Thornapple River – Status of Title

Ferro reported that he had requested, through a letter to Rick Rankin, that John Gilmore assume the cost for clearing up the two title exceptions on the property that was quit-claim deeded to the Township by Mr. Gilmore in 2006. The title exceptions include a mortgage interest and an ownership interest in a portion of the property by previous owners, one of whom is requesting \$3,000 compensation for signing a quit claim deed. In response, Gilmore has offered to contribute \$1,000 toward this cost.

Concerns were expressed by several members that the Township shouldn't have to bear any cost for clearing up title, and that the amount requested by the previous owner was excessive. It was pointed out that previous direction from the Advisory Board was to not offer in excess of \$1,000 to obtain the needed quit claim deed.

It was moved by Roe, seconded by Nygren, that the Township offer an amount not to exceed \$1,000 for the quit claim deed from the previous owner.

In discussion of the motion, it was pointed out by Haga that the County Property Description and Mapping department has refused to accept the transfer of property from Gilmore to Ada Township, and that it is still on the tax rolls as being owned by Gilmore. Ladd suggested that the responsibility to directly negotiate this should rest with Mr. Gilmore, since it is title to his property which is in question.

The motion by Roe and second by Nygren were withdrawn.

Ferro stated he would follow up with Rick Rankin on this matter.

STATUS OF FUND-RAISING FOR PROPERTY ACQUISITION AT 7980 EAST FULTON ST.

Crosby reported that the citizens' fund-raising committee is now making personal solicitations. There have been close to 40 individual contributors, with amounts ranging from \$50 to \$5,000.

Haga stated that there have been suggestions from several parties that it may be appropriate for the entire cost of purchasing the property at 7980 East Fulton St. to be charged to the open space preservation account, rather than being divided equally between open space preservation funds and Township general funds. He stated that he supported the purchase because he believed it did fall within the goals of our open space plan, as expressed in the dissent statement submitted to the Press. He asked the Board to consider supporting a re-allocation of funding for the purchase.

In discussion, Ladd stated he did not believe that, in view of the history of the property, that funding the entire cost from open space preservation funds would be appropriate. He stated that the Advisory Board needs to consider its responsibility to be good stewards of the open space funds. He pointed out that the

Advisory Board's original recommendation of \$150,000 in funds from the open space account had already been increased some by the Township Board. He stated that funding the entire purchase from open space funds would take funds away from other potential open space projects.

Ferro commented that he believed the Advisory Board should consider the question from the perspective of the general taxpayer, and what would be most acceptable to them. Use of Township general funds for the purchase does compete with a broad range of Township funding needs, whereas funding the purchase strictly from open space funding would not divert funds from other potential non-open space uses.

Ferro added that he believes that preventing a billboard on the site falls within the open space plan goals of protecting the scenic qualities of the Township.

He also pointed out that after 15 years, when the millage comes up for renewal, taxpayers will be looking at how the total revenue from the millage was used over the entire 15 years, and funding the entire purchase from open space funds would only amount to 10%-11% of the total revenue over the life of the millage.

Haga pointed out that after the 7980 East Fulton and Forest Bend Dr. property acquisitions, there is still a balance of funding in the open space account, and additional revenue in excess of \$250,000 will be coming in this year.

Roberts commented that how it will be viewed at the end of the 15 years is important, and that she believes that preventing the billboard will be viewed as a worthwhile use of the funds.

It was moved by Haga, to revise the funding allocation for the purchase of the property at 7980 East Fulton St., to come entirely from the open space preservation fund account.

The motion died for lack of a second.

Crosby asked whether the Township had heard more from the neighboring property owner who offered to purchase a portion of the site for an accessory building. Ferro stated he had received a recent voicemail from the realtor, asking him to call about the property.

MARKETING/PROMOTION

Mark Fitzpatrick reported on coordination efforts with Melanie Good at the Land Conservancy, to involve students in the Earth Day stewardship effort planned at Seidman Park.

Haga reported on the upcoming Ada Business Association "Forest Hills Business Expo" planned for March 15, and asked whether the Advisory Board wishes to share a booth with the Parks Department. The consensus was that the Board would participate, as it did last year.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

ADJOURNMENT: It was noted that the next meeting is on Thursday, February 14, 2008, at 4:00 p.m. The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Deborah Ensing Millhuff, CMC
Ada Township Clerk
rs:jf