

Sept 8, 2016

The Portage Township Planning Commission Sept 8, 2016 meeting was called to order by acting chair Ted Soldan at 7:00 PM. Present were Ted Soldan, John Ligon, Connie Sherry, Dave Rulison, and Peggy Anderson. Guests Bruce Petersen, Tyler Ross, Chris Hoffman, Bill Bingham, John Ollila, and Emma Hitch were also present. Chair Melanie Watkins arrived a few minutes late and assumed the chair of the meeting.

The minutes from the July 6, 2016 meeting were approved on a motion by Peggy, seconded by Dave, and passed.

Tyler Ross and Chris Hoffman were introduced to the commission. They had approached John Ollila and Bill Bingham about opening a medical marijuana clinic in the Copper Country Mall. John and Bill determined that this type of clinic was legal in Michigan similar to a drugstore and provisionally granted approval, but suggested Tyler and Chris attend the planning commission meeting to answer questions. Tyler stated he is a certified caregiver.

Bruce asked them for an update on the State of Michigan regulations. Tyler said he had a lot of experience with medical marijuana clinics, and that what they planned to do fell within the regulations. He said that current regulations do not allow edibles or concentrates. Tyler offered to consult with the commission in updating the zoning ordinance, and suggested the medical marijuana clinic might be a source of revenue for the township. The commissioners expressed skepticism about that claim.

John Ollila suggested we add a category "medical marijuana caregiver facility" to the B1 zone in the zoning manual. The commission agreed to look into this at a future meeting.

The commission affirmed John and Bill's approval of the proposed medical marijuana clinic.

John told the commission he'd been approached by Jeff Radcliffe regarding a hard cider facility including a tasting room in the township. John said he had not had a follow-up from Jeff and wondered if this idea is still being pursued.

John also suggested that the zoning manual's section on sizes of signs needs to be reviewed. He felt the regulation allowed signage much larger than the commission had intended with the ordinance. The commission agreed with his assessment and said it would be looked at in a future meeting.

John then introduced Emma Hitch, owner and builder of a tiny house located in Hurontown. Ms Hitch answered questions from the commission about how she planned to handle electric, water, and sewer in her home. John said he had the impression from the ordinance that the home would need to be placed on a foundation. This one was built on a trailer. There was a lot of discussion about what constitutes a foundation, and health department regulations for self contained sewage systems of the type in this structure.

Connie made a motion that the commission grant a special use permit for the home in its current location in Hurontown through June of 2017. The motion was seconded by Ted and passed with no dissent.

If Ms. Hitch decides to continue to keep the tiny home on this site after that date, she will need to re-apply for a special use permit. In the meantime, the commission will look into the Portland OR tiny home ordinances and others for guidance.

A motion was made to adjourn at 8:30 pm by Peggy, seconded by Dave, and passed.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ted Soldan".

Ted Soldan, Secretary

Planning Commission

Sept. 8, 2016

1. TED SOLDAN
2. Dave Pulson
3. Connie Sherry
4. Bruce Peterson
5. Tyler Bass
6. CHRIS HOFFMAN
7. Bill Bingham
8. John O'ell
Peggy Lee Anderson
9. John Ligon
10. Melani Watkins
11. Emma Hitch

NOTES FOR PLANNING COMMISSION 09/08/16

In late July I received a phone call from Jeff Ratcliffe of KEDA asking if a microbrewery with a tasting room could be located in FF. I asked him to put his specific request in a letter, which I have enclosed. We told him any business venture would have to go to the Planning Commission since Bill & I could not authorize the plan. I'm curious if you folks have heard anything: has the venture been dropped, or is it proceeding surreptitiously?

Bill & I had a request for a new, freestanding sign at the River Valley Bank on Sharon Avenue and discovered that the guidelines probably aren't what was intended. According to Sec. 5.5, item 1., the new sign would have been OK as long as it didn't exceed 300 sq. ft. !!! This is 30% of the area of the front wall. Two times the LOT frontage in linear feet (expressed as sq. ft. instead) would have been an even larger area. Our candid opinion is that this is nuts and that the Planning Commission should revisit the topic of sign dimensions.

We approved a request to site a medical marijuana business in the mall. My brief letter recognized that it's a legal business in Michigan and that drug stores are allowed in B-1 and thus B-2. Both Bill & I thought the Zoning Ordinance had included specific language on the issue, but couldn't find any. Do you want to address this? Our opinion is that the most expedient action would be to simply make such businesses permitted in B-1.

Finally, we investigated a report of a 'tiny' house in Hurontown, the very house that had been featured on TV-6. It's there, and is on wheels. I had simply assumed any tiny house would be traditional and on a foundation. I left a note, talked with the owner on the phone, and informed her that tiny houses can only be permitted as a Special Use, adjudicated by the Planning Commission. I asked her to attend this meeting and bring: a letter from the lot owner giving her permission, photos, information to establish the structure meets building codes, information about septic, water, power, winter parking, etc. Bill & I can attest the home is quite attractive, meets setbacks, and is very discretely sited – probably not visible from any neighboring homes. Does our Zoning Ordinance cover this? Did we fail to anticipate a mobile tiny house? Perhaps permanent tiny houses don't need to go the special use route, but mobile should. My personal opinion is to approve for the school year and revisit at your June 2017 meeting. This gives us a chance to learn, to see how it goes, and to fine tune the language of our regulations.

