

**Princeton Township
Mille Lacs County, Minnesota**

Planning Commission Meeting

Tuesday, December 7, 2020

Minutes

Public Hearing

On December 7, 2020, 6:15 p.m., Planning Commission Chair Cyndi MacDonald re-opened the public hearing continued from November 9.

Due to the Governor's COVID19 restrictions the meeting was held by teleconference.

Planning Commission members present: Cyndi MacDonald, Cheryl Schimming, Kathy Stoeckel, Carol Whitcomb, Tari Zortman. Member absent: David Persing

Also joining: Township Board Liaison Dan Hiller, Township Zoning Administrator Scott Richards, Township Clerk Doug Dahl

Topic of the public hearing was zoning amendments related to cul-de-sacs, lot-width requirements at the ordinary high-water level, and the definition of the building setback line in the River Conservation District.

Zoning Administrator Scott Richards reported that he has been in contact with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources about these questions, but has not yet gotten a complete response from the DNR representative. He recommended continuing the public hearing to the January Planning Commission meeting.

Carol Whitcomb moved to continue the public hearing to the January meeting. Seconded by Tari Zortman. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

The public hearing was closed at 6:25 p.m.

Regular Meeting

At 6:30 p.m. Planning Commission Chair Cyndi MacDonald called the regular monthly meeting to order.

Commission members present: Cyndi MacDonald, Cheryl Schimming, Kathy Stoeckel, Carol Whitcomb, Tari Zortman

Commission member absent: David Persing

Also attending: Township Board Liaison Dan Hiller, Zoning Administrator Scott Richards, Township Clerk Doug Dahl

All participants recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approve Agenda

Tari Zortman moved to Approve the agenda. Seconded by Cyndi MacDonald. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Open Forum

No issues were raised in open forum.

Approve Minutes of November 9, 2020 Meeting

Cyndi MacDonald moved to approve the minutes of the November 9 meeting. Seconded by Tari Zortman. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Land-Use and Zoning Study—Sections 27 & 34—Follow-up to Discussion with Township Residents

Mr. Richards summarized the question in his report to the Commission:

The Planning Commission has been studying the land-use classification and zoning for properties in Sections 27 and 34. At their November 9, 2020 meeting, they invited property owners and neighbors for their input on the process and possible land-use classification and zoning for properties to the north of Den-hei Estates and The Preserve at Princeton in Section 27. The meeting was well attended with residents mostly not in favor of the potential land-use changes.

The discussion was prompted when Scott Moller made application for a Sketch Plan for property in Section 27 on County Road 1/75th Avenue. The proposed subdivision is on 26.9 acres and consists of 17 lots. The property is zoned R-2—Residential District on the west side and RR—Rural Residential District on the east. The lots as proposed are at least 1.25 acres in size, consistent with R-1—Residential District zoning. To allow the development as proposed, the Comprehensive Plan would need to be revised and the property rezoned to R-1—Residential District.

Mr. Richards noted that the Commission would be continuing the discussion of the question, and would not take any action on it at this meeting.

Mr. Moller claimed that there is a housing shortage in the Princeton School District. He commented further that his purpose in proposing the re-zoning to smaller lot sizes is to be able to provide more affordable housing.

Ms. Whitcomb spoke in favor of the plan. She noted that the land is not now being farmed, and has not been farmed for several years.

Ms. MacDonald stated her preference for keeping the section zoned for minimum 2.5-acre lot size. Mr. Moller replied that he can't justify the cost of the roads

Several township residents joined the meeting to express their disapproval of the proposed re-zoning. They expressed their preference for maintaining the rural character of the township. Other concerns centered around the effect of additional development on traffic levels, the additional cost to current township residents of more roads, and the impact to the environment of adding septic sites in such close proximity to one another.

Mark Riverblood charged that Mr. Moller's expressed desire to create more affordable housing was a ruse designed to curry favor with Commission members. He suggested that Mr. Moller could achieve his goal by donating his land to prospective buyers.

Other residents expressed their concerns in chat boxes during the meeting. Those chat comments are stored in a separate document on file at the town hall, and are available upon request.

Ms. Stoeckel urged the Commission to stand by present zoning. Commissioners generally agreed that current zoning allows for additional development at a level that furthers the goals of the Commission, comports with the Comprehensive Plan, and protects the interests of current residents.

Mr. Roxbury suggested enacting a moratorium on any development at least while the restrictions related to COVID remain in place. Ms. Stoeckel agreed. However, other members considered a moratorium unnecessary. Mr. Richards suggested continuing the question to the January meeting. He offered to meet with Mr. Moller in the interim to review any modifications Mr. Moller might want to make.

Ms. MacDonald moved to continue the discussion of the Section 27 re-zoning to the January meeting. Seconded by Ms. Schimming. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Appointment of Subcommittee to Research History of Residential Development to Aid Decision-Making for Future Development

Member Carol Whitcomb suggested appointing a subcommittee to research the history of residential development in the township. Members all concurred that such a study would be valuable.

Ms. Whitcomb moved to appoint Carol Whitcomb, Cheryl Schimming, and Tari Zortman to work with Mr. Richards on the project. Seconded by Tari Zortman. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Zoning Amendments

In light of the need for further information from the DNR, and given the challenges presented by the meeting requirements under the COVID restrictions, Scott Richards recommended continuing the question to the January Planning Commission meeting. Kathy Stoeckel moved to continue the public hearing and discussion to the January meeting. Seconded by Cyndi MacDonald. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Review of Home Occupation/Interim-Use Permits

Mr. Richards suggested continuing this issue to the January meeting as it is not an urgent matter, and would be better handled after COVID restrictions are relaxed. Cyndi MacDonald moved to continue the question to the January meeting. Seconded by Kathy Stoeckel. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Discussion of Questions Raised by Residents Concerning Electronic Signs and Animal Regulations

Some business owners along Highway 169 have raised the possibility of the township allowing electronic signs at their businesses. The current ordinance does not permit the implementation of electronic signs in the township, although there is no specific language in the ordinance mentioning electronic signs. Members generally oppose allowing electronic signs, primarily expressing concerns

that electronic signs present a safety hazard to drivers on Hiway 169. Members discussed adding specific language to the ordinance prohibiting electronic signs. They considered a motion to that effect, but withdrew the motion in favor of further research and discussion. Mr. Richards agreed to provide examples of sign ordinances in a memo for the January meeting.

On the topic of animal regulations, members generally agreed with the current ordinance restricting farm animals to the agricultural districts. They recommended no changes to the animal ordinance.

Planning Commission Meeting Dates for 2021

Clerk Dahl offered a schedule of Planning Commission meeting dates for 2021 based on the standard practice of holding meetings on the first Monday of the month. He noted that the first Monday in July falls on the 5th. Also, he suggested moving the September meeting to Tuesday, September 7 due to Labor Day.

Cyndi MacDonald moved to adopt the meeting schedule with the provision that the July meeting would be moved to the second Monday, July 12. Seconded by Cheryl Schimming. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Adjournment

Tari Zortman moved to adjourn. Seconded by Carol Whitcomb. Chair MacDonald called the roll:

Ms. Schimming—Yes, Ms. Stoeckel—Yes, Ms. Whitcomb—Yes, Ms. Zortman—Yes. Ms. MacDonald—Yes. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Doug Dahl
Clerk/Treasurer

Attendees: Tom Braun, Tim Braun, Eldon Johnson, Bart Kendall, Marcia Kendall, Nancy Moan, Scott Moller, Mark Riverblood