

7:01 o'clock p.m. Chairperson Wurmlinger called the meeting of the Planning Commission to order.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Buechler , Hilton , Koob , Mills , Muir , Oprita , Wurmlinger

MEMBERS ABSENT: Buechler , Hilton , Koob , Mills , Muir , Oprita , Wurmlinger

ALSO PRESENT:

VISITORS: None

Motion by Buechler supported by Wurmlinger, to approve the agenda as printed and posted. Vote, 5 /0

Motion by Muir, supported by Wurmlinger, to approve the minutes from **08-10-2021** as printed and posted. Vote, 5 /0

REPORT FROM TOWNSHIP BOARD REPRESENTATIVE: Bob Buechler

Scarecrow Saturday will be held this year with a few changes due to COVID.

No face painting or tractor rides to help keep crowds spread out and support social distancing.

After the super board meeting, the township sent requests for proposals for the development of the 100-acre parcel. Now thinking we should have made requests dividing the parcel into two 50 acre portions. No decisions have been made. We are still in the investigation stage.

Hilton asked if there has been any discussion about purchasing the small parcel for sale in front of the township offices. Possibly for a future park or green space.

Buechler said there hasn't been any discussion on that piece but eventually we will need to build additional storage for the grounds and maintenance dept. Looking at the backside lot for a possible build. Would like to add open public bathrooms. Would be a nice addition for the nature trail and Farmers Market lot development but with the pandemic, all spending ideas have slowed down.

REPORT FROM ZBA REPRESENTATIVE: Nathan Oprita

A variance request was brought to the board by Bernie Telto for a 150 unit development off of Dykeman Rd, behind State Rd and the Provincial Estates subdivision. He requested a variance to make roads private. His request was denied. Buechler commented that this type of request is done to fit more units on the property. Variances cannot be granted for financial reasons. A few residents have been contacting the township daily with their concerns regarding the project. The developer has been successful in other areas like Richmond. Buechler stated there was some confusion by the public regarding the variance. If Tetlo wants to build, he would need to come before the committee. Hilton clarified that public roads would be required.

CITIZENS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE BOARD: None

- *When the Chairperson calls on you, stand and speak your name and address clearly for the record.*
- *Each person will be permitted to speak one time for 3 minutes until everyone has had a chance to speak.*
- *Any comments to be made regarding the public hearing will be heard during the continuation of the public hearing, below.*

NEW BUSINESS

ITEM #1

Farmland and Open Preservation Program

Farmland and Open Preservation Program

Copied from the State of Michigan's website

“The Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act enables a farm owner to enter into a development rights Agreement with the State. The Agreement is designed to ensure that the land remains in an agricultural use for a minimum of 10 years and ensures that the land is not developed in a non-agricultural use. In return for maintaining the land in an agricultural use, the land owner may be entitled to certain income tax benefits, and the land is not subject to special assessments for sanitary sewer, water, lights or non-farm drain projects.

What lands are eligible?

Farmland eligibility is governed by the size of the farm and in two instances by the income of the farm. The following are the qualification requirements to enroll land in a Farmland Development Rights Agreement. A parcel may be enrolled if one of the following items is true:

- it is 40 acres or more in size, and at least 51% of the land is in active agriculture.
- it is less than 40 acres in size but at least 5 acres in size, more than 51 % of the land is in active agriculture, and the agricultural land produces a gross annual income in excess of \$200 per tillable acre.
- the farm has been designated as a specialty farm by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, is at least 15 acres in size, and has a gross annual income in excess of \$2,000 per year.”

Buechler stated that James Palmateer’s application was delayed over covid. If the application is approved, credit will be given. The property owner enters into the state that the property will remain farmland for the agreed-upon duration, he has requested 10yrs. The total number of acres is 87.53, acreage in cultivation is 81. There is a marshy area in the middle of the property that is not farmable, approximately 7 acres. An aerial map of the farm was included with the application. The farm is located between Carrigan and Brace Road.

Hilton asked if the owner was required to farm or if land could be leased out. Buechler stated they could lease the land to another farmer but was not sure if it would count for the tax credit. When a property is put in this agreement they will not be appraised for any assessments for sewer etc. If they do not connect to the services. If he connects to water/sewer etc he would have to pay. Only structures build farm structures tied to the farm. Or a home only if the occupant is the farmer.

Buechler stated that Palmateer owns additional parcels but it is easier to complete applications individually. He has dealt with clients already in the program and does not see any negative side unless we were looking at multiple assessments.

Wurlminger asked about time requirements. Minimum is 10 yrs and was noted on the application. Buechler stated the township receives the initial application then it goes to the county to respond and even if denied will move on to the state.

Wrumlinger said but if there are any concerns we can note those.

Koob asked if there were any legal ramifications of the spouse's name not being included on the application. Wurlminger said if it was never in her name or considered homestead it wouldn't be included in marital rights. Koob asked if it was in a trust. Buechler said he didn't think it would be an issue but will clarify.

Koob asked if there were any alternative motives, such as converting to solar or wind farms. Buechler said there is a separate application for solar or wind farms with additional conditions. Township would not have a say on what crops he grows or if he grows. Any sort of construction would need the required permits and approvals.

BOARD DISCUSSION: *NO PUBLIC COMMENTS WILL BE HEARD AT THIS TIME*****

Motion by Buechler to approve and move forward to the Board of Trustees, supported by Hilton, to approve/deny. Vote, __5/0_____.

CITIZEN COMMENTS AND/OR QUESTIONS: In order to insure that the comments are recorded as accurately as possible, please follow the format below:

- * Address the planning commission only. Individual conversations should not be held during the meeting.*
- * Please stand at the podium; speak your name and address clearly for the record.*
- * Each person will be permitted to speak one time for 3 minutes until everyone has had a chance to speak.*
- * The minutes will be transcribed from the recording. Please be respectful of the person speaking. Comments made inaudible on the recording by background sounds such as whispering, clapping or interrupting cannot be made part of the official minutes.*

BOARD DISCUSSION:

OLD BUSINESS: None

Motion by Buechler, supported by Koob, to adjourn. Vote, 5/0. Time, 7:38 P.M.

The Charter Township of Fort Gratiot complies with the "Americans with Disabilities Act" and if auxiliary aids or services are required at the meeting for individuals with disabilities, please contact Clerk Robert C. Crawford, 3720 Keewahdin Road, Fort Gratiot, Michigan 48059 (810) 385-4489, three days prior to said meeting.