

**CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

APPROVED

March 24, 2014

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

PRESENT: Commissioners DeLind, Hildebrandt, Honicky, Ianni, Jackson, Salehi, Scott-Craig
ABSENT: Commissioners Cordill, Deits
STAFF: Township Manager Walsh, Director of Community Planning and Development Mark Kieselbach, Director of Public Works and Engineering Ray Severy, Police Chief David Hall, Fire Chief Fred Cowper, Director of Assessing David Lee, Director of Information and Technology Stephen Gebes, Principal Planner Gail Oranchak

1. Call meeting to order

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

2. Approval of agenda

Commissioner Salehi moved to amend the agenda as follows:

- **Add the special use permit for the new central fire station location as a discussion item.**

Seconded by Commissioner Hildebrandt.

Planning Commission, staff and attorney discussion:

- Special Use Permit (SUP) is still before the Board on appeal and the Planning Commission does not have jurisdiction
- Planning Commissioner belief the attorney hired by the Township stated it was within the Planning Commission's purview to discuss the SUP
- As the SUP is currently before the Township Board, that body should vote to send the SUP back to the Planning Commission for discussion
- Inquiry as to why there is not a different SUP for the revised location of the fire station on the subject site since the Commission Review has received a different number
- Attorney explanation that the special use question has been appealed and is pending before the Township Board
- SUP has not been remanded back to the Planning Commission by the Township Board
- Planning Commission does not have the authority to act on a separate special use permit when there is no application in front of it
- Planning Commission question about Attorney Sluggett's prior comments that it was in the purview of the Planning Commission to make certain all of the t's were crossed and i's were dotted
- Continued concern regarding staff's response to the chair's question at the January 7, 2014 meeting regard whether the Planning Commission would get a motion to deny. For the record, the response was no, that the failure to pass the motion would serve as the Planning Commission's denial
- Confusion surrounding the failure of the Planning Commission's motion to approve the SUP being considered a denial and the potential for a subsequent motion to deny

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 4-3 (Commissioners DeLind, Ianni, Jackson)

Commissioner Scott-Craig moved to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Honicky.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 6-1 (Commissioner Ianni).

3. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Scott-Craig moved to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2014. Seconded by Commissioner Salehi.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 7-0.

4. Public Remarks

Chair Jackson opened the floor for public remarks.

William Fossum, 4996 Hillcrest Avenue, Okemos, spoke in opposition to the proposed location of the new central fire station.

Olga Arellano, 2170 Seminole Drive, Okemos, raised concerns with the proposed location of the new central fire station due to the environmental fragility of the subject parcel.

Juan Arellano, 2170 Seminole Drive, Okemos, spoke in opposition to the proposed location of the new central fire station as he believed it would affect the Ottawa Hills watershed.

Lawrence Nolan, attorney for the Autumn Park Condominium Association, 4765 Nakoma Drive, Okemos, expressed his continued opposition to the proposed location of the new central fire station.

Mike Anderson, 2020 Central Park Drive, Okemos, offered a brief summary of action to date on the new central fire station, expressing his opposition to the proposed location.

Joyce Van Coevering, 5530 Strawberry Lane, Haslett, spoke in support of the proposed location of the new central fire station. She believed the ballot language approved in November, 2012 to fund and construct a new fire station at the proposed location should be the prevailing opinion. Ms. Van Coevering addressed the need for civility by the public when addressing staff, appointed and elected officials.

Bill Priese, 13012 W. Howe Road, Eagle, read a letter on behalf of Dr. Hammer, 4953 Okemos Road, East Lansing, who expressed support for the proposed location of the new central fire station. He reiterated Dr. Hammer's preference for the Township to build something on the land instead of a developer, as the Township would make it a priority to retain as many trees as possible.

David Strobl, 1320 Cove Court, Okemos, emphasized the goal of the Autumn Park Condominium Association was not to affect the quality of life of other homeowners by placing the new central fire station at the proposed location on the 28-acre parcel.

Nanette Alton, 5114 Giesboro Lane, Okemos, spoke in support of the proposed location of the new central fire station.

Vance Kincaid, 4530 Nakoma Drive, Okemos, placed pictures on the overhead of the Okemos Road closure from Central Park Drive to Haslett Road due to flooding. He voiced continued opposition to the proposed location of the new central fire station. Mr. Kincaid spoke to a needed amendment to the 1985 special use permit in order to construct temporary fire services at the Meridian Service Center.

Ann Alchin, 5972 Cypress, Haslett, spoke to the “irritation and annoyance level” of the sirens and motors of emergency vehicles she experienced when she lived in the downtown Okemos area near the now closed central fire station. She voiced her support for a new fire station facility, just not placed near “people’s houses.”

Steven Lamb, 2026 Central Park Drive, Okemos, stated moving the fire station to a different location on the subject property does not address the real concerns previously expressed for the 28 acre parcel. He spoke to the process used to date for the location of the new central fire station.

Renee Korrey, 4633 Okemos Road, Okemos, stated her property values have not decreased due to proximity to the now closed central fire station. She spoke to the need for civility during all meetings. Ms. Korrey voiced her appreciation for the firefighters being good neighbors and would “take them back any time.”

Bill Richardson, 5300 Chantilly Lane, Haslett, spoke to the numerous conversations which transpired over a long period of time about placement for the proposed new central fire station.

Dennis Carpenter, 2155 Clinton Street, Okemos, lived directly across the street from the now closed central fire station for 35 years. He spoke to the fire station as a good neighbor and thanked the firefighters for their community service.

Chair Jackson closed public remarks.

5. Communications

- A. McKenna Community Planning & Design, 235 East Main Street, Suite 105, Northville; RE: City of Williamston Master Plan
- B. Shiawassee County Community Development, 201 N. Shiawassee Street, 3rd Floor, Corunna; RE: Shiawassee County Future Land Use Plan
- C. Ronald Rivard, 3655 Ponderosa Drive, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- D. Bill Richardson, 5300 Chantilly Lane, Haslett; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- E. John McDermott, 4622 Seneca Drive, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- F. Miles McNall, 1711 Shaker Blvd., Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- G. Jewell Muller-Gornick, 653 Canoga Lane, Haslett; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- H. Bob Pangman, 1785 Mirabeau Lane; Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- I. Matthew Walters, 5685 Potter Street, Haslett; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- J. Jeff Rostar, 5073 North Okemos Road, East Lansing; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- K. Matthew Walters, 5685 Potter Street, Haslett; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- L. Cameron Williams, 4486 Tacoma Blvd, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- M. Paul and Priscilla Loonto, 4300 Manitou Drive, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- N. Jason & Ann Johnson, 1931 Oneida Drive, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- O. Rita Peffers, 4932 Sioux Way, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- P. Bruce Peffers, 4932 Sioux Way, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)\
- Q. Elizabeth Meier-Austic, 2198 Seminole Drive, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)

- R. Ed Busch and Leigh White, 1124 Buckingham Road, Haslett; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- S. Karen Amachree, 5327 Chantilly Lane, Haslett; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- T. Kimberly Kortgoede, 5685 Potter Street, Haslett; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- U. Mary LaPorte, 2176 Seminole Drive, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)
- V. Juan & Olga Arellano, 2170 Seminole Drive, Okemos; RE: CR #14033 (Meridian Township)

6. Public hearings

- A. Special Use Permit #14041 (First Housing Corporation), request to modify studio apartments in Phase 1 of Grange Acres and bring all phases into compliance with Section 86-658 Buildings greater than 25,000 square feet

Chair Jackson opened the public hearing at 8:04 P.M.

- Introduction by the Chair (announcement of procedures, time limits and protocols for public participation and applicants)
- Summary of subject matter
Principal Planner Oranchak summarized the special use permit (SUP) request as outlined in staff memorandum dated March 20, 2014.
- Applicant
Tom Lapka, attorney for the applicant, 6177 Graebear Trail, East Lansing, offered history of Grange Acres to date. He noted the studio apartments have experienced a 25% vacancy rate over the last ten (10) years. Mr. Lapka noted the money is available for conversion from studio to one (1) bedroom apartments through Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Dave Gerchak, Executive Vice-President, First Housing Corporation 4275 Five Oaks Drive, Lansing, added that studio apartments are difficult to market and this conversion project will allow all units to be utilized. He stated that since Grange Acres is subsidized housing based on income, the one-bedroom units will cost the occupant the same as a studio apartment.

- Planning Commission discussion:
Commissioner Ianni believed this existing use is not out of keeping with the community. He expressed concern the need for a variance may be an obstacle.

Commissioner Scott-Craig voiced his support for the project and suggested the applicant work with staff in an effort avoid a variance request before the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA).

Principal Planner Oranchak stated where the additions are being placed on the existing units will bring them closer to the parking area and the variance probably cannot be avoided as currently configured.

Commissioner Salehi spoke in support of the project, noting a minor increase in square footage.

Chair Jackson stated all phases of Grange Acres were developed under separate SUPs and this application will bring the four (4) phase Grange Acre project into compliance with Section 86-658.

Commissioner Honicky indicated the floodplain map shows Phase 3 in the floodplain. He inquired if this SUP is agreed to, is the Planning Commission giving permission to work in Phase 3 without coming back to the Planning Commission.

Principal Planner Oranchak replied that any work in Phase 3 would require verification of the floodplain, noting that when Phase 3 of Grange Acres was built, it was not within the floodplain.

Chair Jackson closed the public hearing at 8:20 P.M.

- B. *Commission Review #14033 (Meridian Township), Section 61 review for location, character and extent of proposed fire station on Okemos Road, north of Grand River and south of Central Park Drive

Chair Jackson opened the public hearing at 8:21 P.M.

- **Summary of subject matter**
Township Manager Walsh introduced staff who will present on behalf of the Township as the applicant.
- **Applicant**
Director of Community Planning and Development Mark Kieselbach indicated the commission review of the fire station is pursuant to Section 61 of the Planning Enabling Act and based on the Township's Master Plan. He stated Chapter 61, in general, states prior to construction of a public building, the Planning Commission must review and approve the location, character and extent of the project as to its consistency with the Township's Master Plan. Director Kieselbach added the act does not provide a definition of character, location or extent, but previous Section 61 Reviews looked at their common meaning. He presented a map which showed the proposed location for the fire station is central to the Township and on Okemos Road, a major thoroughfare which runs from Jolly Road north to Lake Lansing Road. Mr. Kieselbach noted it is also close to Grand River Avenue, a major thoroughfare which traverses from Meridian Road to Hagadorn Road and south of Central Park Drive, which connects Okemos Road to Marsh Road and Marsh to Grand River Avenue. He stated Central Park Drive was designed as a ring road to serve the major commercial core area on either side of the ring.

Mr. Kieselbach outlined the new configuration and location of the central fire station on four (4) acres of the 28.5 acre Township-owned site and presented the concept plan on the overhead projector. He noted the building coverage on the four acres to be used for the station represents approximately eight percent (8%), while the building coverage over the entire 28.5 acre parcel would represent 1.12% of the overall coverage. Mr. Kieselbach stated the ordinance allows up to 25% building coverage on a site. He indicated 75% total impervious surface coverage is allowed by ordinance as a non-residential use, and use the four (4) acre site in the calculation would result in 34.25% coverage and 7.12% using the 28.5 acre parcel. Mr. Kieselbach reminded members this need was recognized and addressed in the Community Facilities Chapter, as well as a strategy contained in Goal 5, Objective B of the 2000 Master Plan. He added the new fire station has been in the Capital Improvements Program for at least the last decade. Mr. Kieselbach stated the proposed project meets Township Board Policy 1.2.2 relative to health and safety.

Jeff Sluggett, Bloom Sluggett Morgan, 15 Ionia SW, Suite 640, Grand Rapids stated that, under Section 61 of the Planning Act, the Planning Commission is to focus on the location, character and extent of this proposal in the context of the Master Plan. He noted the standards of the Township's Zoning Ordinance do not directly apply to a Section 61 Review. Mr. Sluggett added the statute clearly states the Planning Commission must identify the grounds for its decision which are then sent to the Township Board.

Tom Bennett, Fishbeck, Thompson Carr and Huber (FTCH), 5913 Executive Drive, Suite 100, Lansing, environmental consultant for the Township, addressed the environmental issues associated with the proposed new central fire station. He indicated the proposed project will not impact wetlands on the parcel, therefore there would be no state jurisdiction or Township wetland regulation over the project. Mr. Bennett stated FTCH did a wetland assessment on the parcel and stormwater will be addressed through a detention basin and the proposed runoff rate cannot exceed the current runoff rate. He clarified once the stormwater is in the detention basin, the pollutants and suspended solids will be filtered and released.

Mr. Bennett indicated the washing of the emergency vehicles will occur inside the bays and the vehicle wash water will travel through a "treatment train" (multiple various treatments in a row): traps to catch basin, released through an oil separation system to the sanitary sewer and then to the East Lansing Meridian Water and Sewer Authority (ELMWSA) treatment facility. He stated there will be no impact to groundwater and therefore no groundwater vulnerability and no water is leaving the site and going to the wetland community. Mr. Bennett stated all ground surfaces are within a watershed on this planet. He noted water would be managed on the site through best management practices, i.e., external flow into the detention basin and internally through the treatment train. Mr. Bennett stated as the Township's environmental consultant, he could not see denial of this commission review based on the scientific evidence.

Director of Public Works and Engineering Ray Severy addressed the condition of both Central Park Drive from Okemos Road across Marsh Road to Grand River Avenue and Okemos Road from Central Park Drive to Jolly Road. He stated the Ingham County Road Department (ICRD) classifies both roads as Class A all-weather roads for trucks, which means they are not affected by load restrictions and can accommodate heavy trucks year round. Mr. Severy added the ICRD is working to obtain funding from both the state and federal government to repave Central Park Drive within the next two to three (2-3) years.

Mr. Severy stated the Township intends to retain the original plan for the internal vehicle washing system and displayed the plan on the overhead projector. He showed the trench drain in each bay which will send the water to catch basins and then to two (2) oil separators outside the building prior to flowing into the sanitary sewer system. Mr. Severy noted that according to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) requirements, trucks must be washed inside the building. He pointed out the highlighted detention area which controls the flow of water off-site at preconstruction rates, which means that the project will not impact flood levels downstream. Mr. Severy also showed a map which highlighted the location of the wetlands on the subject site approximately 200 feet south of the proposed parking lot.

Township Assessor David Lee stated he looked at two existing condominium developments adjacent to the south fire station to determine if a fire station had an effect on marketability of nearby residential properties. He indicated there have been six (6) sales in 2013-2014 within the Coyote Creek Condominium development to the west of the south fire station which is an indicator of good marketability of the units. Assessor Lee also compared the Fieldstone Village Condominiums, a development adjacent to the south fire station to the north and highly comparable to Autumn Park in age of construction, size and quality of construction. He stated the condominiums were developed after the construction of the south fire station and experienced four (4) sales in 2013. Assessor Lee believed the market evidence supports there would be no significant negative influence on the marketability of any surrounding residential property to the proposed fire station.

Gerald Richards, retired Township Manager, 3986 E. Sunwind Drive, Okemos, addressed the site selection process. He noted multiple Township owned sites were considered in the process of planning for the replacement of the central fire station previously located in downtown Okemos. Mr. Richards stated the municipal complex site was considered and eliminated due to floodplain restrictions and lack of buildable area. He indicated the property across from the Younker's Men's Store on Central Park Drive was eliminated due to unstable soils. Mr. Richards indicated the Service Center area on Gaylord C. Smith Court was looked at; however, floodplain issues with resulting insufficient buildable area was ascertained. He stated the old Clinton Street location, including the Meridian Area Resource Center (MARC) property, was looked at but rush hour traffic on Okemos Road, the cost of demolition and use as prime commercial development precluded its selection. Mr. Richards believed the proposed site was, and continues to be, the best site for location of a replacement station due to its location within the central business core of the Township and location between the north and south railroad tracks. He noted the subject property was purchased as a general fund expenditure consistent with the Township's adopted Future Land Use Plan.

Mr. Richards stated two additional sites on East Grand River Avenue were considered. He indicated a parcel on the market located at the southeast corner of Grand River and Washington Heights was studied but considered unsuitable because of size limitations, building restrictions due to wetlands, concern with left hand turns traveling westbound on Grand River Avenue and the high cost of the land. Mr. Richards noted a parcel further east of the "Sparrow Building" on Grand River was also studied, but determined unsuitable as it did not have immediate direct access to the municipal sewer system, was located further away from the central core, and contained sloping terrain which would need to be removed from the site in order to make it buildable.

Mr. Richards recalled the 2012 Board added the location of the fire station to the ballot language to specifically identify the site to voters.

Director of Information and Technology Stephen Gebes stated his department ran approximately a dozen different simulations regarding traffic relative to the different site locations between the summers of 2009 and 2012. He noted considerations included advantages and disadvantages to two-station responses, equipment movement inside facilities, density of calls, increase/decrease of calls over the last five (5) years regarding placement to anticipate future usage, current commercial concentration which needs fire service protection, concentration of residents for EMS response, etc. He availed himself for questions relative to the model used.

Police Chief David Hall, addressed the traffic and how it affects Central Park Drive and Okemos Road. He stated there would be unsafe conditions to suggested access to the site near JC Penney “behind the post office” and would prevent easy access. Chief Hall believed it would be difficult and confusing for motorists attempting to locate the access to the fire station and envisioned vehicles pulling onto the fire ramp due to lack of access off primary roads. He stated exiting out into Meridian Mall’s parking lot to Central Park Drive would require three (3) turns and even more turns to access Grand River, both of which are not a desirable exit from the premises. Chief Hall expressed grave concern with the public suggestion of using the “cut through” from Meridian Mall to Okemos Road.

Chief Hall addressed his concern for non-fire traffic with the suggestion of going out to Okemos Road either north or south of the fire station. He stated the traffic will back up more on Okemos Road at the light than Central Park Drive at the light. He indicated an informal survey conducted showed the traffic load on Okemos Road is greater (63%) than on Central Park Drive (37%). Chief Hall concluded his remarks by stating it is safer to exit the traffic from the fire station property onto Central Park Drive as there is clear sight distance and stacked traffic would be on the opposite side of the road. He also expressed concern with motorists “waving traffic through” for vehicles exiting the parking drive onto Okemos Road, indicating there will be little backup at the light on Central Park Drive.

Jeff Sluggett reviewed the language in the fifth and sixth WHEREAS clauses and NOW THEREFORE clause as to the proposal’s consistency with the Township’s Master Plan, the Capital Improvements Program and provided staff memorandum.

Township Manager Walsh addressed the ballot language passed by the taxpayers of Meridian Township in 2012. He spoke to changes made as a result of neighborhood input regarding the impact the proposed fire station would have on both the Autumn Park condominiums and the Ottawa Hills neighborhood. Manager Walsh indicated a fire station is a community facility used for a variety of reasons and cannot be “hidden.” He reminded Planning Commissioners that many Ottawa Hills residents are in support of the fire station at the proposed location, across from two (2) or three (3) homes in a Township comprised of approximately 16,000 parcels. He spoke to the future of the property if the project is denied, as 140 apartments with 300 parking spaces could be constructed with special use permit approval.

- Public

Leonard Provencher, 5824 Buena Parkway, Haslett, spoke in opposition to the proposal as he believed the procedure has been tainted since prior to the November, 2012 election. He indicated the public was not informed and he believed the information presented by the Township this evening were opinions, not facts. Mr. Provencher stated the primary reason this location was selected was because the Township owned the property and wanted to make use of it. He stated it is the wrong location and would have a negative effect on residents of Autumn Park, Ottawa Hills, the subject parcel and the Township as a whole.

Heather Jones-Clark, 1955 Penobscot Drive, Okemos, voiced support for the proposed location of the new central fire station. As a licensed realtor, she offered insight into the value of the Autumn Park Condominiums, stating nine (9) of the 14 units in the complex were sold as foreclosed property. Ms. Jones-Clark indicated when the condominiums were built in 2005, the subject site had been and continued to be zoned as a developable and buildable parcel of land. She indicated she will have an easier time selling one of the condominiums with the fire station located on the corner of Okemos Road and Central Park Drive rather than a potential multi-family medium density development. Ms. Jones-Clark stated the proposed fire station is a minimum use of the parcel which leaves the portion of the site directly across from the Autumn Park condominium buildings untouched.

Bill Richardson, 5300 Chantilly Lane, Haslett, addressed the “HUD noise requirement”, noting federal law indicates the 65 decibels are an average over a 24-hour period. He addressed the fact that a 1.2% use of the site is a significantly smaller impact than construction of a 140-unit apartment complex. Mr. Richardson requested the Planning Commission take action this evening as the residents deserve a decision.

Ed Jones, 1955 Penobscot, Okemos, stated there are many nuances involved in the new central fire station issue. He noted the voters approved a millage for the new station in 2012. After listening to the presentation by the Township, Mr. Jones was convinced the “professionals” know what they are talking about. He spoke in favor of moving ahead with the construction of the central fire station.

Mike Anderson, 2020 Central Park Drive, Okemos, believed it easy for residents to speak in favor of something that does not directly affect them. He addressed the issue of this proposal not being a “replacement” fire station, but including a training facility, warehouse, administrative offices, a temporarily eliminated four (4) story training tower and a 61 car parking lot. Mr. Anderson spoke to the effect the fire station will have on the quality of life for residents of Autumn Park Condominiums.

Betsy Strobl, 2056 Central Park Drive, Okemos, believed the residents of Ottawa Hills should have been involved in the “compromise” meeting. She suggested a traffic study be conducted by the ICRD. She noted six (6) of the Fieldstone condominiums are currently for sale, four (4) of which are within the first seven (7) buildings closest to the south fire station.

Barbara Strobl, 1320 Cove Court, Okemos, addressed what she characterized as negative impacts of the proposed central fire station on nearby residents. She believed this issue to be one of ethics.

Steven Lamb, 2026 Central Park Drive, Okemos, addressed what he believed is an existing traffic problem at Okemos Road and Central Park Drive which requires further research before placing an additional ingress/egress in the area.

David Strobl, 1320 Cove Court, Okemos, spoke to the issue of noise as an environmental concern. He read from the HUD noise requirements which states “loud impulse sounds are similarly accommodated if confirmed”, alleging loud impulse noise is a siren (123 decibels) and would not fit the HUD requirements. He challenged much of the information presented by the applicant, asserting some things were omitted relative to the Master Plan.

Vance Kincaid, 4530 Nakoma Drive, Okemos, suggested this issue is about process and procedure. He indicated there has been no information from the Ingham County Drain Commissioner (ICDC) or a traffic engineer on the Section 61 Review. He offered “facts” on the process and the issue. Mr. Kincaid requested the Township do the right thing and look for a more appropriate location. He suggested land on each side of Okemos Road, part of which is the homestead from which Nancy Moore Park was created.

Lawrence Nolan, attorney for Autumn Park Condominium Association, 4765 Nakoma Drive, Okemos, questioned why there is another Section 61 Review vote this evening as he believed the Planning Commission had previously denied the review. He read excerpts from the statute relative to a Section 61 Review which states the Planning Commission must approve the review. Mr. Nolan indicated very little had changed since the last time the Planning Commission reviewed the proposed fire station project, other than the building has been turned sideways and now exits out onto Okemos Road. He questioned whether the residents of Ottawa Hills were given notice of this review.

- Planning Commission discussion:
Commissioner Ianni stated the applicant has provided extensive testimony as to why the proposed location was chosen, i.e., centrally located near the business district. He believed it important for the fire station to be located on this site, in part, due to flooding as demonstrated by pictures shown on the overhead this evening. Commissioner Ianni indicated the proposed public building will not be detrimental to the area and will produce minimal disruption given the ability to change the traffic light on Okemos Road. He noted the building has been reduced in size from the previous plan, with the project covering only 1.12% of the overall 28.5 acre parcel. Commissioner Ianni stated the environmental consultant offered testimony that it will not have any effect on the wetlands or groundwater and believed the environmental concerns raised by the public have been adequately addressed.

Commissioner Hildebrandt did not believe the fire station issue was appropriately vetted. She asked Environmental Commission Chair Ned Jackson to come to the podium to offer insight.

Environmental Commission Chair Ned Jackson stated there is no formal expertise on the Commission for noise or traffic issues. He stated it is the first time the Planning Commission has asked the Environmental Commission to comment on a Section 61 Review and the Township is “digging deep” to assess the situation as fairly and thoroughly as possible. Chair Ned Jackson stated Environmental Commissioners were asked if the footprint was environmentally acceptable as drawn and several members walked the site in order to respond. Chair Jackson indicated the conclusions drawn by the Environmental Commission were the same as Mr. Bennett’s findings.

Commissioner Hildebrandt inquired how increasing the impervious surface to 34.25 percent will affect the flooding on Okemos Road and in Ottawa Hills.

Director Severy responded runoff from the site will go to a detention area, whose purpose is to control the run-off rate flow. He added ICDC requirements mandate that run-off from the site after development must not exceed the pre-construction rate and that requirement will be at the forefront when the stormwater system is designed. Director Severy clarified the traffic signal at the exit onto Okemos Road will control northbound traffic only and be triggered by the emergency vehicle driver within the station. He added the “button” would also stop all southbound traffic on Okemos Road and westbound traffic on Central Park Drive.

Commissioner Hildebrandt inquired if the traffic light has been approved by the county.

Director Severy responded he has had conversations with the county and its representative has agreed that the light can be installed, adding the permit has not yet been requested as the site has not been approved.

Commissioner Hildebrandt inquired if the ICDC will be consulted.

Director Kieselbach replied in the affirmative, adding the ICDC is typically consulted during site plan review.

Commissioner Hildebrandt inquired as to the advantage of having all three (3) fire stations on Okemos Road.

Director Gebes replied a fire station close to the primary arteries which have good north/south and east/west access provide better response times to the extremities of the Township. He clarified the rationale is not necessarily proximity to Okemos Road, but the primary arteries which provide the best network improvements for responses to the various areas of the Township.

Commissioner Hildebrandt inquired if the proposed site provided optimal response times.

Director Gebes showed response time maps on the overhead, indicating moving the station to the east would improve response time to the Meridian Road corridor, but provide longer response time in the Hannah Plaza, etc. He provided a map which showed parcel density within the Township and added there is a high density of calls along Marsh Road, which were factors when considering how to reduce response times. He stated the proposed location was the best of the sites available to the Township.

Commissioner Hildebrandt inquired as to the addition of trees which was made last week to the site.

Township Manager Walsh stated he reached out to Autumn Park residents and offered to move the ingress/egress on Central Park Drive to the west (facing an open field) and added 10-14 trees, which species will be determined by the Environmental Commission. He also discussed relocation of the Farmers Market on a portion of the site to develop a community space in the future.

Commissioner Hildebrandt expressed continued concern due to flooding on Okemos Road. She indicated the regional 2035 Transportation Plan shows no current mitigation for the flooding until 2031 and inquired about response times based on the flooding of Okemos Road. She believed the possibility of a negative impact on response times from flooding to be much greater than those from the railroad tracks.

Director Gebes replied the area of response is the thinner wedge of the Township, so the central station would be responding to the Grand River side. He stated the north station is covering primary response north of the railroad tracks and north of the flooding area. Director Gebes acknowledged there are one (1) or two (2) small properties between the railroad tracks and the flooding area, but if the station was placed north of the flood area, it would not have the ability to provide service to the central portion of the Township.

Chair Jackson inquired if this commission review has a different number from the previous review for the 28.5 acre parcel because it is a different location and a different design.

Director Kieselbach replied the number assigned to a case is only for tracking purposes by the Planning Department.

Chair Jackson asked if the project has a different number because it is a different location on Township owned property.

Director Kieselbach replied in the affirmative.

Commissioner Hildebrandt inquired if the police chief believed the best entrance/exit was on Central Park Drive.

Police Chief Hall responded in the affirmative.

Commissioner Hildebrandt pointed out this Section 61 review has the exit onto Okemos Road and that configuration is problematic.

Police Chief Hall replied his remarks relative to the best location for the entrance/exit on Central Park Drive related to use by regular vehicular traffic.

Commissioner DeLind believed the flooding on Okemos Road proved the need for a centrally located fire station. He stated this location was approved by the voting public.

Commissioner Scott-Craig inquired if the language contained in the RESOLVE clause of the resolution irrevocably tied the resolution to the new site plan. He expressed concern that the language is not clear and was working to write language which provided clarity.

Mr. Sluggett replied the intent of the language was to incorporate, by reference, the memorandum from staff. If the Planning Commission felt the staff memorandum did not adequately highlight the particular layout on Okemos Road, he believed the commission could modify the resolution in order to tie it to the specific proposal presented at tonight's meeting.

Commissioner Salehi objected to acting on this issue through a resolution this evening since a large amount of information has been presented. He believed it more appropriate to discuss this issue in depth over the course of three (3) meetings. Commissioner Salehi believed maps presented by the applicant should include surrounding land 1,000 feet from the subject site as there are homes within that perimeter. He believed this proposal looks "worse" than the last proposal which was not approved because it would affect more residents who live in the area surrounding the subject site. Commissioner Salehi stated he walked a 700 foot radius of the proposed location last week and received input from eight (8) of 20 homeowners, noting that seven (7) of those property owners spoke against the proposed location. He believed he must take the quality of life into consideration for those residents most directly impacted.

Commissioner Salehi read excerpts from Section 86-654 (e) of the Township's ordinances regarding non-residential structures in a residential district. He provided a map on the overhead which he believed showed the proposed location does not meet the language which states preference at the edge of a residential district. Commissioner Salehi also believed the location does not offer a natural or man-made barrier which would lessen the effect of the intrusion as written in that same ordinance section. He stated the proposed location does not meet Master Plan Goal #1 of preserving and strengthening existing and future residential neighborhoods.

Commissioner Salehi pointed to a letter from Christopher Johnson which expressed support for the replacement fire station, but voiced a preference for the previously proposed location on the site. He stated the 14,000 square feet for the new design did not include the pole barn to house emergency equipment.

Commissioner Salehi noted he performed an internet search at Google Scholar on fire station location study to see how other municipalities handle placement of a new fire station facility. He stated it is a well-recognized research problem, but did not believe Planning Commissioners were provided with any detailed scientific studies regarding response times, cost and other metrics. He spoke to a troubling e-mail received today which stated an April, 2012 Board presentation revealed the average response time of the Central Park Drive/Okemos Road site was 1.5-2.5 minutes further than the Dobie Road/Grand River site. Commissioner Salehi indicated the Assessor's comments were directed toward the number of sales which occurred in the Fieldstone Condominiums near the south fire station, not the price at which they were sold. He did not believe the number of sales an adequate assessment.

Commissioner Honicky believed the municipal complex site meets the metrics for the proposed fire station. He expressed concern with the amount of "work arounds" needed to construct the fire station at the proposed location. Commissioner Honicky stated there needs to be a way to shield noise regardless of the specific location of the central fire station.

Commissioner Scott-Craig inquired if there have been any meetings with the residents of Ottawa Hills.

Township Manager Walsh responded the Township reached out to Ottawa Hills residents by walking the neighborhood. He added that wherever the station is located, some residents will object to its placement.

Commissioner Scott-Craig believed the initial exit out of the fire station will direct noise, sirens and lights out front into one direction and there must be a way to shield the residents directly across Okemos Road.

Township Manager Walsh responded that the emergency responder will have the ability to change the light to stop traffic in order to exit onto Okemos Road. He reminded Planning Commissioners there are four (4) to five (5) calls per day out of this station, with two (2) to three (3) calls each on Okemos Road or Central Park Drive. Manager Walsh stated the Township took care in positioning the fire station north of the Hillcrest intersection.

Commissioner DeLind believed the Township has shown there must be a third fire station to adequately protect all residents and it would be negligent to prevent having a new and modern facility for the residents who previously approved its construction through a majority vote.

Commissioner Hildebrandt recapped the position of residents who lived near the now closed central fire station and Christopher Johnson's letter regarding the high volume of calls along Marsh Road. She believed if you tie the density of calls, the flooding and the overpass for trains on Marsh Road, this is not the best location within the Township.

Commissioner Salehi stated he designated the center of the Township on a zoning map and that location is the post office, signifying the proposed location is at the center of the Township. He indicated his intuition, science and engineering backgrounds in evaluating optimization problems indicate the third fire station is placed in a location dependent, in part, on the other two (2) locations. He believed the proposed location was selected to save money as the Township owned the property.

Chair Jackson believed the proposed location was based largely on the fact the other two stations are located on the other side of railroad tracks. She expressed appreciation to the applicant for all of the information presented, investigating all of the issues raised by residents and offering possible compromises. She reminded fellow Commissioners that they consider the opinions of professionals in other Section 61 Reviews prior to making their decision based on that information.

Chair Jackson closed the public hearing at 10:55 P.M.

7. Unfinished Business

- A. *Commission Review #14033 (Meridian Township), Section 61 review for location, character and extent of proposed fire station on Okemos Road, north of Grand River and south of Central Park Drive

Commissioner Ianni moved [and read into the record] NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, FOR THE REASONS STATED HEREIN INCLUDING THE MEMORANDUM OF COMMISSION REVIEW #14033, DATED MARCH 20, 2014, WHICH BASES ARE HEREBY FURTHER ADOPTED, THE PLANNING COMMISSION OF THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN approves the location, character and extent of the proposed Central Fire Station as described in the Memorandum of Commission Review #14033, dated March 20, 2014 and as depicted in the attached site plan. Seconded by Commissioner DeLind.

Planning Commission discussion:

- Township reviewed a number of locations throughout the community and chose this location, in part, due to response times and ability to construct on the subject land
- Suggestion to locate the fire station at the municipal complex would require construction within the floodplain
- Township conducted an accurate scientific study
- Subject site meets the character, location and extent

Commissioner Scott-Craig offered the following friendly amendment:

- **Insert after “proposed central fire station” in the RESOLVE clause “as described in the memorandum of Commission Review #14033 dated March 20, 2014 and as depicted in the attached site plan”**
- **Delete “located on a 28.5 acre site.” in the RESOLVE clause**

The amendment was accepted by the maker of the motion.

Planning Commission and applicant discussion:

- Possibility of a barrier to serve as a buffer on the other side of Okemos Road
- Barrier must be outside of the public right-of-way
- Barrier would need to be on private property across Okemos Road from the emergency vehicle exit
- Township does not have a right to install a barrier on private property
- Practical approach of the Township to offer a tree line barrier if the property owners were amenable
- Neighbors not likely to want a sound barrier wall in front of their property along Okemos Road
- Possible methods of minimizing the impact of sirens for residents in Ottawa Hills
- Placement of the traffic light at the emergency vehicle exit onto Okemos Road will stop and clear traffic which will minimize the impact on the neighborhood
- Possible placement of the fire station on the 28.5 acre parcel south of the post office
- Placement of the fire station across from residences is a “non-starter”
- Commitment by the Township to continue to work with the residents of Ottawa Hills to offer the potential of screening along Okemos Road across from the proposed fire station (i.e., trees, wooden fence)

Commissioner Honicky offered the following friendly amendment:

- **Add a 7th WHEREAS clause which reads: “WHEREAS, the Township commits to sound screening to address emergency vehicle exits if neighbors are in agreement.”**

The amendment was accepted by the maker of the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE: YEAS: Commissioners DeLind, Ianni, Scott-Craig, Chair Jackson
 NAYS: Commissioners Hildebrandt, Honicky, Salehi
 Motion carried 4-3.

B. Special Use Permit #13121

Commissioner Hildebrandt moved to suspend Planning Commission Bylaw 5.14 to allow an agenda item to be introduced for discussion after 10:00 P.M. Seconded by Commissioner Salehi.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried 4-3 (Commissioners DeLind, Ianni, Jackson)

Planning Commission and attorney discussion:

- Need for an explanation as to why a special use permit review by the Planning Commission is not needed as the fire station site plan has changed and moved on the parcel
- SUP #13121 was approved by the Planning Commission on September 9, 2013 and is still pending before the Township Board on appeal
- Section 86-189 of the Township's Zoning Ordinance provides the Township Board with the authority to affirm the decision of the Planning Commission with or without modification, said modification to include placement on the subject parcel
- Approval of the SUP is for the entire 28.5 acre parcel
- Section 61 Review is required under state statute
- Motion to approve the previous Section 61 Review failed on a 5-4 vote, hence no action was taken
- Request for clarification if a failure to approve a resolution is equivalent to a denial
- Attorney Sluggett's expressed belief that a motion to approve which fails is not the same as a motion to deny
- Concern the Planning Commission believes it can take action on a SUP when there is not an application in front of it
- Planning Commissioner belief it is within the Planning Commission's purview to readdress the SUP which it failed to approve through voting on a denial
- Planning Commissioner belief special counsel stated during a Township Board meeting the Planning Commission could readdress the SUP
- Inquiry if the Planning Commission will be consulted on the new design of the proposed fire station after the Board makes a decision on the SUP before it
- Special counsel's belief the Township Board is not legally required to send the SUP back to the Planning Commission for further input after it votes on the issue
- It is within the Township Board's authority to send the SUP back to the Planning Commission for further input if it so chooses
- Appreciation that rendering a legal opinion "on the fly" is difficult without time for thorough research
- Request for the Planning Commission to be provided with any information as a result of special counsel finding precedent or any verbiage in Robert's Rules of Order which clarifies whether failure to approve is a denial
- Reiteration that the process should have been slowed down after receiving so much information this evening

9. Township Board, Planning Commission officer, committee chair, and staff comment or reports

Commissioner Scott-Craig reported his attendance at the Capital Area Transportation Authority (CATA)-Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) charette in East Lansing on March 19th as well as the related work in progress presentation last evening. He noted that Areas 7, 8 and 9 of the BRT are in Meridian Township and stakeholder group meetings will be held on April 16th, one at Wardcliff School and two in the Town Hall Room of the Meridian Municipal Building. In response to Planning Commissioner inquiry, he added that previous group meetings had been taped for later viewing.

Commissioner Salehi indicated his walk through some neighborhoods within the community last week was a new and interesting experience. He encouraged fellow Commissioners to do the same in an effort to hear citizen input about the issues within Meridian Township.

10. New applications (None)

11. Site plans received (None)

12. Site plans approved (None)

13. Public remarks

Chair Jackson opened public remarks.

Juan Arellano, 2170 Seminole Drive, Okemos, spoke to his four (4) years of service on the Planning Commission. He expressed concern that he lives within 1,000 feet of the proposed fire station and was not contacted by the Township to solicit his input. Mr. Arellano believed the offer to install a line of trees as a buffer to the fire station is an empty gesture, given the lack of maintenance for tree lines installed when both Central Park Drive and the Meijer Store were constructed.

Vance Kincaid, 4530 Nakoma Drive, Okemos, spoke to his concerns with the pole barn, parking lot, traffic study, noticing requirements and other issues related to the proposed new central fire station location. He believed the vote on Commission Review #14033 tonight was premature as proper procedure has not been followed, stating residents across the street of the new location on the subject site were not notified.

In response to the Chair's inquiry, Principal Planner Oranchak stated the noticing requirements for commission review is for a legal ad to be placed in a newspaper of general circulation. She indicated there is no requirement in either state law or the Township's ordinance for commission reviews to be noticed in the same manner as special use permits or zoning matters.

David Strobl, 1320 Cove Court, Okemos, expressed disappointment that noise and its impact on nearby neighbors was the topic that received the least expert opinion during the public hearing on Commission Review #14033. He stated a line of trees or wooden fence was an insufficient barrier to block the 123 decibels which will be emitted from emergency vehicle sirens exiting onto Okemos Road.

Mike Anderson, 2020 Central Park Drive, Okemos, requested Planning Commissioners visualize a 14 foot wall across the front yard of their homes in an attempt to create a barrier against the noise emitted from emergency vehicle sirens exiting onto Okemos Road and how an explanation for its need would translate to a potential buyer of their home.

Trustee John Veenstra, 320 Piper Road, Haslett, expressed appreciation for the advice he receives from the Planning Commission and suggested such advice be made clear. He suggested that, in the future, if the Planning Commission does not approve an issue, it should pass a clear motion to deny. Trustee Veenstra stated it was his opinion that since the Planning Commission failed to approve SUP #13121 when it was before the Commission in January, it could now pass a motion to deny. He believed since the change in location required a new Section 61 Review, it is logical to require new consideration of the SUP. He requested that when that is done, the Township notify all property owners within 300 feet of the proposed location to avoid people complaining they had no knowledge of the project.

Lawrence Nolan, attorney for the Autumn Park Condominium Association, 4765 Nakoma Drive, Okemos, stated Autumn Park residents are only asking to enjoy a residential piece of property. He addressed the issue of the 28.5 acre parcel currently being zoned residential. Mr. Nolan questioned whether the Grand River/Dobie Road site had a quicker response time for the residents who “really need” it in Meridian Township. He expressed disappointment with the Planning Commission’s vote on Commission Review #14033.

Leonard Provencher, 5824 Buena Parkway, Haslett, thanked Planning Commissioners for their insightful questions this evening. He took exception to a comment made by the Chair regarding listening only to the expert professional opinion.

Chair Jackson clarified that similar to all other cases, expert opinion is provided to Planning Commissioners and it is considered among all the information received at a public hearing.

Chair Jackson closed public remarks.

14. Adjournment

Chair Jackson adjourned the regular meeting at 12:04 A.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sandra K. Otto
Recording Secretary