

**WILLIAMSTOWN TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
MINUTES – 7/26/23**

CALL TO ORDER

The Williamstown Township Planning Commission convened at 7:00pm at the Township Hall, 4990 Zimmer Road, Williamston, MI. Vice-Chair Stanford called the meeting to order and reviewed the agenda.

PRESENT: Vice-Chair Stanford, Commissioners Giese, Flore, Poth, Brinker, Tocarchick and Trustee Creagh.

ABSENT: Commissioner Weston, Chair Eidt. Quorum established.

ALSO PRESENT: Planning Consultant Chris Doozan of McKenna and Jim Howard, Planning Assistant.

Vice-Chair Stanford led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Brinker, second by Poth to approve the agenda.

Motion approved 7-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Creagh, second by Brinker to approve the minutes of 5/24/23.

Trustee Creagh offered a slight correction at the top of page #4.

Motion approved with correction 7 – 0.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Roz Peacock, 1353 Germany, expressed concerns about the draft wind and solar ordinances – needs to be unfriendly to development; the 400 foot height; it would be helpful to hear from energy companies. Has talked with property owners along Germany, most surprised, don't want it. Not sure solar works with farmland, what about forest land. Has issues with map #8.

Andrew Mason, 1030 Germany, has concerns about aesthetics, robbing people of what they moved here for.

Resident on Epley Road agrees with the previous comments, loves the farmland.

Todd Granger, 542 Haslett, doesn't want to see his property rights being taken away; doesn't want to see 500 foot turbines. Need to be more restrictive, no insurance or acreage requirements.

Ben Byelicch, 4835 Zimmer, doesn't like how it's written – as if by a company in the business. Need more restrictions, would be a permanent detriment.

Public comment closed at 7:19pm.

PUBLIC HEARING

None.

At the suggestion of the vice-chair, motion was made by Tocarchick, second by Brinker to move New Business up ahead of Unfinished Business.

Motion approved 7 – 0.

NEW BUSINESS

- *Special Use permit and Site Plan Review for an event barn at 5820 Shoeman Rd.*

Chris D. reviewed his two memos.

In general the plans were very lacking with numerous deficiencies. In particular item #4 on page 4 needs to be resolved as only one event barn is allowed per parcel; the plans indicate 2. Also item #5 – attendance limit of 150 people needs to be clarified.

Discussion:

- The SUP application is also very lacking
- Applicant has copy of the letters
- The project's lack of alignment with the ordinance
- The 2 barns are existing – can they use one at a time?
- The intent was to start out slow which is the reason for the 150 person limit

David Wilson, representing the project said they understand this is the first submission under the new ordinance but this is a unique property. Have had discussions with the health department and the lagoon system will be replaced with septic systems. They are here for the SUP approval, and Williamstown Township is unique in the state to require both at same time. He mentioned all the money spent so far and that they have submitted the traffic study. The north portion of the property will be a hayfield to provide a buffer.

The 2nd barn will be an accessory building; for example might have a rehearsal dinner there; the smaller building will not have plumbing. They are aware of the 150 limit, but are looking toward the future. He mentioned a possible Sparrow event and that the building is .8 of a mile back from the road.

He wants the SUP approval to be contingent on site plan approval and wants the public hearing.

Chris D. stated that Mr. Wilson was incorrect and that the traffic study indicated 2 event barns.

Mr. Wilson stated that things change.

Commissioner Tocarchick suggested that if things do change it may require a new traffic study.

Mr. Wilson asked what is the purpose of a public hearing, and that it could be called for by property owners within 300 feet. All buildings exist and there is no reason to delay the project.

Commissioner Stanford stated they need more information.

Motion by Poth, second by Brinker to table the issue until the September meeting.

Motion approved 7 – 0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

○ *Wind and Solar Energy Systems*

Chris D. provided an overview for the audience. The state is requesting that companies expand their green energy facilities, which must be connected to the grid. The state may preempt local control. Regarding a wind turbine height of 500 feet, “the higher, the fewer.” No property rights are being taken away by the township – the owners sign the leases.

Chris then reviewed his letter and the Scenic Hudson information.

Discussion:

- Clarification over prime farmland and prime farmland if drained
- Implications for exclusionary zoning and potential of legal challenges
- Companies typically want 1,000 + acres, or 2,000
- Refine overlay district map
- State looking for 1% of land for solar which = 370,000 acres
- Use of more marginal lands
- Eliminate wellhead protection area from proposed overlay map

Motion by Tocarchick, second by Flore to table the issue to the next meeting.

Motion approved 7 – 0.

PLANNING AND BOARD REPORTS AND REVIEW

Township Board Report: Trustee Creagh reported the board approved an additional Eagle Scout project, and paving of the Township Park drive with ARPA funds; discussion of ADUs due to the recent project on Haslett road.

Commissioner Stanford discussed the CIP, a recent meeting at the Township, how projects are initiated and reviewed the draft plan with the forms.

CORRESPONDENCE

The response letter to the draft Master Plan for Perry Township, Shiawassee County was mentioned.

CITIZEN COMMENT

Roz Peacock asked whether a small committee could be formed to work with developers, and whether projects could be put on “Engage Williamstown” or the website.

Kurt Guter, 4045 Cygnet relayed an experience he has had on property he owns in White River Township (Muskegon County, 290 acres) where he and others signed solar leases in 2018 with the total over 2,000 acres. He stated that excluding prime farmland will mean no solar projects in Williamstown Township, and that a solar lease represents a revenue stream for retiring farmers. He asked how to communicate with the public (via a newsletter or e-newsletter?) and provided some written comments.

REVIEW

Vice-Chair Stanford reviewed the PC’s actions from the meeting:

- Approved the minutes of May 24, 2023;
- Took public comment on the draft wind and solar amendments;
- Discussed the proposed event barn for 5820 Shoeman Rd. and tabled the project until the September meeting;
- Resumed discussion of the draft wind and solar amendments and tabled them until the September meeting;
- Discussed the draft CIP.

VC Stanford also asked the question about how prime farmland is being used, what is actively farmed and how to get that information.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Poth, second by Commissioner Brinker to adjourn.

Meeting adjourned at 9:28 pm.

Jim Howard
Recording Secretary

Secretary Giese