

WHITE CLOUD PLANNING COMMISSION
Regular Meeting Minutes
White Cloud City Office, 12 N. Charles, White Cloud MI 49349
April 26, 2022

A. Call to Order

Chairperson Shears called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

B. Roll Call (confirmation of a quorum)

Wallace conducted roll call for attendance.

Present: Johnson, Fetterley, Shears, and Steffes. Tiernan joined the meeting at 6:03 p.m.

Absent: None

Others present: John Wallace (zoning administrator) and April Storms (city manager)

C. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance

Shears gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

D. Set/Amend Agenda

A motion was made by Steffes, supported by Johnson to approve the agenda as presented with the addition of a fourth item of business under new business being discussion of peddler permits.

Yeas: 5

Nays: 0

Motion passed.

E. Public Comment (Comments limited to 2 minutes)

Dan Abid reported that he had a meeting with city manager Storms and zoning administrator Wallace. He indicated that he has been asking the city for five years for changes to the sign ordinance and would like the city to move forward on this now. He said that many of the city businesses signs are not in compliance due to number of colors and changeable LED signs.

Tiernan said it has been an issue for the last twenty years. She suggested getting the businesses together to work on this issue.

Storms clarified that there is no limitation on number of colors for a sign in general, but the issue on color related to multiple colors of the background to the changeable message portion of the sign. Having multiple backgrounds makes the sign look as though it was cobbled together.

Storms indicated that one of issues with ordinance changes has been the frequent change over in staff. Needed changes are identified, but before they can be implemented, they get dropped due to staff change.

Storms indicated that she and Wallace will be working on amendments to the sign ordinance that will be brought back to the Planning Commission. These amendments would include a provision to allow for LED changeable message signs. She indicated that our current focus on sign enforcement now relates more on safety issues.

Wallace added that amendments would include a more unified setback for signs, particularly along Charles Street.

Storms added that for extensively used ordinances such as the sign ordinance it is important that they be updated now and not to wait for an update to the city master plan.

Abid said he can appreciate the issue of staff turnover but said he has been asking for sign ordinance changes for five years. He appreciates that it looks like now that it will be addressed. Abid said it is hard to get a sign company that will agree to do work in the city and mentioned Valley City Sign Company. He was grateful that city manager Storms provided him with another sign company that would work in the city.

Shears indicated that the Planning Commission would wait to hear back from Storms and Wallace on proposed amendments for the sign ordinance.

F. Approval of Minutes

1. Regular Meeting Minutes of March 22, 2022

Motion by Steffes, supported by Johnson to approve the regular meeting minutes of March 22, 2022 as presented.

Yeas: 5

Nays: 0

Motion passed.

G. New Business

1. Redevelopment Ready Communities – Review master plan goals and strategies to assign responsibilities for implementation and time frame.

Chairperson Shears went through the spread sheet of the goals and strategies to determine which strategies would have planning commission involvement. Strategies included:

- Number 5 on page one regarding an overlay zone along the White River
- Number 17 on page two regarding fees and penalties for property owners who leave the buildings vacant.
- Number 20 on page three regarding site plan standards to provide for amenities.
- Number 21 on page three regarding requiring street trees and sidewalks for new developments.
- Number 24 on page three regarding establishing a façade improvement program.
- Number 30 on page four regarding amending the city zoning map to accommodate a larger C-3 district.
- Number 1 on page four regarding limiting the area of county campus.
- Number 3 on page four regarding zoning regulations for outdoor cafes.
- Number 4 on page four regarding cottage industries in the downtown
- Number 10 on page five regarding establishing basic design criteria for downtown developments.
- Number 20 on page seven regarding working with the schools or jails and consider using a greenhouse to propagate flowers and vegetable plants for community gardens.
- Number 2 on page eight regarding the promotion of multi-story buildings in downtown.
- Number 7 on page eight regarding investigation of feasibility of a small-scale multi-family housing development behind the existing grocery. It was expressed that this may not be possible because of the airport flight patterns.
- Number 8 on page eight regarding apartments for transitional housing.
- Number 5 on page nine regarding development along Morgan Street.
- Number 10 on page nine regarding potential changes to the mobile home park.
- Number 11 on page nine regarding single-family home conversions into multiple-family units
- Number 8 on page eleven regarding updates to the city's zoning ordinance to comply with the master plan.
- Number 5 on page 14 regarding limiting commercial development along M-20 to what currently exists.

2. General discussion on establishment of a rental housing inspection program. Also discussion on what constitutes a rental.

Storms discussed that the creation of a housing rental inspection program was on the table a few years ago but it just kind of fell through the cracks. It is becoming more imperative now to have such a program particularly to help renters who find themselves in a bad housing condition. She explained that she looked at the program in Cadillac and Newaygo and included a sample ordinance, rental form and fee

schedule in the packet. She indicated that is critical now to get housing up to code as it is the only way to hold landlords accountable.

Wallace talked about the importance of such a program due to the high percentage of rental units in the city which appears to be a trend in many communities. He also explained about a typical dysfunctional relationship between landlords and tenants that leads to the poor condition of rental units. Wallace explained how the program works in the City of Cadillac which is based on housing inspections every three years. He thought that time frame worked well. He explained that there is also a provision for the city to deal with tenant complaints. Having such a program ensures basic housing maintenance within the community.

Johnson indicated that he liked the concept of a rental inspection program. It holds both sides accountable and he thinks it is good idea.

Storms also asked the Planning Commission to weigh in on what constitutes a rental. She referred them to a letter from Chief Evans on the challenges the police department faces when several rooms in a single-family home are being rented to individuals who are not part of the family.

Storms told the Planning Commission that this is something we need some direction on as to whether this is something we should keep on enforcing.

Wallace explained that historically in most communities having one or two renters in one room may be tolerated, but when it started to exceed that number enforcement kicked in. He feels the city should clarify the line of acceptance regarding renters in a single-family home.

Storms concurred with Wallace that defining the legal number of renters needs to be determined. She offered existing cases where several people are living in a single-family home. Storms explained that enforcement must be consistent and determining the legal number of people has to be measurable.

Shears told of an existing case she was aware of where a tenant was in a bad housing situation and she was limited in how to assist by providing references for outside agencies. She indicated that there should be additional research done and then to have the Planning Commission look at options.

Johnson said he would refer to the issue to a realtor group he is in.

Wallace indicated that the rental issue will eventually have to consider short-term rentals.

Storms indicated that she would do a little more research on the topic and asked that the Planning Commission also do some research of their own.

3. General discussion on the sign ordinance and need for changes. Two specific topics to include allowing LED changeable message signs and providing for a consistent setback for freestanding signs along Charles Street.

Wallace indicated that he thought the city's ordinance was outdated in not permitting LED changeable message signs. He felt such signs are allowed in most cities with some restrictions related to how the messages get displayed. He suggested drafting language to address the manner in which LED changeable message signs would be permitted and passing an amendment to this effect. Wallace thought an amendment should be passed to regulate the setback for freestanding signs to have a more consistent setback along major streets such as Charles.

Shears raised the issue of feather signs. Wallace indicated that such signs were not addressed specifically in the sign ordinance. He thought they should be considered temporary signs and that the ordinance should contain a setback distance and maximum height for such signs.

4. Discussion of Peddlers Permits

Storms raised concerns about what types of peddler permits should be allowed. She thought issuing them for food trucks was fine. She expressed safety concerns about exposing residents, particularly elderly residents, to salespeople who are selling products door to door. She also felt there was no direction given about under what circumstances a permit would be denied if for instance a background check revealed some level of criminal activity. Storms suggest that we put hold on issuing any new permits until the ordinance can be reviewed and amended.

Shears concurred with Storms regarding the safety concerns for the residents.

Consensus was reached that no new door to door permits would be issued temporarily, and that Storms and Wallace would do some research and bring back to the Planning Commission a draft of an amended ordinance.

H. Unfinished Business

1. None

I. Public Comment (For items discussed on this agenda/3 minutes)

Dan Abid reported that he is one who is renting rooms at this home. He has no problem with a rental inspection program. He reported a number of personal issues as to why he

does not wish to live alone. He reported that he is asked by many people for a place to rent. He appreciates the city is looking at the rental ordinance.

J. Correspondence

1. Zoning Report – March 22, 2022

Shears just looks at the report and is in awe of how many activities there are.

Expressed gladness that one of the longer-term cases came to satisfactory end.

2. Letter from the police chief Dan Evans on single-family homes being used as rentals. (discussed as part of the discussion on the rental inspection program)

K. Adjournment

A motion was made by Johnson, supported by Steffes to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m.

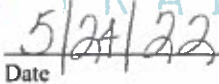
Ayes: 5

Nays: 0

Motion passed.



Planning Commission Chair



Date



Zoning Administrator/Recorder, John Wallace

MICHIGAN