

**CITY OF WIXOM
49045 PONTIAC TRAIL
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2024**

**APPROVED
JUNE 3, 2024**

This meeting was called to order by Chairman Day of the Planning Commission at 7:00 p.m. at which time allegiance was pledged to the American flag.

PRESENT: William Day (Chairman), Cheryl Tacy (Vice Chairperson), Commissioners: Sandro Grossi, Mark Lada, Anthony Lawrence

ABSENT: Excused: Cousineau; Helsom

OTHERS: Matteo Passalacqua (Carlisle Wortman Associates), Drew Benson, Assistant City Manager; and Mona Freiburger (Recording Secretary)

Determination of a Quorum:

A quorum of the Planning Commission was present for this meeting.

Changes or Additions to the Agenda:

None

Approval of Minutes:

MOTION made and seconded by Commissioner Lawrence and Vice Chair Tacy to approve the April 1, 2024, Planning Commission Meeting Minutes, as submitted.

VOTE:

MOTION CARRIED

Correspondence:

April 23, 2024, City Manager Update
Lyon Township - Notice of Distribution of Draft Master Plan

Call to the Public: (Limited to 5 minutes per speakers, addressing Agenda items on Agenda only)

No public comments.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

1. VCA Sign Ordinance Discussion

Mr. Passalacqua stated he wanted to come to the meeting tonight to have a conversation about signage in the VCA Core, specifically. Carlisle Wortman Associates know and acknowledge that the Planning Commission has a very strong passion for this district and all the design elements associated with it. There have been conversations about the recent sign approvals for 11 11 Burgers and Dough. Mr. Passalacqua wanted to provide some information on where those decisions came from and use those as a springboard and opportunity to further dive into the VCA sign ordinance to research and clarify the language, put some pictures out there to see what looks good, and what embodies the intent of the core area.

As a support document to this conversation, Mr. Passalacqua went through and did a sign inventory of the VCA core. He presented some pictures from other downtown areas that have been mentioned in conversation showing examples of what would be deemed as a high-quality style of signage.

Mr. Passalacqua outlined and spoke about the VCA Sign Provisions in his memo dated April 29, 2024, to Drew Benson, Assistant City Manager, which is included in tonight's packet to the Commissioners.

Mr. Passalacqua presented a PowerPoint slideshow with the VCA sign inventory and pictures provided by Vice Chair Tacy.

Mr. Passalacqua commented it was not necessarily the intent for the Commissioners to comment on all the things they do not like about the signs, but to try to hone in on the primary focus of whether there is an element of the sign they feel does meet the intent of the VCA sign ordinance or the elements they feel does not meet the intent.

Assistant City Manager Benson commented it might be helpful to talk about the interpretation of "box" sign, which is included in the Memo.

The first sign presented in the slideshow relates to 11 11 Burgers. Mr. Passalacqua asked the Commission for comments, issues, or concerns.

Chairman Day indicated there is a section in the VCA sign regulations that says when internally illuminated letters, logos or other message components are used, they shall be mounted directly to the wall of the building and that the backlit logos or other message components shall be no larger than 18 inches high, which would seem to eliminate the 11 11 Burgers sign, regardless of whether or not it meets the definition of box sign.

The Dough signage, there isn't dimensionality to the sign. Vice Chair Tacy commented it is a sheet of plastic, and the mounting boards can be seen. Mr. Passalacqua indicated they were working on getting this corrected and removed. Vice Chair Tacy indicated to put a border around the sign or to do something to finish it. The sign does not meet with the architectural character of the building.

Vice Chair Tacy commented the LaCasita is a similar sign but the colorful awning coordinates with the sign, so it is a full package which dresses it up as opposed to the Dough sign.

Chairman Day commented the Dairy Queen sign has the same problem as with the Chicken place; it is too big, too bright and the size of the logo is more than 18 inches. Chairman Day indicated if the sign wasn't internally lit, and an externally lit sign, he would not have a problem with it. It is his preference for no internally lit signage.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated this conversation tonight is an opportunity to look at what changes the Commission would like to make.

Chairman Day stated the Wixom Station and a few others in Country Corners conform within the ordinance. Wixom Station is externally lit.

Vice Chair Tacy commented the Drafting Table sign is stylish. There is some depth from the backing of the sign. Assistant City Manager Benson indicated, just as an example, specifying a minimum depth, such as no less than three inches deep to be internally lit or something like that, could be looked at. Ultimately, one of the goals of these conversations would be to make the ordinance more specific and to implement and communicate to the designers.

Wixom Family Pet Practice sign pre-existed the VCA.

Mr. Passalacqua presented signage from other downtown areas. He stated Coratti's signage in downtown Milford seems to follow the architecture of the building. Smoke Street signage has the external lighting. Vice Chair Tacy indicated she would agree with both of signage. She liked the fact that the awning is pulled through with the little awnings over the windows. The sign is mounted to the wall and carried through into the

end of the awning. The Smoke Street sign has a border around it, a little bit of a logo and "Smoke Street", itself, is stylized.

Assistant City Manager Benson commented one of the ideas is the ability to mandate a certain number of design features. Examples could be given of design features such as: must have borders, raised letters, externally illuminated, etc. Vice Chair Tacy agreed and liked the idea. Assistant City Manager Benson indicated regardless of what approval methods of the VCA signage, the more specific the design features, helps from a staff perspective when looking at it.

The Carol signage, downtown Milford, looks older, and the assumption would be that it probably pre-dated some of the standards of the newer signage. The Acorn sign is an externally lit sign, it is an attractive sign. You can also see that the Acorn sign has a hanging sign. Vice Chair Tacy recalled the Wixom design standards encouraged people to consider, as the pedestrian is walking down the sidewalk, to see what's next.

Mr. Passalacqua commented some of the language provided came out of a shared ordinance between the Charter Township of Plymouth and the City of Plymouth along Ann Arbor Road. The memo speaks about the lettering style should be clean and simple, no more than two fonts being used; three colors, one uniformed background color. Then it speaks to establish company logos. Mr. Passalacqua stated he liked the language, and this was something to be modeled.

Vice Chair Tacy stated she liked The Post signage, it is very stylized and clean; the signage stands out, then Local Bistro.

Chairman Day commented on the Shades Salon signage. He indicated when Shades Salon came in for their sign approval, the first S is oversized and had to be approved. Chairman Day indicated the sign looks good.

Ironwood Grill signage is a piece of metal that is mounted over the backdrop and is cut through; again, external lighting. Vice Chair Tacy indicated the Ironwood Grill sign is very artistic, and makes an artistic statement, in her opinion. The Yogurt place signage is overwhelming, busy and cannot distinguish.

Vice Chair Tacy provided pictures of signage from Harbor Springs, Petosky, Traverse City, Holland, and Milford. She indicated she was looking for signage with classic designs, an upscale look, and high-quality materials. Glass painted is cool. Traditional facades; awnings; very traditional signage but not old fashioned or Old West. The common theme of the projecting signs is that they are all hanging/suspended.

Vice Chair Tacy commented she was driving through downtown Milan where they have projected signs, so as the pedestrians are walking along, they could see the next shop.

She stated she was not saying Wixom should necessarily adhere to this, but the signage did make it feel very quaint and very user friendly.

Commissioner Grossi commented most of these places have been established for decades. Wixom is brand new.

Vice Chair Tacy commented the Commission spent a lot of time with CIB, the previous planners, and they had a good idea of what the Commission was looking for in the signage design. Buttercream Bakery, originally, came in with a signage design with awnings which were going to pick up the color of the cupcake. Vice Chair Tacy stated that is exactly what the Commission was looking for in signage; the quaintness. She did not recall what happened with the original design.

Wixom Dental is in the VCA Core. Chairman Day stated he was not sure about the brightness, but it seems bright, and secondly, it is raceway signage. Raceway signage is prohibited in the VCA Core. Chairman Day stated he did not see where there is room for interpretation when the ordinance, specifically, says no raceway signage.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated another point is to have the ability for more visual examples and to be more specific about defining a box sign, defining raceway, etc., which would be helpful for the applicants.

Assistant City Manager Benson indicated when we create the language, there are businesses that are not going to want to do exactly what we want them to do. We are going to have this understanding that there will be conflict in building systems to appeal decisions to the Planning Commission. As an example, newer businesses, chain oriented, they are going to have preferences that they will be willing to seek variances as opposed to try to conform, whether it is an ease of construction or trying to maintain brand continuity. Assistant City Manager Benson stated he was not going to speak for Dough, but he is going to venture to say that sign wasn't the most expensive option. He is worried from an economic development side and a business attraction standpoint, trying to be flexible with how much it costs to get in and to get a sign on a building, how much they could afford, if the business had to put "x" amount of dollars down to get in or for their lease costs. Those are other talking points from the perspective of people who are going to occupy these spaces. Vice Chair Tacy stated she does not want to "rubber stamp" stuff. Just using Dough as an example, this isn't their only location, so it is not like a person that is trying to establish a business; they are established. She understood that there are costs, and so forth, but we cannot let everybody walk in and do whatever they want. Chairman Day thought from a marketing and economic perspective for a business, there is a value of having a cohesive looking downtown that is going to draw more people into the downtown. This is something that is considered, as well. Vice Chair Tacy stated she is not saying we won't work with people, but these are design guidelines.

Mr. Passalacqua stated he has some good notes based on the visuals. He asked if there was anything about some of the samples provided either verbatim or in theme that the Commission thought might inform some of the VGA signage decisions.

Chairman Day indicated to try to make the verbatim as specific as possible, but there must be some room for flexibility, as well.

Vice Chair Tacy stated she liked Assistant City Manager Benson's idea which should incorporate at least "x" number of conditions; at least nudge them to incorporate a little higher end rather than the cheapest one.

Commissioner Lada gave an overview of the direction: if it is a flat sign with external lighting such as Wixom Station, it is good. Individual letters or numbers can be internally lit because they are their own, they are not part of a box, they are their own shape, and their own letter, that is okay. We would prefer depth to the letters on either version. Aesthetics. Definable and measurable. Need words that deal with the color combination or color scheme of the building, or the materials used and the creation of the building; number of fonts.

Vice Chair Tacy commented she would like to include more pictures especially like Ironwood Grill which has the copper color in the back.

Commissioner Lada stated he was intrigued by the bulleted list; such as you need to have at least three of the seven things.

Vice Chair Tacy gave the example of Longhorn Steakhouse. The Commission worked with them, so that they still had their corporate identity.

Assistant City Manager Benson stated to be specific, that if there are architectural features that are unique that may not meet the ordinance, such as the S in Salon, if we make it clear, then those items can be approved with the Planning Commission's consideration.

Commissioner Lada stated it may not hurt to include benchmark photos of the expectations.

2. Renewable Energy Ordinance Discussion

In light of new renewable energy legislation that Governor Whitmer signed on November 28, 2023, local governments must now re-evaluate how large, utility-scale wind, solar and energy storage facilities will be regulated in their communities. The new

legislation includes many gray areas that will be clarified in the coming months. However, it is important for communities that want to retain local regulatory control under the new legislation to act, and coordinate with their neighbors, before November 29, 2024.

A memorandum dated April 24, 2024 (included in the packet), from Matteo Passalacqua, Carlisle Wortman Associates, provides a summary and recommendations regarding the legislation, as they, currently understand it. The memo noted it is important that municipalities consult with their legal counsel before undertaking substantiated actions towards addressing this legislation.

The law states that communities must have a CREO, Compatible Renewable Energy Ordinance, by the time that the law goes into effect, November, 2024. If you don't have it by choice, then you are not necessarily penalized but all the reviews of these systems are going to go through the State and the State is going to have the final say on how it is set up. If you do have a CREO, then you can retain local control. The State tells you what the setbacks are going to be, the noise regulations, and the different rules as it relates to these different systems. To clarify, these are solar fields, wind turbines and battery energy storage systems. These are the three that have been outlined by the State.

Carlisle Wortman Associates has been working with their clients to retain some level of local control or to take the public position that they will be okay with the State reviewing these systems, if they come up in their communities, in which the community will not have local control. For context, the State has picked the thresholds, it is called nameplate capacities for each system. These are outlined in the Memo. These are not backyard or rooftop things, but very large systems.

The State also says these systems can be non-contiguous. They can cross municipal borders, but they must have a single tie into the grid. Because they can be non-contiguous and can be shared with other communities, there may be some areas in Wixom's M-1 and M-2 districts that have not been developed yet that would offer a sizeable offering, if someone was interested in developing those sites as that system.

Assistant City Manager Benson indicated we do recognize, broadly speaking, with 400 to 600 acre projects are unlikely unless Lyon Oaks decides to sell or make available their 200 acres in Wixom, and combined with the rest of the Ford property; battery storage is something that is entirely feasible for an area like Wixom, and smaller installations that might not be applicable for a CREO ordinance, but might be worth discussing or having an ordinance that gets specific about them.

Mr. Passalacqua stated Assistant City Manager Benson brings up a good point. The thresholds listed, the State, basically says the rules apply if you are at those thresholds

or higher. Carlisle Wortman is advising their clients, if they want to regulate, to work on an ordinance that addresses both the State level and the sub-State level. Unfortunately, the State law does not offer any guidance one way or another, or whether you can use tools like zoning to regulate their size systems or if you can apply additional regulations. There are a handful of rules that must be met when developing these systems, but they don't talk about additional studies, regulations, or information on site plan review. Within reason, you can add regulations to the State size things. We must be careful on what we write and how strictly we write it because if it is deemed to be non-compatible, you lose your control to the MPSC. There are some incentives in the way the law is structured; it does offer some incentives for the developer to want to go through local control as opposed to State control. State control system can take up to a year to review. The municipality would get 120 days. The developer is not going to want to sit on this for a year.

Assistant City Manager stated there are portions of any kind of renewal energy systems that we could find places that tie into our current ordinances, but our current ordinances weren't written in a way that dives into the issues. It is a question of, do you want to get specific on some of these things? Is there a scenario ten years from now that wind turbines are so efficient that Flint Development wants to do five of them, they can somehow generate enough power and it is outside of our control? Alternatively, we want to encourage certain types of installation, there might be things in a general renewable energy we have control over addressing such as how we want to handle EV charging stations.

Communities are required to have a compatible renewable energy ordinance, and if you don't, it either needs to be by an elective step to say we don't want it, we are fine with it, but let the State deal with it, or if you are trying to stop it from happening, then the State is going to say, we will do it for you.

Mr. Passalacqua indicated this is a lot to digest. We must think about what position you want to take on both big and small, above State level, and below State level. There is a thought process, do we want to regulate both big and small, where do we want to allocate some land within the community to allow these uses, and is there any benefit or effort to coordinating with your neighbors, does it align with what's on their border and does it make it more likely or less likely that a development might be interested in that land?

Vice Chair Tacy asked if there is anything needed from the Commission at this point other than our awareness. Mr. Passalacqua answered self-education if you would like. It would be helpful to understand, again, do you want to regulate the big stuff and the small stuff in the same way or in different ways?

Mr. Passalacqua thought there may be some geography that could support these systems, but is it the highest and best use of land in an area like Wixom? Townships

are wrestling with this in a different way because they are getting a lot of interest with on the outskirts where Meijer is not looking at turning that field into a store, but a solar company says yes, that's perfect.

Commissioner Grossi asked whether Wixom would be able to dictate whether it is solar or wind or either/or. Mr. Passalacqua indicated you could develop an overall that strictly speaks to whether battery could go there. The way the law is written, if you say yes to one, but not the other, a case could be made that you are not compatible, and you could lose control to regulate all three. Assistant City Manager Benson commented, the bigger picture, Wixom likely would not run into situations where it doesn't make sense. As an example, if you don't have a big enough field, they may not look in solar, but they might be more open to wind. There is a balancing act that would come into writing such regulations and trying to be thoughtful about how it could happen. Assistant City Manager Benson indicated his perspective is that Wixom's land values are way too high to accommodate most of these uses, in most cases, but he is not going to say it is impossible, specifically, when you look at the 100 acres of the railyard.

Commissioner Lada stated he is not opposed to renewable energies. His question was, are they able to use a combination of those three? Mr. Passalacqua stated no.

Chairman Day asked about the tax implication in terms of revenue. Assistant City Manager Benson stated he did not have a specific example to cite but he would venture to say the installations, themselves, would be taxable and they would be based on the value of those assets. There could be scenario where a single wind turbine could be worth more than a building; he did not know.

Mr. Passalacqua commented there are community benefits associated with the law, that if you do have one of these systems in your community that's of the State size, there are certain financial benefits that the developer has a requirement to give to the community to be used towards public services.

Mr. Passalacqua stated the flipside of battery is, it needs the least amount of land, but there is a lot of public safety concerns regarding when these installations were to catch fire or something of that nature. It is the give and take. There has been a lot of interaction and involvement of fire departments in crafting the language for what the development must provide as it relates to safety, protocols, training, equipment, etc.

Mr. Passalacqua commented he was hearing that they are interested in regulating both State and local system for these three categories. Chairman Day stated yes. Mr. Passalacqua stated we can start to work on what ordinance language would look like and in the meantime, think about where. Assistant City Manager Benson stated he could send out some examples, things to think about and then bring this to a future agenda to continue this conversation.

Call to the Public:

No public comments.

Staff Comments:

Assistant City Manager Benson commented the school bond passed yesterday by a large margin; 70% turnout. The school has not communicated, but their intent would be to move on a new elementary school to open in the Fall of 2027. The City has been in contact with them. This would also tie in well with existing conversations at updating the master plan next fiscal year.

City Council hasn't approved the budget formally and will do so on May 28th.

Assistant City Manager Benson indicated, the schools are not subject to local zoning. He has been trying to have a conversation with them to understand how they plan to go about it. They have not gotten that far, but yes, they would like to have it come before the Planning Commission. The new elementary school will be located on Maple Road.

Assistant City Manager Benson updated the Commission on the Renton properties. We did not receive any proposals from developers during the initial RFP process. The City will continue to market the site and at the same time they will move forward with soliciting bids for demolition of the existing structures. Different brokers were interviewed to help market the site.

Commission Comments:

Commissioner Lawrence stated he must regrettably say that his ongoing meeting attendance is going to be questionable due to a medical issue of his family. He must resign effective June 1st; if he is needed at the next meeting. Otherwise, effectively immediately. Chairman Day stated he will be missed, and sorry to hear.

Commissioner Grossi inquired about the preschool located on Charms and Wixom Roads. He asked if the building was what the Commission approved. Commissioner Grossi stated the building looks like plain brick. Vice Chair Tacy commented the Commission asked for more, the Commission pushed to have shutters installed, put color on the building. There is still a lack of color.

Commissioner Grossi commented Dan's Excavating is a disaster. There are a dozen trucks that make many trips in a day. It is a nightmare going up and down the roads. There is physical concrete debris.

Assistant City Manager Benson commented, at least in the shorter run, they have the street sweepers out, significantly, more often; they have also been wetting down the street, but he 100% recognizes the same concerns with the debris, the dirt, and the dust. The Commission will have the opportunity, if they want to continue this, it is a temporary land use. The Commission has no obligation to grant them to do that again. Assistant City Manager Benson indicated, to his knowledge, they have not violated any specific terms; they are doing two things at the same time.

ADJOURNMENT:

This meeting of the Planning Commission was motioned and adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Mona Freiburger
Recording Secretary