

PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes
July 17, 2008

I. ROLL CALL

Fred Walstrom	Present
Andrew Bowman	Absent
Jack Deegan	Present
Jeff Ford	Present
Mary Ellen Hughes	Present
Laura Kors	Present
Lee Kramer	Present
Sheryl McCleery	Present
Sara Smith	Present

Also present were City Planner Larry Nix and City Manager Fred Geuder.

Walstrom welcomed new Commissioner Lee Kramer to the table.

Chair Fred Walstrom called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. MINUTES

Motion by Hughes, seconded by McCleery, to approve the minutes of the May 15, 2008, regular meeting, as presented. Motion carried.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT AND CORRESPONDENCE

None.

IV. NEW AND OLD BUSINESS

A. Zoning Code Discussion—Lot Coverage/Residential Architecture

The City Manager noted that the Commission has had an on-going discussion concerning issues such as lot coverage, setbacks and architectural standards for residential districts. Following the March meeting, the Manager asked Commissioners to look at various homes in the communities and to send comments to him, which he then distributed in a memo. He suggested that City Planner Larry Nix give an overview on the issue.

Nix summarized the on-going discussion, noting that architectural style and the size of homes is a concern.

In looking at the comments of the Planning Commission members however, Nix noted that there really is no uniformity of opinion. And overall, in Nix's opinion, architectural style is not really an issue, so the question is, where does the Commission go from here.

Nix noted that the City of Grand Haven had addressed the issue, by developing specific character criterion for a number of neighborhoods as overlay districts. It did not apply to all parts of the City. But it does make for a more intensive review process, and Nix noted that the full-time staff at Grand Haven is larger than in Harbor Springs.

Nix also noted that with the economy on a low cycle generally, the new rules have not really been fully tested in Grand Haven.

Nix suggested that the Commission focus on those areas where it has its strongest concerns, perhaps curb appeal issues, setbacks and lot coverage.

Enter Kors.

The general concerns of the Commission in summary include such items as:

1. When the front of a home at the setback is a single mass.
2. A concern about using as much of the footprint as is available.
3. The overall mass of some homes, relative to the neighborhood.
4. Long, straight walls, two stories high, on the sides of homes.

The City Manager noted that many homes that were viewed as positive by Commissioners may have had about 50-60% of the front notched back in some way, in other words part of it was one story.

Jeff Ford noted that we had looked at architectural standards a number of years ago, and found that the community did not want them. (It was noted that the proposal then was for strict historic standards.)

Pringle Pfeifer suggested that standards that deal with numbers and measurements are easier to grasp than style, and may be standards that could be developed.

Nix noted that over the years a number of changes have been implemented, including the definition of height which has had a significant effect.

The City Manager noted that the general side yard setback for a given district is "x" number of feet or 10% of the lot width, whichever is greater. He opined that the 10% could possibly be increased.

One idea put forth was to require some "notching" on side walls, although defining such a rule and interpreting it would be difficult.

Nix summarized those ideas that perhaps had a consensus within the Commission to consider further:

1. With larger lots (wider than minimums), have wider side setbacks.
2. Consider some rule for minimizing the mass on the front (curb) side of a house.
3. Look at lot coverage requirements.

It was suggested that the City Manager do a random sample of lot coverages for various buildings in different zoning districts.

B. Sidewalk Master Plan

The City Manager said that the Council would like to have the Planning Commission look at those areas in the City where perhaps new sidewalks are needed. He asked Commissioners to begin looking around town, with an eye toward a fall discussion on the topic.

C. Election of Vice-Chair

The City Manager noted that Peter Sears had served as Vice-Chair of the Commission, but that the position was now vacant.

Motion by McCleery, seconded by Hughes, to elect Jack Deegan as Vice-Chair. Motion carried.

D. West Traverse Township Master Plan

The City Manager noted that West Traverse Township was in the process of updating their Master Plan, and in the process (as the City had done) was required to seek comment on their proposed plan from neighboring jurisdictions.

Planner Larry Nix said he had reviewed the proposed West Traverse Goals and Objectives and found no major issues with their ideas, and said their plan was in concert with the City's on the mutual borders.

The consensus of the Commission was to respond to the township and commend them for a good job in their planning.

V. MEMBER COMMENTS

None.

VI. Adjournment

The next regular meeting of the Planning Commission is scheduled for August 21, 2008.

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There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Frederick W. Geuder, City Manager