

**ADA TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION Draft
MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 2, 2006 SPECIAL MEETING**

Draft

A special meeting of the Ada Township Planning Commission was held on Thursday, February 2, 2006, at the Ada Township Offices, 7330 Thornapple River Dr., Ada, Michigan.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was called to order by Korth at 4:15 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Korth, Burton, Butterfield, Gutierrez, Hoeks, Lowry, Sytsma at 4:45 p.m..

Also Present: Planning Director Ferro.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Hoeks, second by Gutierrez, to approve the agenda as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

IV. DISCUSSION OF MASTER PLAN DRAFT VISION STATEMENT.

Korth stated that from the public input sessions, there seems to be a consensus that there is concern about too much density and a desire by Township residents to keep things the way that they are. There is a lot of sentiment expressed in the comments that is in agreement with the survey results from 2004. There seems to be a desire to keep the sense of a compact village, and also to retain the countryside, as overriding themes of the input.

Korth suggested opened the meeting to public comment at this time, since we have a time constraint to end the meeting by 5:40 p.m.

Public comment was opened.

Lloyd Paul, 1268 Pettis Ave., stated that after reading the portions of the draft Vision Statement dealing with the Pettis Ave. corridor, he is in total agreement with it, assuming it moves forward in this form.

He has heard some talk regarding a recycling situation, and his view is that the operations on the Pettis and Rieth-Riley properties are illegal, and that they are operating more aggressively than ever. They seem to be warehousing sand and gravel and aggregate to an excessive level, and using the site as a distribution center.

Matt Nygren, 6319 Knapp St., stated that he knows we have received lots of letter opposing commercial land use designation for the Knapp/Egypt Valley intersection. He says that with one store and design center there now, the intersection is already dangerous. He doesn't know if it's true or not, but he heard that someone may want to put up a strip mall there, and most of the residents would be opposed to this. Having a corner store there is fine, but he does not see the need for anything else.

Public comment was closed.

Ferro stated that we had good turnout at the January 12 public input meeting, which was helped by the advance news coverage of the event. Ferro reviewed the written comments received on the draft Vision Statement. Ferro stated he had received quite a few e-mail messages commenting on the neighborhood commercial center concept at Knapp/Egypt Valley, most opposing commercial development at this corner.

Ferro also referenced correspondence received last June from Jamie Ladd requesting that land he owns on Fulton St., adjacent to the Longleaf development, be designated for office/warehouse use.

Ferro referenced the list of issues he prepared and written input from Commission member Butterfield last fall to guide discussion, as well as a summary of major findings from the 2004 citizen survey.

Korth suggested that the concept of designating a neighborhood commercial center at the corner be dropped from consideration at this time, and there was consensus among Commission members to do this.

Hoeks suggested providing some way to encourage upgrading of the existing Gram's store, which is a non-conforming use.

Ferro pointed out that the geographic breakdown of survey results shows that the residents in the northern portion of the Township were more strongly opposed to the concept than Township residents overall.

Korth noted that people were probably thinking of a "mini-mall" more than the Cannonsburg concept which we have been talking about.

Korth suggested that the Commission use the list of issues prepared by Ferro to guide discussion.

Korth referenced a study that was conducted in the early 1990's when the Township reduced maximum densities from 1 unit per acre to 1 unit per 2 or 3 acres. The in-depth analysis that Ferro prepared at that time contained a lot of data regarding road capacities and usage that would be useful to have updated.

Korth stated he has heard a lot of input suggesting that people value space, and the only way he sees to accommodate this is to increase lot sizes, outside of the Village area.

Lowry brought up that soil conditions are an important factor affecting septic system suitability. Ferro noted that the soil conditions in the Township are extremely variable, ranging from heavy clay to very permeable sands, and that it is difficult to come up with an across-the-board lot size minimum based on soils.

Korth stated that we can always take a conservative view that larger lots are better.

Korth stated it was also interesting to see the data in the 1989 study that showed that even though there was a 1-acre lot size minimum, most of the development taking place was on lots much larger than 1 acre.

Burton pointed out that larger lot sizes would have the effect of encouraging more expensive homes; she questions whether we would want to do this across the entire northeast part of the Township.

Korth also brought up the constraints on growth imposed by the limited road crossings of the river, which also have to handle traffic from a large part of Cannon and Vergennes townships and areas beyond to Ionia and Belding.

Hoeks suggested the possibility of a policy statement discouraging more dense development unless there is a plan for a 3rd bridge. Hoeks pointed out he does not see why the current plan encourages 1 unit per acre density along Pettis Ave. He thinks the planned density in this area should be the same as the rest of the rural portions of the Township.

Korth agreed with this.

Hoeks also suggested that we strongly encourage removal of all processing and recycling activities in this area as well.

Korth stated he had reservations about that.

Ferro pointed out the current zoning boundaries of the RR and AG districts in the north part of the Township. We need to consider whether the Pettis Ave. corridor logically fits into one or the other of these areas. Ferro also summarized the rationale for the suggested 1 unit per acre density for the Pettis Ave. corridor contained in the 1995 Plan, that being the relative lack of sensitive natural features in this area. It is moderately sloped, open land with little wetland or woodland cover.

Ferro also noted that the Grand Valley Estates subdivision is an example of density of 1 unit per acre, with 1 acre lots. On an open, non-wooded site, the effect of a 1 acre lot size minimum is often a 1 acre lawn, which is not very desirable. In areas where we have rugged, wooded hills, such as The Highlands development, 1 unit per 2 acre density may be too high. One approach to address this may be to base the density limits on natural features, rather than using arbitrary boundaries.

Korth stressed the constraints of the infrastructure. Korth raised the question as to whether current residents want bottlenecks getting across the river at the two bridges every time they leave their homes. He believes that this infrastructure constraint is a big factor that supports lower density limits.

Ferro noted that we should not necessarily encourage a 3rd bridge across the river, as that would simply open up the area to more development.

Hoeks again stated he supports planned density for the Pettis Ave. corridor that is consistent with either the RR or AG districts.

Korth stated he agrees with this, but also would like to see the data from the 1989 analysis of appropriate lot sizes updated with current data.

Korth requested Ferro to provide some background information regarding the status of processing operations on Pettis Ave., before the Commission begins discussion of the land use goals with regard to these operations.

Ferro provided background information regarding the status of activities on both the Pettis and Rieth-Riley's property, and their legal status. He stated he is seeking Township Board direction regarding possible zoning enforcement action.

Hoeks suggested Vision Statement language which would state "to work toward removal of all natural material mining and subsequent processing activity, especially in view of the fact that there is now a large public school in the vicinity."

Ferro observed that the language suggested does not speak at all to processing that is unrelated to mining.

Gutierrez observed that what she is doing is a good thing, but the question is whether it belongs in that location.

Korth noted that he hasn't arrived at a conclusion as to whether the activity should or shouldn't be there. He is concerned with the fact that it may not be legal.

Gutierrez suggested that the activity belonged in an industrial district.

Korth stated there may be some merit to processing the material close to where it will be used.

Lloyd Paul, Pettis Ave., pointed out that he has lived along the Pettis Ave. corridor for many years, so he is familiar with the area. He stated that 22 years ago, the eventual redevelopment of the mining area with a lake was discussed. Today, it has turned into a distribution center, and a form of cancer. The intent in 1985 was that these uses would be temporary, and that it was not a good area for these uses to be located permanently.

He lives in the middle of it, whether it ends up as residential or industrial. He thinks we need to keep an open mind on the density levels, because of the costs of the land and the services that may be needed. We should be planning it to be residential, which has been the intent since 1984.

Hoeks suggested language regarding utility goals and policies that would state "The Township's intent is to not expand public utilities across the river unless/until a 3rd bridge is constructed across the river. Korth suggested a variation that would state our intent is to not extend utilities across the river, and that this policy would only be re-evaluated if a 3rd bridge is constructed.

Gutierrez noted he is not a big fan of well and septic systems. He stated that there are areas in the state where septic systems are being replaced with public sewer. Flowers Mill in Grand Rapids Township is an example. Korth agreed that well and septic is not perfect, but it is the strongest support for keeping the density low. Flowers Mill has 1 acre lots, which is much higher than our densities.

Ferro brought up the possible need for public sewer to serve the limited area of the existing commercial uses near Pettis Ave. and M-21, where there may be public health need. We have two food service businesses, a large day care center, and a house with a 2,000 gallon holding tank and no drain field which all should be served by public sewer.

Korth said he does not want to create a vehicle to allow sprawling down Fulton St. toward Lowell. We have survey results that say people don't want anything more out there, so why would we create avenues to allow more.

Ferro stated we have existing zoning and existing uses where there is a need.

Gutierrez stated that if there is an existing quality of life issue due to lack of sewer serving existing development, it may be reasonable to extend the service, if the users are willing to pay for it. Lowry agreed with this point.

Ferro stated there is language in the current Master Plan that states that if public utilities are extended beyond the current service area, the costs of extending the service should be borne by those benefiting from the extension.

Korth summarized that Ferro will update the data from the 1989 lot size study, we have agreed to dropping the Knapp/Egypt Valley commercial corner concept, and we have had some overall discussion suggesting that the Pettis Ave. corridor planned density should be consistent with the rest of the rural area.

He suggested they focus now on issue number 1, land use in areas served by public utilities.

The merits of large versus small schools and the importance of school site selection was discussed.

Hoeks questioned whether planned density should follow school location or vice-versa. The possibility of inviting school district personnel to meet with us was discussed. Waiting until the new Superintendent is selected and comes on board was suggested.

Korth stated that in and around the Village is the area that makes the most sense for concentrating density. We need to define boundaries around what we consider the walkable Village area.

The impact of increased density on traffic on Ada Drive and Spaulding Ave. was discussed.

Korth stated he felt it was not necessarily our obligation to accommodate more people by permitting higher densities than currently allowed, especially since there is so much underused land in the central city.

It was pointed out that the amount of vacant land that is likely to be available is not so large that a modest increase in density would have major impacts in terms of increased population, housing and traffic generation.

Korth suggested targeting the strategy of increasing density to specific properties, rather than applying it across the board to the entire R-2 district.

Hoeks offered language along these lines. The desire to avoid spot zoning was also discussed.

Korth suggested that the Plan identify a boundary around the Village that would be planned for higher density.

VIII. NEXT MEETING DATE

The Commission set a date of Tuesday, March 7 at 5:30 p.m. for another Master Plan work session.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Hoeks, second by Sytsma, to adjourn the meeting at 5:43 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.