

Meeting Minutes

Cascade Charter Township Planning Commission

Farmland Preservation Study Sub-Committee

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

8:00 am in the Front Conference Room

ARTICLE 1: Call the meeting to order

Chair Rissi called the meeting to order at 8:06 am.

Members Joe Engel and Ralph Moxley were in attendance. Member Bruneau was unable to join the meeting. Zoning Administrator Madison Smith-Jacoby was also present.

ARTICLE 2: Approve the agenda

Member Engel moved to approve the agenda for the meeting. Member Moxley seconded the motion. Motion approved.

ARTICLE 3: Approve minutes of the last meeting

Member Engel moved to approve the minutes from the December 14 meeting. Chair Rissi supported the motion. Motion approved.

ARTICLE 4: Disclose any Conflict of Interest

No members have a Conflict of Interest.

ARTICLE 5: Acknowledge visitors and those wishing to speak

Visitor to our meeting was Jade Smith, Cascade Township Manager.

ARTICLE 6: Farmland Preservation goals and timeline

Manager Smith has been with Cascade Charter Township for about four months. Upon arriving, his priority was to develop the budget for 2024, which had not been started. Manager Smith also had to deal with many staff changes and thus his inability to attend earlier.

Manager Smith was provided with a brief summary of work developed to date. Chair Rissi noted that subcommittee members met with Grattan Township and would like to expand on the TDR

(Transfer of Development Rights) Ordinance developed for Grattan. Dennis Heffron (Board member in Grattan) came to a sub-committee meeting and spent two hours explaining what they created and answering our questions. Dennis told us that Paul LeBlanc, a professional planner, came in to help Grattan Township develop the TDR Ordinance. Grattan Township has preserved more land in Kent County than any other township. Grattan Township purchased development rights from farmers, but Kent County runs the TDR program. Dennis Heffron donated the development rights for his property. He noted the TDR program is very contagious with many other farmers are getting into the TDR program. This program will keep developers from buying up farm parcels and open land and then developing housing subdivisions on that property. It also helps the local farmers financially. The developers facilitate the purchase of Development Rights from the County.

The sub-committee took this concept of TDR to the Planning Commission to seek their approval. They recommend we coordinate the TDR program with McKenna as part of the Master Plan currently being developed.

The Farmland Preservation sub-committee took a document created by Zoning Administrator Smith-Jacoby and updated it into a format that clearly spells out '**Agricultural Uses by Right**' in **ARC and FP Zoning Districts**, and '**Special Land Use**' in **ARC and FP Zoning Districts**. That draft document still needs to be reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission.

Manager Smith mentioned that he has already spoken with Mike Homier about developing a **Farmland Preservation Ordinance** for Cascade Township because he feels we need to keep this project moving. We also need to keep the **Master Plan** moving to completion. We are also feeling a lot of pressure to build in the Township. Ultimately, we will need a scoring system that clearly spells out to developers what they will need to provide to obtain an exception to current Zoning Ordinances.

Manager Smith noted that Cascade Township has already been approached by two property owners seeking to preserve their farmland. We could apply a TDR program to these two parcels almost immediately. We need something that we can work with to purchase Development Rights in the near future. The Township has budgeted \$100,000 for the **Purchase of Development Rights** in the 2024 budget.

Manager Smith recommended a work session with the Board of Trustees and the FP sub-committee members (not the full Planning Commission) to summarize findings and concepts developed thus far. McKenna staff member (Danielle Bouchard) should be there and legal counsel (Mike Homier) should also be there. Then staff will get their marching orders to develop the final **Farmland Preservation Zoning Ordinance**.

McKenna's professional services contract will be expanded so that they can do more work for the Township. Manager Smith feels that we need to better control the hiring of professional services so that they are approved by Township staff.

Note that Danielle Bouchard did not cancel her attendance at today's meeting. Manager Smith recommended that he meet with the FP sub-committee first. Chair Rissi had asked McKenna in late 2023 to hold off on meeting with the sub-committee until we had first developed key documents and had met with Dennis Heffron.

Member Engel recommended that before we meet with the Board of Trustees that we have a final review session of the FP sub-committee to review what will be presented at the joint Work Session.

Chairman Rissi will take the presentation document provided to the Planning Commission on December 18 and create a new document with bullet points in lieu of paragraphs describing the three options. An outline format with bullet points will be easier for Trustees to read and understand.

We will need to have a final review meeting with Manager Smith and McKenna so we can discuss who will say what and to approve what will be in the final package.

Chairman Rissi said we do not need to run this approach or any documents past the Planning Commission since they already gave us approval as a sub-committee to meet with McKenna.

All sub-committee members agreed to meet one more time before going to a Work Session with the Board of Trustees.

ARTICLE 7: Any other business

No other issues were discussed.

Next Planning Commission meeting will be January 22. Staff to make sure Mike Homier knows about this change.

ARTICLE 8: Adjournment

Member Engel motioned to adjourn the meeting. Member Moxley seconded the motion. Motion approved at 9:04 am.