

Meeting Minutes

Cascade Charter Township Planning Commission

Farmland Preservation Sub-Committee

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

7:30 am

ARTICLE 1: Call the meeting to order

Chairman Scott Rissi called the meeting to order at 7:31 am. Members in attendance included Joe Engel, Ryan Bruneau and Ralph Moxley.

Also in attendance were Planning Director Brian Hilbrands, and Zoning Administrator Madison Smith-Jacoby.

ARTICLE 2: Approve the Agenda

Member Engel moved to approve the agenda. Member Moxley seconded the motion. Motion was approved by all members.

ARTICLE 3: Approve minutes from the September 27 meeting

Article 6, last paragraph should say "...and wish to save that farm **forever.**"

Article 6, second paragraph should say "Mr. Channing stated that the historical cost to purchase development rights in Kent County to preserve farmland is \$4,000/acre." Note that these farms that qualify for Transfer of Development Rights do not have to be in a Farmland Preservation zone.

Member Bruneau requested that several items be changed or clarified in Article 6. He also requested that in Article 8 we provide the date of **November 2** when applications are open to the Kent County Preservation program.

Member Engel moved to approve the minutes with the changes noted. Member Bruneau seconded the motion. Motion approved by all members.

ARTICLE 4: Disclose any Conflicts of Interest

No Conflict of Interest was noted by any member of the Farmland Preservation sub-committee.

ARTICLE 5: Acknowledge visitors and those wishing to speak

No visitors were present at this meeting of the Farmland Preservation sub-committee.

ARTICLE 6: Review of information provided by Matthew Channing, Kent County Agricultural Preservation specialist

Chair Rissi asked if the **\$4,000/acre** was reasonable for the purchase of development rights, or is it too low? Consensus around the room was that value is too low for Cascade Township. Value has to be determined by a professional appraisal. Matt Channing had said that they had not done any significant amount **Transfer of Development Rights** in 13 years, so his number is not current or realistic for today's land market. We need to do our own homework to see where that number should be in today's market.

Transfer of Development Rights is one option for property owners to consider. We need to come up with creative options in the weeks ahead.

Member Bruneau feels that PUDs give us a lot of flexibility in dealing with developers. We can require that they keep a portion of the PUD open and undeveloped if they want our approval.

Chair Rissi proposed that we encourage rural property owners/developers to keep more open space when they develop a parcel by consolidating the housing parcels into one smaller area of the land. If they propose 50% open space, they can have smaller lot sizes.

Planning Director Hilbrands noted that the Subdivision Ordinance already uses a similar approach.

A **PUD** is not a "By Right" approval process. The developer may ask for exceptions but needs to be flexible in other areas. They negotiate with the Planning Commission for approval of their package. In some portions of the Township, we may not want the developer to develop more than 80% of the land.

Chair Rissi feels that many citizens in the community want to reduce developed areas, but he is also concerned that long term any land development restrictions will get walked back. He feels that communities with no growth become very dated and stagnant after a while.

We need to see if **Dennis Heffron** (Grattan Twp. Trustee) has a template that we can utilize in Cascade. Planning Director Hilbrands will reach out to him and ask that he meet with us in the near future. Chair Rissi feels we should hear from Mr. Heffron before we try to create anything on our own.

We should develop a list of Cascade properties that would be good for future development and are located in more populated areas of Cascade (not rural farm areas).

Chair Rissi suggested that we ask a small group of local farmers that live in the Township to come in and meet with us. We would present a few options to them focused on Development Rights and ask them for their opinions and feedback. Steve Peterson had asked farmers for

opinions and feedback in 2010 on the Farm Preservation Zoning district when it was created. This was done via letters.

Member Bruneau asked if legal counsel Abdoo could come in and listen to Mr. Heffron when he meets with us. Member Engel thinks it may work best if we meet with Mr. Heffron first, and then send a proposed plan to counselor Abdoo. Planning Director Hilbrands will send her a copy of the ordinance and say we are considering something similar and ask her for a simple response that tells us if this is worth pursuing any further.

We will probably see some examples of what Grattan Township will allow (and not allow) in Conservation Easements (protected farmland). There can be exceptions and cut-outs to the Conservation Easement.

ARTICLE 7: Review and discussion of Agri-Business Tourism

Zoning Administrator Smith-Jacoby was able to develop a highly detailed document that focused on **Special Uses in the Agricultural District**, specifically agri-tourism and agri-business uses. The sub-committee members will discuss this document in greater detail at a future meeting.

Local Agricultural Tourism business include Heidi's Farm Market (Lowell Township), Robinette's (GR Township), and Snow Avenue Greenhouse. Member Moxley was able to visit a farm in Iceland last fall (thru Smart-Tours) that included a facility tour, and farm-grown food served at an outdoor dining facility. They also had a gift shop and a greenhouse open to the public.

Member Engel told us about a farm located in an urban environment in Portland that he visited where the owner had plotted out many small (20' X 20') parcels that people can lease and grow their own food. A touch of farming in an urban environment.

Member Rissi also told us about a development in GR Township that had about 15 garden plots (10' X 10'). Because of the high demand for those garden plots the developer wishes he had created three times as many plots.

ARTICLE 8: Goals of Sub-Committee for next meeting

Planning Director Hilbrands will contact Commissioner Dennis Heffron of Grattan Township to see if he can join us for our next scheduled meeting. We should be flexible on the start time.

ARTICLE 9: Any other business

Member Moxley suggested the next meeting of the Sub-Committee will be held on **Thursday, October 26 at 7:30 am.** (or whatever time works for Mr. Heffron).

We need to review the document developed by Zoning Administrator Smith-Jacoby at a future meeting, after we meet with Mr. Heffron.

ARTICLE 10: Acknowledge visitors and those wishing to speak

No visitors were present at this meeting of the sub-committee.

ARTICLE 11: Adjournment

Member Moxley made a motion to adjourn at 8:40 am. Member Engel seconded the motion. Motion approved by all members.