

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
June 8, 2009**

APPROVED

**5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864-1198
853-4000, Town Hall Room, 7:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Chair Wilcox, Secretary Jorkasky, Commissioners Beyea, Domas, Honicky, Jackson, Reicosky
ABSENT: Commissioners Deits, Klemans
STAFF: Principal Planner Gail Oranchak

1. Call meeting to order

Chair Wilcox called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

2. Approval of agenda

Commissioner Jackson moved to approve the agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Honicky.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 7-0.

3. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Domas moved to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of May 11, 2009 and May 18, 2009. Seconded by Commissioner Beyea.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 7-0.

4. Downtown Development Authority Update

Paul Brake, Executive Director of the Okemos Downtown Development Authority (DDA), gave an overview of the consultant's integrated development plan for the Okemos Downtown Development Area.

Recommendations from the study include:

- DDA priorities
- Recommendation included creation of a more walkable area through a traffic calming environment and pedestrian connectivity
- Key component is building a modern roundabout at the Hamilton/Okemos Road intersection
- Infill development (encourage live/work areas through mixed use)
- Compact development
- Landscape improvements which invite a traffic calming environment
- Identification of three zones – core zone (four (4) corners of Okemos/Hamilton Roads), downtown zone and edge zone
- Core zone – height restriction for dense development of four (4) stories
- Downtown zone – ring road system of Clinton, Moore, Methodist and Ardmore Streets; finish roads with curb and gutter and allow pedestrian connection with a limit of three (3) stories
- Edge zone – acts as a transition zone to adjacent residential areas with a limit of two (2) stories
- Recommendation for a “hybrid” C-2 pedestrian zoning district would allow for a narrower lot line, prohibit drive-through developments, permit bars/taverns/lounge development
- Recommendation for landscaping which complements each zone

Planning Commission and staff discussion:

- No endorsement by the DDA Board of the consultant's report, although it is interested in the report as a whole

- DDA Board interested in working with the Planning Commission to create an overlay district
- Fall timeline for the DDA Board to make recommendations for an ordinance
- Shared parking spaces for forty (40) foot lots in the core zone
- Recommendation for working group to look at the Lake Lansing overlay district relative to fireproofing buildings close together as a condition of receiving approval for a smaller setback
- Rezoning of current low to medium density residential to RC residential may meet with opposition by the property owners
- Consultant's report as a framework for thoughtful discussion to ensue
- Recommendation for pedestrian signals at Methodist and Clinton Streets to create safety for pedestrians relative to continuous traffic flow through the roundabout
- Demand for type of infill development as part of the planning process
- Formation of the DDA has heightened interest in the potential for property redevelopment
- Informal conversations with stakeholders (e.g., Cedar Bend Heights Neighborhood Association) on the creation of an overlay district
- Study is a twenty (20) year projection
- Consultant drew upon their extensive experience and best practices for the commercial component
- Importance of the DDA Board working with the Planning Commission and the Township Board to achieve mutual goals
- Ways to encourage pedestrians to come to the downtown area without interacting with the roundabout
- Recommendation has little incorporation of access to assets of nearby parks and the river playing a role with the downtown area in this development
- Recommendation mentions other modes of transportation (i.e., bus stops, connection to the neighborhoods)
- Definition of traffic calming as slowing traffic down
- Michigan State University traffic circles are now gone
- Need to look at how pedestrians can traverse the roundabout without crossing traffic (tunnels, overhead pedestrian walkway)
- Okemos Road as a thoroughfare to and from I-96
- Concern with placement of a single lane roundabout on Okemos Road as a traffic calming measure
- Future plans by the Ingham County Road Commission (ICRC) to build several roundabouts in the county
- Intent to create downtown Okemos as a destination that people will drive to, not drive through
- Concern with bicycle lanes on Okemos Road
- Consideration of biking lanes on the side roads

5. Public Remarks

Chair Wilcox opened the floor for public remarks.

Will Tyler White, Vice-President, Downtown Development Authority, 2142-½ Hamilton Road, Okemos, spoke to the difference between traffic circles and roundabouts, a second level pedestrian pathway, the possibility of a shift in the center of downtown Okemos in the future and creation of pedestrian bridges to tie Indian Hills and Tacoma Hills subdivisions to the downtown area.

Chair Wilcox closed public remarks.

6. Communications (None)

7. Public hearings (None)

8. Unfinished Business (None)

9. Other Business

A. Okemos Study Area Update

Principal Planner Oranchak summarized the Okemos Village Study update as outlined in staff memorandum dated June 4, 2009.

Planning Commission discussion:

- Congressional endeavor regarding the Michigan Avenue/Grand River transportation corridor from the State Capitol to Meridian Mall
- Reevaluation of the Master Plan in light of other endeavors taking place for the region
- Uniqueness of downtown Okemos
- Review zoning of the four properties on the north side of Hamilton Road at some point in the future
- Work with the final recommendation from the DDA to identify priorities through a phased approach
- Planning Commission completion of the future study area taking the DDA study into consideration
- Belief the Okemos/Hamilton Road roundabout issue needs to be resolved first and all other aspects will fall into place
- Planning Commission contribution to the process is not dependent upon the reality of a Okemos/Hamilton roundabout
- Planning Commission discussion for the Okemos Study area will focus on zoning, future zoning, etc.,
- Master Plan as a living document which can grow and change
- Need for more definitive recommendation from the DDA prior to changing the Master Plan
- Planning Commission will provide a tool which focuses on redevelopment of the Grand River Corridor and the other areas of small commercial outside of the Grand River Corridor
- Involvement of the DDA in the workshops to be held by the Planning Commission to develop the redevelopment tool may aid in integrating ideas

B. Redevelopment Committee Report

Principal Planner Oranchak summarized redevelopment committee activity to date as outlined in staff memorandum dated June 4, 2009.

Planning Commission discussion:

- Economic factors which have affected the region required the Redevelopment Committee to “rethink” some of the premise for the commercial districts
- Township Board charge to reevaluate the MUPUD ordinance to be more effective as a redevelopment tool
- Frequency of vacancies within the Township
- Demographics and market demand are changing within the region
- Need for a broader visioning process which involves DDA officials, residents and developers
- Visioning process would be educational (new and emerging trends) and provide a better understanding of the complex private/public partnership involved for redevelopment
- Application of techniques such as form based codes
- Finding of the Redevelopment Committee that the majority of the commercial space is in the vicinity of the Grand River corridor
- All variances requested for redevelopment of commercially zoned property in the last ten years occurred on the Grand River corridor
- Need to be proactive on redevelopment in certain areas of the community
- Using the experience of the MUPUD ordinance as a good basis to move forward without making changes to the ordinance
- Two pronged approach: short-term (which would improve the opportunity for

- redevelopment) and long term (key shift in the market demand for the type of commercial space within the Township)
- Opportunities for pocket development along the Grand River corridor
 - Looking at ways to promote redevelopment
 - Refinement of the Planning Commission approach prior to presentation to the Board
 - Stakeholders and property owners' participation in what they would like to see for redevelopment in order to provide specific data to the Board
 - Recruitment of business needs in order to redevelop in Meridian Township
 - Subcommittee discussion included non-traditional means of online resources and design charettes to obtain public input
 - Opportunity to retool attracts redevelopment which will move the Township forward
 - Subcommittee examples of Township and developer partnership
 - Transit oriented design will require the Township to revisit the Grand River corridor
 - Capital Area Transit Authority (CATA) has selected a consultant to work on the preliminary phases of the transit corridor
 - Transit corridor is on a list for congressional transportation funding
 - Request for staff to obtain documentation from the stakeholders committee and the technical committee to forward to the Planning Commission
 - Next step is to address the immediate charge from the Township Board
 - Barriers to redevelopment currently contained in the Township's ordinances (i.e., setbacks)
 - Planning Commission report to the Board will contain the idea of short term changes in ordinances
 - Report from the subcommittee back to the Planning Commission should contain barriers to redevelopment and analyses of both the requested Zoning Board of Appeal variances over the last five (5) years and Special Use Permits (SUP)

10. Announcements

Commissioner Jackson requested information on the technical differences between modern roundabouts and traffic circles.

11. New applications (None)

12. Site plans received (None)

13. Site plans approved (None)

14. Public remarks

Chair Wilcox opened public remarks.

Will Tyler White, 2142-1/2 Hamilton Road, Okemos, urged the Planning Commission to garner information from the Economic Development Corporation on barriers to redevelopment and discussed a possible transportation center on Grand River Avenue.

Chair Wilcox closed public remarks.

15. Adjournment

Chair Wilcox adjourned the regular meeting at 9:08 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra K. Otto
Recording Secretary