

Minutes of the Sparta Township Planning Commission  
May 14, 2019, 7 PM  
Sparta Township Hall, Sparta MI

Present: Chairperson Terry Hartman; Township Clerk Marcy Savage;  
Commissioners Linda Anderson, Don Doyle, and Mark VanderWerff  
Absent: Commissioners Tim Driscoll and Ken Humphreys  
Also Present: Planner Tim Johnson, Township Supervisor Dale Bergman,  
and Recording Secretary Toni Potes

I. / II. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance: Chairman Hartman called the meeting to order at 7 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Additions or Corrections to Agenda: None.

IV. Minutes of April 9, 2019, & Special Meeting of April 30, 2019: Motion by VanderWerff, second by Anderson, to approve the Minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

V. Public Comment: None.

VI. Business Items

A. Michigan Apple Packers: Amendment to a prior special land use and site plan approval for outdoor solar panels (continuation of tabled meeting on April 9, 2019):

Jim VanderWilp, Plant Manager of Michigan Apple Packers Cooperative, Inc., questioned that since there isn't an ordinance, how can the Planning Commission deny their request. Chairman Hartman answered that the Township is putting an ordinance in order and referenced the public workshop scheduled for May 30, 2019, at 6 PM at the Township Hall regarding solar energy and ordinances. VanderWilp said Consumers Energy is putting up panels everywhere, so why does our company have to go through this.

Also present were Plant Owner William Schweitzer and Photovoltaic Engineer of Ecojiva Solar Installation Company Clement Vijayakumar. Schweitzer stated other townships are allowing solar panels; the energy will be for the company's own use. The problem seems to be that the company cannot put the panels on the roof. Schweitzer feels the request should be allowed under permitted accessory uses. Petitioner had applied for site approval before the Township had an ordinance. Schweitzer feels the company should be considered grandfathered in.

Public Comment: Dr. Joel Robertson appreciates the Township waiting for knowledge; very prudent.

B. Public Hearing: Step 1 Preliminary Site Plan Review of Applicant South Sparta LLC's proposed "Hidden Prairie" development at 9029 Alpine Ave NW, Sparta, Parcel #40-05-35-201-002: Planner Johnson explained Petitioner Bitely's requests (1) to rezone from R-1/Ag to open space planned unit development (PUD) for residential containing about 15% open space and reduced lot size per the Planning Commission's discretion, (2) for site condo approval, (3) for private road approval, and (4) for a mineral mining permit for special use to remove soil. There are two issues for tonight's meeting. Petitioner presented popular home floor plans of 1600 sq. ft, 2300 with finished basement; a document clarifying the wetland discrepancy, 7.66 being the correct number; and a revised site plan dated May 13, 2019.

Public Hearing opened at 7:25 PM

Ron Jelsma of 10485 Alpine Ave. questioned why the petitioner should be allowed a smaller lot size than normal. The plan is more suited for city water and sewer. He opposes the request. Septic and well would have to be approved.

Eric Schaedig of 944 N. Sunset Pine confirmed the total number of lots: 78. He said that's a lot of cars. There are two drives for ingress/egress. Are there plans for increased traffic? The Department of Transportation/Kent County Road Commission will decide. It is a Class A road.

Bill Traxler of 8860 W. Sunset Pine is worried about well and septic pollution. He opposes the request.

Peter Horrigan of 890 W. Sunset Pine has concerns about the number of homes and the traffic, as well as devaluing homes that had to abide by the ordinance. That many homes may require hookup to city sewer.

Lynette Wolbert of 8992 Alpine lives on the opposite side of the road. She questioned how water will be contained. It is a high flood level where she is. That many homes (78) will displace a lot of water. A storm water calculation will be done yet. She worries about mosquitoes in retention/detention ponds, having a flooded basement, and the traffic speed on Alpine.

Andy Donnel of 8930 W. Sunset Pine has traffic concerns. There may be 2000 truck loads of sand moving out, a three-to-five year process. That's too much traffic—another Bedford Falls is not needed.

Erin Bormes of 885 W. Sunset Pine stated 78 homes do not fit a PUD footprint. The schools would welcome it. The lot size suggested is small for rural Sparta. Front yard setbacks look in line for in-town lots. She suggests staying with the Master Plan, closer to one acre lots as we have. She provided other development lot sizes. The proposal is too tight. A turn lane would be needed on Old Alpine. A big hole with sand pulled out is not safe. She questioned how farmland is considered open space. She suggests waiting to approve (the four issues) as one big picture instead of one or two pieces. Stick to the Master Plan: R-1 with permitted lot size. PUD's may not be what we want considered "growth".

Eric Barber of 9099 Alpine had traffic issues; it's a lot of homes and septic going in a small space. Is the farm always going to be farmed? Stick with zoning and larger lot sizes.

Barb Johnson of 9210 Alpine Ave. had sent a letter to council. A rural setting is desired, not a Westgate. The speed on Alpine is excessive. Development around us should fit need and area. She 'dittos' Erin's comments.

Julie Clay of 8900 Alpine seconded Erin's comments. Traffic speed is heavy. It's a concern. Mike Savage of 1025 N. Sunset Pine had the same concerns as everyone there. He wants to keep an acre community.

Mark Dewys of 900 S. Sunset Pine agrees with all of the comments and Erin's. Lot size and what the community offers is why they moved here. Consider what the Master Plan offers. Mining permit and number of homes, water quality, septic, etc. are concerns. How many homes would R-1 zoning allow? No one was sure.

Rosa Buffa of 9211 Alpine said there is too much noise and traffic now. She is concerned about her father's health. She and her father oppose the request.

Jose Buffa of 9211 Alpine seconded everything said before. Why isn't the proposal for R-1 instead of PUD? He opposes the request.

Marybeth Dame of 4100 12 Mile Road had concerns for the Township as a whole, setting precedent. The lot size's narrowness and setbacks are far smaller than normal. This affects everyone, not just those here. Open space requirement is not met. She doesn't know of any kayaking in detention ponds. She recommends staying with the footprint.

Public Hearing closed at 7:58 PM

Chairman Hartman would like to see increased lot size, lower density, and higher-priced homes. Petitioner states this development is upper-class America; he's supplying a need and want. The price range is \$225,000 to \$325,000, accommodating families and empty nesters. This is a four step-up house compared to his other projects in Sparta. This is designed for people who don't want a large lot to take care of. The community wants to buy this. Chairman Hartman wants to know how many homes can go in through an R-1 zoning. He also wants the full board to be present for the decision. Planner Johnson would like the Planning Commission to look at the ordinance and standards for an objective view. The Planning Commission needs time to review the May 13, 2019, site plan. Petitioner thanked the people who came tonight and before (April 30) with conscience and emotional concerns. Chairman Hartman questioned if a traffic analysis has been done; Petitioner said it will be. Planner Johnson reviewed the four issues to address. Petitioner will submit an application, and the Planning Commission will look at the four bundled issues in June. There are many steps to follow yet. Motion by Doyle, second by Savage, to table the matter until the June 11, 2019, meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

- C. Solar Ordinance—Continued discussion; meeting date of May 30, 2019, from 6–8:30 PM for a workshop with Mary Reilly from MSU School of Planning, Design and Construction: Will be held at Township Hall.

VII. Adjournment: Township Supervisor Bergman stated that the Township Board voted to send back to the Planning Commission the proposed wind ordinance because Mary Reilly reviewed the proposal and offered changes. This may be on the June 11, 2019, meeting agenda. Motion by Doyle to adjourn at 8:55 PM. Motion carried. The next meeting of the Sparta Township Planning Commission will be Tuesday, June 11, 2019, at 7 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
—Toni Potes  
Recording Secretary