

**ADA TOWNSHIP
OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD
MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 14, 2008 MEETING**

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m., by Chairperson Betty Jo Crosby.

PRESENT: Betty Jo Crosby, George Haga,, Jamie Ladd, Elise Roe, Rick Steketee, Randy VanDragt

ABSENT: Mischelle Sytsma

STAFF PRESENT: Planning Director Jim Ferro
Parks Director Mark Fitzpatrick

PUBLIC PRESENT: Raj Agrawal

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF JULY 10, 2008 MEETING

It was moved by Ladd, seconded by Steketee, to approve the minutes of the July 10 meeting.

Motion passed unanimously.

STATUS OF CARL CREEK PROPERTY

Status of Boundary Marker Installation:

Ferro reported that the installation of permanent boundary markers is about 80% complete. Another volunteer effort will be needed after leaves are off to complete the work.

Status of Conservation Easement:

He reported that the conservation easement on the property is now signed and recorded with the County Register of Deeds, and we are now ready to send copies of the easement to all residents of the neighborhood.

Crosby noted that educational material regarding proper stewardship of the property should be included in the mailing.

Status of Fire Pit Encroachment:

Ferro reported on the results of the meeting he and Betty Jo Crosby had with Suze Schalon regarding her fire pit that is located on the Township's property. He stated that she is not willing to remove the fire pit at this time, but is amenable to a written agreement that would require it to be removed at a later date, when she sells the property.

In discussion of the encroachment situation, Ladd stated the Township may have some liability if the public uses the fire pit, since it is on public property.

Haga pointed out that the Township needed to be concerned with its liability if one of Schalon's guests is injured at the fire pit. He also raised the possibility that the Township may have an obligation under the terms of the conservation easement to have the encroachment removed.

After further discussion, it was moved by Ladd, seconded by VanDragt, that the Chair of the Advisory Board send a letter to the owner proposing that the fire pit be re-located off the Township property within the next 30 days, with volunteer assistance offered to accomplish this, and that if the owner is not willing to accept this arrangement, that the fire pit will be removed by the Township after the 30 day period.

Motion passed unanimously.

Naming of Property:

It was moved by VanDragt, seconded by Roe, to recommend that the open space property at 5686 Forest Bend Dr. be officially named the Carl Creek Wetland Preserve.

Motion passed unanimously.

Joint Dedication Event with Land Conservancy of West Michigan

September was discussed as a good timeframe for a joint dedication event with the Land Conservancy. Haga also suggested the possibility of holding the event on the same day as the Township's fall event at Roselle Park, on a Saturday in October. Ferro and Crosby will discuss this with the Land Conservancy.

383 PETTIS AVE. PROPERTY ACQUISITION

Ferro reported that the Township has made a new formal offer to purchase the property, with an offer price of about \$144,000, compared to the original offer of about \$165,000. The owner needs to start the process over again of seeking lender approval of this offer.

GILMORE/MDOT PROPERTY ON FORMER THORNAPPLE RIVER – STATUS OF TITLE

Ferro reported there is no change in the status of this item. The mortgage release has not yet been obtained from the owner.

RECOMMENDATION ON FUNDING CONTRIBUTION TO KENT COUNTY PARKS FOR CHIEF HAZY CLOUD PARK

Ferro reported he had requested a copy of the Level I Environmental Site Assessment from Kent County Parks for the property, and was told by Roger Sabine that an assessment was not obtained prior to the purchase, but was now being completed. Sabine will provide a copy to the Township when it is completed. Ferro also reported that Sabine had told him that the County is not currently involved in any efforts to acquire additional properties adjacent to the expansion property.

No action was taken on this item.

POTENTIAL DONATED CONSERVATION EASEMENT AT 3201 EGYPT VALLEY AVE.

Dr. Raj Agrawal was present to discuss his proposal to donate a conservation easement on a portion of the property he is considering acquiring at 3201 Egypt Valley Ave.

Ferro presented a revised conceptual layout of a possible open space development design for the property, with 10 single-family home sites, and approximately 25.5 acres of open space, which would be subject to the conservation easement.

Ferro noted that he had suggested expanding the open space area to include a secondary drainage corridor, with the area adjacent to the corridor changed from 3 lots to 2 lots. The 3rd lot has been re-located to the north side of the proposed private road access.

Concern was expressed by VanDragt that the proposed easement boundary has a lot of "edge" area that might be difficult to monitor, and that a less irregular boundary for the conservation easement would be preferable.

Haga expressed concern that proceeding with the easement prior to going through the zoning approval process for the development might be “putting the cart before the horse,” and put undue pressure on the Planning Commission.

Ladd expressed the view that without an approved development plan that commits to the development layout, there is no way to establish the value of a donated conservation easement. He stated that this would be the first time that the Township has accepted a conservation easement on a private development site, and the first time a conservation easement has been accepted before zoning approval is given. He also questioned whether we would want to take on the long-term maintenance burden of monitoring an easement on this site, when the property does not rank highly on our open space priorities, and when the primary benefit of the easement seems to be to the adjacent lot owners..

VanDragt stated that he believes that there is habitat protection value involved here that goes beyond just the benefit to adjacent lot owners. He mentioned the large number of butterfly species that were observed during his site visit as an indication of the value of small pockets of preserved habitat.

Ferro pointed out that Dr. Agrawal has stated that he has no definite plans or schedule for developing the property. He noted that the easement itself could place limits on the maximum number of home sites that could be developed on the entire property, which could provide the documentation needed to establish the value of the conservation easement. If we proceed with a conservation easement, we also want to place some parameters on how the adjoining property could be developed in the future, to ensure that the easement property is not compromised or degraded by adjacent development. The concept plan could be used to establish these parameters. He stated that we do not necessarily want to discourage placing a conservation easement on a portion of a property, by precluding potential future development of the rest of the property.

It was moved by Haga, seconded by Ladd, to postpone action on the acceptance of an easement.

After discussion, Haga and Ladd withdrew the motion and second.

It was moved by VanDragt, seconded by Haga, to express the Advisory Board’s support for the concept of the Township accepting a conservation easement on approximately 25 acres of the property, subject to Dr. Agrawal providing the following additional information:

1. mapping of the potential easement boundary should be separated from the drawing of potential future development of the property.
2. completing a formal wetland boundary determination.
3. additional refinement of the access road design, particularly through the steep slope area at the north edge of the property
4. survey of the easement boundary.
5. development of proposed easement language.

Motion passed unanimously.

CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON PROPERTY AT 2200 HONEY CREEK AVE.

The Advisory Board reviewed proposals and experience lists that were obtained from 4 appraisers for completing an appraisal of the purchase price of a conservation easement on the VanDerWarf property at 220 Honey Creek Ave.

It was moved by Haga, seconded by Roe, to recommend the selection of Soper & Associates to complete the appraisal.

Motion passed unanimously.

Ferro reported that Don Vanderwarf had told him that the family may also be interested in including the property on the west side of Honey Creek Ave. in the proposed conservation easement. He presented an aerial photo showing this property in relation to the property on the east side of the road, and noted that the same creek corridor extends through both properties.

It was suggested that we should determine how much the fee for an appraisal would be increased to include this property in the appraisal.

VanDragt noted that the wooded creek corridor of the property would be a higher priority for an easement than the open field portion, but that even the field portion has potential for long-term successional growth into desirable habitat.

Ferro also reported that Don Vanderwarf had told him that a contract had been entered into for logging of 100 trees from the property east of Honey Creek Ave., before our discussions with the family regarding a conservation easement were initiated. Mr. Vanderwarf was not sure whether this contract could be cancelled.

Members expressed concern with proceeding with the appraisal of the property until the status of the logging contract is further determined. VanDragt also expressed concern with the extent of the off-road vehicle trails on the property and that some agreement on restricting this activity be reached before proceeding with the appraisal. He also stated that we need to determine whether the junk cars that were observed are on the property we are considering.

Ferro stated that Don Vanderwarf told him that the cars are on the easement property, and that they would commit to removing them. Don also told him that the sand washed into the creek crossing occurred recently, as a result of the heavy rains in June.

It was moved by Haga, seconded by VanDragt, to delay forwarding the recommendation on proceeding with an appraisal to the Township Board, until the property issues are discussed with the property owner.

Motion passed unanimously.

Ferro indicated he would begin discussing possible easement terms with the family to address the issues that were discussed.

OFFER OF PROPERTY AT KNAPP ST./EGYPT VALLEY AVE.

Ferro reported on the offer to sell property to the Township at the corner of Egypt Valley Ave. and Knapp St. that had been received. The consensus of the Board was that the property should be considered as a potential park acquisition. Haga stated he would take this proposal to the Parks Committee.

RECOMMENDATION ON ENDORSEMENT OF KENT COUNTY FUNDING FOR PDR PROGRAM

It was moved by VanDragt, seconded by Ladd, to recommend that the Township Board endorse the statement of support for Kent County providing County funding for the County Purchase of Development Rights Program.

Motion passed unanimously.

STATUS OF NWF COMMUNITY WILDLIFE HABITAT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Mark Fitzpatrick reported that additional progress is being made on the certification program, including establishing a rain garden at Roselle Park.

STATUS OF UNITED GROWTH FOR KENT COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND OWNER OUTREACH PROGRAM

Ferro reported that United Growth is now ready to proceed with the property owner mailing to Ada Township land owners regarding farm land preservation options, and distributed the draft letter to property owners prepared by United Growth. Members indicated willingness to assist in meeting with property owners.

The following agenda items were not taken up, due to the length of the meeting:

1. Map of Grand River corridor properties.
2. Cattle Access to Grand River/Compliance with Right-to-Farm Act

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:

Haga distributed copies of the public service application form to members, and invited them to recruit potential Advisory Board members to fill the two vacant positions.

DISCUSSION OF MEETING TIMES

The consensus was that future meetings should be scheduled at 4:00 p.m., on the 2nd Thursday of the month.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Deborah Ensing Millhuff, CMC
Ada Township Clerk
rs:jf