

PALMER TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION

PUBLIC MEETING SEPTEMBER 13, 2011 7:00 P.M.

PALMER LIBRARY COMMUNITY ROOM

The regular monthly meeting of the Palmer Township Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, September 13, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. with the following in attendance: Vice Chairperson Virginia Rickert, Ron Grandinetti, Jo-Ann Stoneback, Rich Wilkins, Bob Blanchfield and Chris Briglia. Absent was Chairman Tom Grube. Also present were Planning Director Cyndie Carman, Solicitor Charles Bruno and Attorney Victoria Opthof. Vice Chairman Rickert convened the meeting and led those present in the Pledge to the Flag.

Minutes of the meeting of August were approved on motion by Stoneback, seconded by Blanchfield, and agreed by all.

NEW BUSINESS –

1. Zoning Ordinance Amendment – Digital Signs

Bruno distributed information pertaining to this zoning ordinance text amendment. Carman stated that the reason for this amendment was that there had been an applicant before the Zoning Hearing Board for a digital sign as part of their business sign. The request had been denied on other grounds but the Zoning Hearing Board had recommended that the Township consider amendments to the ordinance because it currently does not permit these types of signs at all. Bruno added that another request had come in for a property on Charlotte Avenue. Carman explained that she had gone through the whole ordinance to see what sections needed to be amended so that all sections would be consistent. Bruno stated that with any sign ordinance you have to beware of freedom of speech issues. The ordinance can control size, location, distance from other signs, distance from neighboring homes, brightness, etc. but you can not control the content of what is on the sign. Carman reviewed the draft ordinance and the proposed amendments. She had a visual display of the different types of electronically changing message signs and digital signs. Rickert asked if a sign had to be reviewed by the zoning officer. Carman stated that they would always need a sign permit from the township as they would for any type of sign but if they could not meet the regulations for this type of sign they would have to go to the Zoning Hearing Board for approval. They would also need a permit from PennDOT for a digital sign if it is on a state highway.

Carman explained that one of the things the Zoning Hearing Board had asked the Township to look at would be to require a minimum distance to separate any business sign from a residential district. She had originally proposed 500 feet but on further review felt that might be too restrictive and that 200 feet may be more appropriate.

The Commission discussed the provisions regarding flashing, blinking and twinkling displays. These are currently prohibited in all areas of the township. Opthof stated that this provision has been challenged previously in other municipalities. There might be a certain zoning district in the township that they should be allowed. She would forward the case law for review.

The Commission discussed the zoning districts in which electronically changing message signs or digital signs would be permitted as freestanding signs. They would need to be included in the

maximum sign area already permitted in those districts. They would be restricted to one sign digital sign per lot.

As written, the ordinance would require a 1000-foot separation from an electronically changing message sign or digital sign to a residential district. This would limit these signs to certain locations along Route 33 between Van Buren Road and Main Street. Carman showed a map of these locations. If the requirement was reduced to 500 feet, this would allow certain additional locations along Route 22. Carman displayed a map of these locations. This would be in the area of Olive Garden and the businesses in that area. Billboards are not currently allowed along Route 22 so these amendments could permit on-premise electronically changing message signs or digital signs along Route 22 but not digital billboards. Billboards are permitted along Route 33 and of the five that are already located there, under these amendments two of them could potentially be converted to digital.

The general consensus of the Commission was that they didn't have a problem with these digital signs along Route 22 or 33 but they would have to meet all requirements of PennDOT as well as Palmer Township. Some sign wording/displays could be a distraction for motorists so this is why there would be restrictions. The timing for the messages was discussed and it was noted that PennDOT has their own set of rules for these signs which includes everything we have discussed tonight. The Township has a lighting consultant which would be used to measure the brightness of the signs. Blanchfield stated that he was most concerned with local businesses wanting to change their current signs to these digital signs and if they had residences around them.

The Commission was given time to think about these amendments and they will be discussed at the next meeting.

On motion by Wilkins, seconded by Stoneback, and agreed by all, the Commission voted to table action on these zoning ordinance amendments.

PLANNING DIRECTOR COMMENTS

Carman noted the Comprehensive Plan Survey is on the web site and asked everyone to please go through it and let others know about it as well. She anticipated having something for them to review next month on the Comprehensive Plan.

Rickert asked about the retail store that was approved off Corriere Road (Joseph property) and Carman informed her that the owners have not found a tenant yet.

Carman told the Commission that she had met with Mandy Partners representatives who informed her that they have a company interested in taking over this development and hopefully they will be in soon with a slightly revised plan.

PUBLIC COMMENT – None.

On motion by Stoneback, seconded by Wilkins, and agreed by all, the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Diane Grube, Secretary