

**OSHTEMO CHARTER TOWNSHIP
PLANNING COMMISSION**

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD JUNE 25, 2015

Agenda

PUBLIC HEARING: SPECIAL EXCEPTION USE REQUEST AND SITE PLAN REVIEW OF THE APPLICATION FROM WD PARTNERS ON BEHALF OF MEIJER TO INSTALL THREE DRIVE-THRU LANES FOR CURBSIDE PICK-UP AT AN EXISTING RETAIL STORE LOCATED AT 6660 WEST MAIN STREET IN THE C-LOCAL BUSINESS DISTRICT. (PARCEL #3905-14-185-022).

A meeting of the Oshtemo Charter Township Planning Commission was held on Thursday, June 25, 2015, commencing at approximately 7:00 p.m. at the Oshtemo Charter Township Hall.

ALL MEMBERS WERE PRESENT:	Terry Schley, Chairperson Fred Antosz Wiley Boulding, Sr. Dusty Farmer Pam Jackson Millard Loy Mary Smith
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Also present were Greg Milliken, Planning Director; James Porter, Attorney; and Martha Coash, Meeting Transcriptionist. Three other persons were in attendance.

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Schley at approximately 7:00 p.m. and the "Pledge of Allegiance" was recited.

AGENDA

The Chairperson asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

Mr. Loy made a motion to accept the agenda as presented. Mr. Boulding, Sr. seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Chairperson Schley asked if anyone in attendance wished to comment on non-agenda items.

There were no public comments on non-agenda items. Chairperson Schley moved to the next item on the agenda.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF JUNE 11, 2015

The Chairperson asked if there were any additions, deletions or corrections to the minutes of the meeting of June 11, 2015. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the minutes as presented.

Mr. Antosz made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 11, 2015 meeting. Ms. Farmer seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

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Chairperson Schley moved to the next item on the agenda, a special exception use application from WD Partners on behalf of Meijer, and asked Mr. Milliken to review the request.

Mr. Milliken said the applicant desires to install a drive-up facility in the parking lot of the existing Meijer store on West Main Store in order to implement its curbside pick-up program. The store is located at the northeast corner of 9th Street and West Main Street in the C-Commercial zoning district.

He explained Meijer has initiated a new curbside pick-up program. It has been installed at one store in Grand Rapids and is being implemented at several other stores as the company begins to roll out this new technology. The system allows customers to submit an order online and then pick up the order in a dedicated drive-through area. Customers approach the pick-up area, speak or enter a name or code to announce their presence, and then pull forward to await an employee to bring the items to the vehicle.

He indicated the proposed pick-up area is located in the northeast portion of the existing parking area. It would occupy the space currently occupied by ten parking spaces at the north end of an existing parking bay. The proposed area is at the east end of the parking lot, which is near the entry to the grocery area. Due to the proximity

of the proposed area to the grocery entry, it is in a highly congested area and will occupy popular parking spaces.

Mr. Milliken said it is anticipated that the curbside program will be available from 7am to 9pm. The facility has a capacity for 100 orders a day. It is currently in operation at the Knapp's Corner store in Grand Rapids (1997 East Beltline Road). The applicant has indicated that they are receiving approximately 25 orders per day at that facility.

He said the retail building is 209,161 square feet with a parking lot containing 1,303 parking spaces. The proposed development removes 10 of those spaces reducing the total to 1,293 spaces, which would still be in compliance.

Mr. Milliken explained for drive-up and drive-through uses, section 68.300.G requires that "stacking space for vehicles awaiting service shall be on-site and designed and located so as not to block or impede pedestrian and/or vehicle circulation on the site or on any adjacent sidewalk or street." There is not a specific number of stacking spaces required, but there is a requirement that the stacked vehicles not create safety or circulation issues.

He noted the arrangement and layout of the proposed curbside facility represents the biggest concern or question regarding this application. The plan does not provide for any stacking. Three lanes are established for vehicles, and each lane has two stops: one for customers to call in their orders and one for customers waiting for delivery of goods.

Based on the estimates and projections provided by the applicant, he said it would be reasonable to project between three and ten vehicles utilizing the curbside facility per hour. These are not large numbers and therefore, a substantial amount of stacking spaces should not be required. That being said, even one vehicle waiting to enter the facility will create significant circulation issues waiting in the parking lot aisle. Sitting here, a vehicle awaiting entry to the curbside facility will block access to the adjacent parking spaces, will block the flow of traffic in this busy circulation aisle, and could create backups into the very congested (both vehicles and pedestrians) east-west drive that runs adjacent to the main building. Considering all of this and the safety problems that result, some amount of stacking should be provided to avoid the conflicts stated above from occurring.

Mr. Milliken proposed two alternatives. First, instead of having the facility in the parking bay running parallel to the face of the building, it could be rotated 90 degrees and run perpendicular to the face of the building. The curbside pick-up facility would have to be reduced to two lanes and would likely occupy a greater number of parking spaces.

The second alternative would be to relocate the facility to the east where there are sixteen parking spaces in a small lot immediately east of the building just north of

the main east-west drive. This is not a well-used parking facility, at least not by customers, and would provide a better location for the proposed facility.

He said there certainly may be other arrangements that work. However, it was desired to stay reasonably close to the location, size, etc. of the original proposal. He also noted Meijer has indicated they are willing to go with the first option, a perpendicular arrangement to the proposal.

Mr. Milliken referred to the standards of approval and said the proposed curbside facility is compatible with other uses permitted within the zoning district. Meijer already has a drive-up window for the pharmacy in the store located on the west side of the south façade of the store. There is also a car wash, gas station, fast food restaurant with drive-thru window, and a bank with drive-thru windows and ATM on or around the subject property.

He explained the biggest concern with the proposed development is the potential impact on circulation and safety on the site for users of the curbside program as well as customers of the store.

He pointed out the proposed use is consistent with the commercial character and use of the area and if the site should need to be adapted or redeveloped at some point in the future, the proposed curbside facility could be modified as necessary and/or relocated to fit into the proposed plans.

Mr. Milliken said, based on the criteria for special exception uses, the curbside facility appears clearly consistent with Zoning Ordinance standards.

However, the site plan that has been submitted raises significant concerns due to the potential impact on traffic circulation and the safety of the users of both the curbside facility and the surrounding parking facility.

Mr. Milliken said the Board will need to make two motions regarding this proposal. The first will be regarding the special exception use. The second will be regarding the site plan.

Mr. Milliken said he understood Meijer was willing to accept the alternatives suggested by staff to turn the plan 90 degrees and that the Board would need to decide whether they are comfortable with that concept and leave further review and approval to Staff or ask the applicant to return with a revised plan.

Chairperson Schley asked if the applicant wished to speak.

Mr. Ben Dariano, WD Partners, Columbus OH, explained the pick-up process. Customers submit an order online and pick up their order by approaching the pick-up area, enter a name or code, pull forward to await an employee to bring the items to the vehicle.

He said Meijer was willing to turn the plan 90 degrees as suggested by Staff. He presented the Planning Commission with a concept sketch showing how such an arrangement could be laid out on the site. He said the lighting under the canopy would be on only during open hours, from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. in consideration of neighbors. He said all signage is conceptual and that WD would work with Oshtemo Township Staff to achieve approved signage.

In answer to questions from Commissioners, Mr. Dariano said Meijer feels the area chosen is most conducive to the operation by being placed near the order storage area inside the store which is currently an underutilized area; the set-up is radically different from the Grand Rapids site which is a cul-de-sac; lighting would not exceed current lighting; there would be three or six pick-up stations; call boxes would be on the drivers' side of vehicles; stations would be covered with cantilevered canopies and no outside posts so cars can leave as soon as loaded, and there is ample space if a driver might need to get out of the car to open the trunk.

There were no further questions for the applicant from the Board. Hearing no comments from the public, Chairperson Schley moved to Board Deliberations.

Commissioners were supportive of the concept, but were concerned there was not a specific commitment proposed, and wondered if the operation could be located at the east end of the building rather than losing 16 prime parking places for in store customers. There was concern about traffic flow crossing lanes into opposing traffic.

Mr. Dariano said Meijer has found this method to be the best alternative to get people in and out quickly to minimize stacking and said 8-12 cars an hour in 15 minute time slots would be served, which would regulate the amount of traffic, and that those numbers are equal to about one car every five minutes. No more than 3-4 cars would be expected at a time.

Board Members were concerned that there might be a backup if most cars come in the a.m. and in the evening. Mr. Dariano agreed most pick-ups would likely occur in those times.

Chairperson Schley said the Board should be asking for a specific response from the applicant as to how the process will work and how many call boxes would be located on each side of the aisle – the number would change stacking needs entirely.

Mr. Dariano said the plan is conceptual and difficult to quickly redesign.

Mr. Loy and Mr. Antosz felt the site plan should be tabled to allow the applicant to come back to the Commission with a specific plan.

Mr. Loy made a motion to approve the special exception use as requested to establish a drive-thru facility for a new curb-side pick-up program for the 9th Street Meijer. Mr. Boulding, Sr. seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

When asked how long it would take to adjust the plan according to the feedback and if a revision would be available for the next meeting, Mr. Dariano said he thought two weeks would be adequate to develop a revised site plan.

Mr. Loy made a motion to table the application for site plan approval for two weeks, until July 9, to allow the applicant to revise the application and provide more details. Ms. Jackson seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Chairperson Schley asked Commissioners to share their thoughts with Mr. Dariano regarding what they wished to see in a revised application for the site plan to give them a better chance of approval.

Ms. Jackson said that she loves the idea, but that cross-traffic is an issue and other options are needed.

Mr. Loy said he wants to see one stack in each lane; 4 pick-ups and one stack at a time.

Ms. Smith said the proposed area is high density and directly adjacent to handicap lanes. She would like to see it moved to the east side for health and safety concerns.

Chairperson Schley said he could support the application if it is clearly defined. If the concept submitted in the application is on the east side and allows for stacked cars outside the entry, he would be on board, but if it is in the middle of the 24 foot cross aisle with entry/exit crossing traffic, he would have a problem with it. Normal conventions and safety issues need to be addressed. He also wants lighting photo metrics included in the application for the proposed additional lighting. In addition if handicap parking spaces are lost, they should be addressed with an offset. Signage beyond directional would also need to be included. The revised application would need to be received by Staff to allow time to consider and for the review of the Fire Marshall.

Mr. Antosz felt alternative locations should be considered, loss of parking spaces addressed, and additional traffic expectations included in the revised proposal.

Mr. Loy favored utilizing the east side of the building and suggested a sidewalk to the end of the building.

Mr. Boulding, Sr. wondered if the applicant felt more interest would be generated in a new, innovative venture if it is in a more visible location.

Chairperson Schley said whatever location is proposed needs to have sound aspect of traditional design and address safety hazards for traffic. The Meijer Pharmacy pullout into traffic lanes was approved years ago and was not a good design. There is too much ambiguity in the plan as proposed; more details are needed. He said he hoped the comments of Commissioners would be helpful in revising the proposal.

DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL ZONING ORDINANCE AMENDMENTS RELATED TO AREA OF CHANGEABLE COPY ON SIGNS

Chairperson Schley moved to the next item on the agenda and asked Mr. Milliken to introduce the subject for discussion.

Mr. Milliken said at the last PC meeting there was an initial discussion of a variety of Zoning Ordinance amendments and issues. One of those issues involved the percentage of sign area that could be dedicated to changeable copy. As discussed at the meeting, Staff had been presented with information regarding advances in sign technology particularly related to electronic signs. This new technology has certain dimensional requirements, and the current limit of a maximum 25% sign area dedicated to changeable copy does not always fit well with those requirements.

He noted the result of discussion was that the Commission was willing to entertain further discussion on the topic but would require additional information before totally embracing the proposed amendments. In order to provide the requested information and respond to the questions of the Commission, Staff invited Steve VanderSloot of SignArt, who presented the request to Staff, to attend the meeting to present the information and any required clarification. How to proceed can be decided following discussion.

Mr. Milliken introduced Mr. Steve VanderSloot, SignArt, and Chairperson Schley noted Mr. VanderSloot has been a good friend to the Township, that he provided fundamental advice and guidance when the Township has development and advanced its ordinance.

Mr. VanderSloot provided a history of the development of changeable sign technology. He explained that with today's state of the art electronic signage, the benefit is that words are not needed for people to read and understand the advertising message. Graphic representations are more effective and actually can use less space and emit less light when an opaque, dark background is employed. He explained the standardized size of the modules dictates that signs are of a particular size with fixed proportions. A result is that the 25% active area allowed by Oshtemo Township standards limits the effectiveness of the new signs. A 35% active area would mean the full capability of the signs could be employed. Changing the Township Ordinance to allow 35% of the sign to be changeable would provide a proactive stance for the Township. He noted that rather than being driven by size, the new technology is driven by use and aesthetics.

In response to a question from Mr. Loy regarding whether sign manufacturers might make smaller modules in the near future, Mr. VanderSloot said he did not believe that would occur.

Commissioners discussed whether a change to the sign ordinance to address increasing the active area should be Township wide or be allowed in specific zones. They were mindful of not wanting “sign blight” in the Township, but having a good fit for the community and enabling merchants to take advantage of the available technology.

Mr. VanderSloot said he would provide Commissioners with a list of signs they could drive around to take a look at to get an idea of what the changeable area looks like when fully utilized in the popular 3 x 7 size.

Chairperson Schley said Commissioners would receive the list and take it from there. They will consider looking at the technical changes to support the industry. If there will be more of these signs, at some point there may be concern about whether the Ordinance should address location as a consequence and other restrictions that may be necessary.

OLD BUSINESS/OTHER BUSINESS

Chairperson Schley asked if there was old business or other business to come before the Commission. There was none, so the Chairperson moved to the next item.

Mr. Milliken noted as a result of the tabling of the Meijer site review, there will be a Planning Commission meeting on July 9.

PLANNING COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

There were no comments from Commissioners.

ADJOURNMENT

Having exhausted the agenda, and with there being no further business to discuss, Chairperson Schley asked for a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Farmer made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Loy seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Chairperson Schley adjourned the Planning Commission meeting at approximately 8:39 p.m.

Minutes prepared:
June 29, 2015

Minutes approved:
July 23, 2015