

PLANNING COMMISSION

June 5, 2014

The City of Portage Planning Commission meeting of June 5, 2014 was called to order by Chairman Welch at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers of Portage City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue. No citizens were in attendance.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairman Welch led the Commission in the Pledge of Allegiance.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Christopher Forth, Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Services; Michael West, Assistant City Planner; and Randy Brown, City Attorney.

ROLL CALL:

Chairman Welch introduced new Planning Commissioner, Caroline Richmond. Mr. Forth called the roll and the following Commissioners were present: Patterson, Bosch, Stoffer, Welch, Dargitz, Schimmel, Somers and Richmond. A motion was made by Commissioner Bosch, seconded by Commissioner Stoffer, to approve the roll excusing Commissioner Felicijan. The motion was unanimously approved 8-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Welch referred the Commission to the May 15, 2014 meeting minutes contained in the agenda packet. A motion was made by Commissioner Patterson, seconded by Commissioner Bosch, to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion was unanimously approved 8-0.

SITE/FINAL PLANS:

None.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. Ordinance Amendment #14-B, Specialized Agriculture (OS-1 and B-1). Mr. Forth summarized the staff report dated May 30, 2014 regarding a proposed ordinance amendment that would allow “specialized agriculture” uses, including greenhouses, as permitted and conforming uses in the OS-1, office service and B-1, local business zoning districts. Mr. Forth stated the proposed ordinance language is similar to the 1989 amendments and would afford D & D Greenhouses operational protections that were previously provided to other greenhouse operations across the city in 1989, if the D & D Greenhouses properties at 916 and 918 East Centre Avenue were rezoned to OS-1 or B-1.

Commissioner Dargitz asked if an ordinance amendment to allow “open markets” as an allowable use in the B-1 and OS-1 districts could also be considered. Mr. Forth stated Ordinance Amendment #14-B was expedited and specifically initiated in conjunction with Rezoning Application #14-2. Mr. Forth indicated the Commission could initiate a separate ordinance amendment at a future date or when a specific development project involving an open market use is proposed. The public hearing was opened by Chairman Welch. No citizens spoke regarding the proposed ordinance amendment. A motion was made by Commissioner Bosch, seconded by Commissioner Stoffer, to close the public hearing. The motion was unanimously approved 8-0. After a brief discussion, a motion was made by Commissioner Bosch, seconded by Commissioner Patterson, to recommend to City Council that Ordinance Amendment #14-B, Specialized Agriculture (OS-1 and B-1 districts) be approved. The motion was unanimously approved 8-0.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. 2014 Comprehensive Plan – Information Only. Mr. Forth referred the Commission to the staff report dated May 30, 2014 that summarized issues previously discussed by the Commission in regard to the 2014 Comprehensive Plan Update. Commissioner Dargitz again inquired about possible relocation of some city facilities, such as Parks, Recreation and Public Services buildings, that do not contribute to facilitating a vibrant and walkable City Centre Area. Mr. Forth stated that centralization of municipal facilities and buildings within the City Centre Area has been a long-term goal of the city involving significant financial resources. Mr. Forth also indicated the Parks, Recreation and Public Services facilities are located at the end of a dead end road with a steep embankment to the east and railroad tracks and the Portage Creek to the west that create impediments for private commercial redevelopment. Mr. Forth indicated there are other privately owned properties within the City Centre Area with better access and visibility that are available for development. Commissioner Dargitz stated that she believes a large congregation of municipal facilities and buildings is not conducive to facilitating a mixed use development pattern and a vibrant and walkable City Centre Area.

Commissioner Dargitz then asked staff and the other Commissioners about a RC, Resource Conservation designation and zoning district recently adopted by Texas Township and whether a similar designation/district should be developed for the City of Portage. Mr. Forth summarized staff's discussion with the Zoning Administrator for Texas Township and stated the creation of the RC designation/district was largely symbolic and would not change or impact existing land uses. Mr. Forth indicated no properties in Texas Township are currently zoned RC and the Township does not have any plans to proactively rezone privately owned properties to RC. According to the Township Zoning Administrator, Texas Township may, in the future, initiate rezoning of some township owned properties. Commissioner Dargitz stated that adoption of a similar designation/district by the City of Portage would give a clear indication that these areas are not intended for development. Commissioner Dargitz indicated the least intensive zoning district in the City of Portage is single family residential that does not indicate an intent by the city to preserve parks and nature preserves, or the State of Michigan game area. Mr. Forth stated that designated parks cannot be sold for private development without a vote of the electorate pursuant to the City Charter. Mr. Forth also indicated the Gourdneck State Game Area is owned by the State of Michigan and not subject to local zoning. Attorney Brown stated any zoning district that would prohibit or restrict development needs to be carefully researched and studied. Such a district could not be applied as a "blanket" across a large portion of the city. Attorney Brown also indicated a zoning district that would prohibit or restrict development could not be applied to privately owned land since "reasonable use" must be afforded to the land owners. Commissioner Dargitz stated that she believes the Texas Township RC designation and zoning district is a great idea and believes a similar designation and zoning district could be developed for the City of Portage. Commissioner Dargitz asked for input from other Planning Commissioners. The other Planning Commissioners had no additional comments.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Election of Officers. Chairman Welch discussed the annual policy of the Commission to elect a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary and asked what the Commission thoughts were for officers for the upcoming fiscal year. After a brief discussion, a motion was made by Commissioner Patterson, seconded by Commissioner Bosch, to retain the existing officers for the upcoming fiscal year: Chairman (Paul Welch), Vice-Chairman (Dave Felicijan) and Secretary (Wayne Stoffer). The motion was unanimously approved 8-0.

STATEMENT OF CITIZENS:

None.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher T. Forth, AICP
Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Housing Services