

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
March 16, 2016  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER  
7:00 P.M.**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

**Present:** R. Johnson, A. Bedogne, C. Zuellig, B. Mason, L. MacGregor, P. Hollifield,  
J. Talaga, H. Jugenitz

**Staff:** Bonnie Wessler, City Planner  
Nan Schuette, Executive Secretary  
Cynthia Kochanek, Associate Planner  
Beth Ernat, Director of Economic Development

Chairman Johnson welcomed new planning commission member, Jason Talaga.

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Commissioner Hollifield moved to approve the minutes of February 17, 2016, with correction noted by Chairman Johnson (Support: L. MacGregor) and the motion carried unanimously.

**IV. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION**

None

**V. PRESENTATION AND PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS**

1. Rail Crossing Closures: North Park and North Grove

Ms. Wessler presented the staff report stating that the City has been informed by Amtrak that trip times may be decreased, and train travel speeds increased, with every at-grade crossing closure. To incentivize municipalities to close these crossings, they fully fund such closures if they are completed by July 30<sup>th</sup>. In an effort to ensure smooth and efficient functioning of the Wolverine Line, the City has agreed to strongly consider closing the crossings at North Park and

North Grove. Area residents and other stakeholders were invited to attend the public hearing at this Planning Commission meeting to get feedback. Planning Commission is being asked to make a recommendation to City Council. A drawing of the concept was included for the public to review.

Chairman Johnson asked about the possibility of pedestrian crossings and Ms. Wessler responded that this would be prohibited from crossing at this point. Commissioner MacGregor asked what the result would be if not closed – would that mean no station if not feasible to complete by July 30<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Wessler responded that there is no direct relationship between the closures and a rail stop; however, we must take into account that any stop that is added would add time. These closures would reduce travel time and make the rail stop more likely. Commissioner Hollifield asked where else could people cross and Ms. Wessler responded, either N. Prospect or N. River.

Commissioner Bedogne moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: P. Hollifield) and the motion carried unanimously.

**Hugh Kennedy, 316 N. Grove** – Initially, he was in favor due to speeders/cut-through and truck traffic, but concerned there would be no pedestrian crossing but realizes that the safest way for pedestrians would be to use Prospect St. bridge. He is still supportive of the closure since it would enhance transportation in Ypsilanti.

**Lynn Fremont, 208 N. Grove** – in favor of closing – agrees with Hugh Kennedy regarding the speeders and trucks but happy to use Prospect to walk.

**Stephanie Weston, 302 N. Grove** – agrees with others, in favor of train and second what everyone else says about train station and closures. Would like pedestrian crossing – bridge? In support.

**Becky Lewis, 216 E. Cross** – not in favor of closures. Cars that speed down Park/Grove will detour to Prospect/River. She is concerned about amount of traffic by reducing the two streets. She feels it will involve more traffic at her intersection (Prospect/Miles/Cross). The turn lane by her driveway that was moved during the reconstruction on Prospect affects her pulling out the driveway. She was also confused about the train stop at both crossings. Ms. Ernat explained to her the stopping/slowng traffic for future stop in DepotTown.

**Henry Prebys, 301 N. Grove** – sympathizes with Becky – he is concerned about traffic that went to Marsh Plating. After construction, trucks continued to use N. Grove – started doing a three-point turn at High 3-4 times per day. Supports closing Grove and Park.

**Lon Smith, 215 E. Cross** – carriers for Post Office not happy – one carrier serves whole area – carrier has to make multiple runs across the crossing – would be a mess to reconfigure the routes. Wants a “no through traffic for trucks” sign and ticketing. Uses Park Street. Doesn’t like going through Depot Town. Also on New Beginnings Academy, the parking for them faces Michigan Avenue so will have to u-turn or take North Street. Safety issue. Also concerned about plowing. Doesn’t believe it will help speed up trains – just blow through. Also will be difficulty for tourists finding the Tucker House. Wants a traffic study done and a survey of the people that live there.

**Leo Heffner (Becky's husband) – 216 E. Cross** – Agrees with everything Lon stated. He questions why the streets should be closed for a train that “might” stop in Depot town for a couple of minutes.

**Andrea Gruber, 318 E. Cross** – Has mixed feelings – traffic will have to go somewhere if diverted. She is pro-train but not really sure that a Wolverine is worth it. Doesn't like the idea of going through Depot Town – thinks traffic elsewhere will speed up and go down Prospect/E. Cross.

**Teresa Maddix, 214 N. Grove** – currently lots of truck traffic – In favor if Amtrak would commit to train stop. Pedestrians would jump over barriers to cut thru. Closing the tracks would make commute longer but she's OK with that.

**Christine Chi, N. River** – should do a study – consider closing only one street with all the events that go on in Depot Town. Closing both if close proximity not good idea – would create havoc.

**Tyler Weston, 302 N. Grove** – recommends only closing Grove and not Park. He is concerned about diversion of traffic and not enough pedestrian traffic.

Ms. Ernat stated that MDOT will give us money if we can decrease time of five minutes statewide. Chairman Johnson added that the board will be taking a vote.

**Mary Ellen Hagenauer, 309 N. Grove** – supports the train but wants to compromise and only close Grove.

**Hugh Kennedy, 316 n. Grove** – Pointed out that these two streets are really the only impediment for miles around that are practical to close.

**Matt Marsh, 103 N. Grove** – stated that he was sensitive to the truck issue – will make every effort to redirect traffic since he didn't realize it was so bad. He told the audience he agrees with speeding and will encourage people to drive safely. Cuts off their maintenance lots – needs to look at design/redesign. Concerned for people turn left on to E. Michigan – tough on evacuation routes and Grove is really their only access.

Commissioner Zuellig moved to close the public portion of the hearing (Support: H. Jugenitz) and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Johnson stated that he lives on Grove and is happy about potential closure – they have wanted that for years. He added that we had received one letter from a resident, Ms. Probst, 302 N. Park – who is hugely in favor of the railroad crossing at Park and OK with the one on Grove also but has less vested interest on that closure.

Commissioner Mason stated that it would make it easier for EMU students/faculty to travel. Closing would increase safety but does understand the impact on traffic.

Commissioner MacGregor – Is a neighbor of the lady on N. Park who wrote the letter. She added that this is the route that she and her kids take to get to Prospect Park. She'd also like to point out the resident that wrote the letter on Park was in favor of closing the crossing at Park and is less vested in Grove. Ms. MacGregor asked what impact the closing of the streets would have on adding any time for the train and the likelihood of actually building the platforms; actually seeing regional transit; or it is a pipe dream. Also, do we have an estimate on how that might or might not play out in the future.

Commissioner Zuellig – really appreciated all the feedback - stated that she had previously lived on N. Grove and is concerned about closing two streets pushing traffic on to River or Prospect. Grid gives the city redundancy and resiliency. This will create a superblock in that area. She is pro-traffic study. Think it is an interesting idea to close one but not the other – dead ends are rough spaces in town. Would hate to close the roads and then never get a stop.

Commissioner Jugenitz – Seconds the view that there should be a traffic study to help the board make the best decision.

Commissioner Bedogne – he counted the votes and looks like six people spoke against the potential closure and two were for it, for a total of eight people that spoke. It is his opinion that it is a drastic measure but one that has to be taken and will vote for it.

Commissioner Hollifield – He is inclined to go along with it. He added that we have had the median on Michigan Avenue, the recent road diet down Michigan Avenue and feels that while people complain now, they get used to it. Thinks the design isn't the greatest and could be improved. He is pro train stop. He would also like pedestrian bridges and feels that the train will bring in more revenue to the city.

Commissioner Talaga – noted that Beth has mentioned about the need to cut times by five minutes and asked if other communities had been contacted to see how they had been affected.

Commissioner Zuellig asked why the cut-off date was July 30<sup>th</sup> if not doing right away. Ms. Ernat responded that it is funding issues.

Commissioner Hollifield moved that the Planning Commission recommend to City Council the railroad crossing closure of N. Grove and N. Park (Support: A. Bedogne). A roll call vote was taken with a vote of 6:2. Commissioners Zuellig and Jugenitz opposed. The motion carried.

## 2. Special Use – 943 N. River

Staff report was presented by Associate Planner, C. Kochanek, who stated this is an approval of a special use and site plan for the solar array proposed for the northern portion of the site at North River (bounded by Clark) for a total of 5.015 acres for the installation of a ground mounted solar photovoltaic system with the accompanying signage, transformer pad and service rack.

The Planning Commission recommended to City Council at its February 10, 2016 meeting, that the text of the zoning ordinance be amended to allow for solar farms as a special land use in

the Parks district. This has not been approved by council as of this date but should be completed by April. Any approval of this special use and site by the Planning Commission is contingent on the approval by City Council in April.

We did receive the engineering review from OHM which indicated they recommended site plan approval. Staff is recommending that we approve the special use and site plan with conditions and waivers.

Staff report was presented by Ms. Kochanek.

Commissioner Hollifield stated that his son is a VP of Information Technology at DTE and questioned if he has a conflict of interest with voting on this item. Economic Director Ernat asked if his son lived at home and is directly involved with solar at DTE, to which Commission Hollifield responded that he neither lived at home nor was involved in solar. Ms. Ernat stated that based on this information, he would not have a conflict of interest.

Commissioner Hollifield moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: H. Jugenitz) and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Johnson asked if the applicant had any concerns with conditions and Jeff Eckhouc, Project Manager for Nova Consultants, representing DTE, responded that he had no issues with any of the conditions.

Ms. Wessler noted that one of the possible permutations for one of the conditions for the non-motorized pathway and/or sidewalk is, given the presence of the nature preserve to the north and Superior Greenway and high quality nature trails to the south, that the Planning Commission may consider instead of a fee in-lieu of constructing a sidewalk that they consider a fee in-lieu of a shared use path to connect the superior greenway to the trails at Highland Cemetery at some future time.

Some questions were asked by commissioners to clarify the fee in-lieu and how it is handled. Ms. Wessler stated it goes to a specific account for a designated project that is agreed by all parties. She gave an example of one at Peninsula Place where money was held for a sidewalk that was unable to be built because of the railroad and the money is being held for a more appropriate project in the same area. Chairman Johnson added that he was comfortable with staff ensuring that this would be handled in such a way to be beneficial to our shared interest of how this is worked out.

Commissioner MacGregor moved to close the public portion of the hearing (Support: P. Hollifield) and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner MacGregor moved that the Planning Commission approve the Special Use Permit for the DTEE Solar Project-Highland Cemetery with the following findings and conditions:

Findings: The application is substantially in compliance with Sec122-165(b) and complies with the ordinance amendment currently before Council for approval.

Conditions: Special use approval shall be subject to approval of the site plan.

The motion was supported by Commissioner Jugenitz. A roll call vote was taken and carried unanimously.

Commissioner Jugenitz moved that the Planning Commission approve the Site Plan for the DTEE Solar Project-Highland Cemetery with the following findings, waiver, and conditions:

Findings:

The application substantially complies with Sec122-127; and complies with the ordinance amendment currently before Council for approval.

Waivers:

1. A waiver is requested from the Sec122-704 due to site constraints and the nature of the solar array project.

Conditions:

1. Applicant will indicate the height of the transformer on plans submitted to the city planner for administrative approval.
2. Applicant will note on the site plan that any freestanding photovoltaic system which is not used for six (6) months will be deemed to be abandoned and unless there is proof of mitigating circumstances and a three-month extension is granted by the City, the applicant will need to dismantle the site and return it to its original state.
3. The applicant will provide shared-use path in lieu of a sidewalk, as part of a non-motorized network or a fee in-lieu of construction may be provided by the development in the amount of 100% of the construction cost.
4. Shrubs and other obstructions will be mainlined lower than 30" and trees and other obstructions higher than 8' surrounding the site for traffic visibility triangle at the intersection of North River and Clark.
5. Applicant will plant an additional three (3) trees to the north along the gravel drive.
6. Applicant will screen the transformer from the rights-of-way with plantings or a compatible durable non-combustible enclosure.
7. Applicant will maintain vines on the north fence as screenings as long as they don't interfere with the operation of the solar array.
8. This approval shall be conditioned on council's adoption of the amendment to the zoning ordinance recommended by Planning Commission, or an amendment substantially similar in nature and requirements.

The motion was supported by P. Hollifield. A roll call vote was taken and carried unanimously.

## **VI. NEW BUSINESS**

1. Study Item – 50-62 Ecorse

Ms. Wessler stated that the owner has two potential concepts for this property and would like feedback from the Planning Commission. This is for presentation purposes only and no action will be taken. Ms. Wessler stated there is no staff presentation.

The applicant stated that the owner could not be present, hence the reason he was in attendance to review the proposed concepts with the board for feedback. They have gone through four different options and have now come up with two. They are looking at either one enlarged retail use or two separate buildings for a medical/support facility. They are looking at changing the five current openings to two. A number of comments were made by board members, indicating some concerns that they had regarding frontage, parking, etc. The consensus choice was the second option with the medical support facility. They also recommended that the building be moved further back.

## **VI. OLD BUSINESS**

None

## **VII. FUTURE BUSINESS DISCUSSION/UPDATES**

Ms. Wessler reported that there are three applications for next month:

436 Orchard – child care  
734 N. River – Special Use  
298 Jarvis – Fire truck access

## **VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **1. Non-Motorized Advisory Committee By-laws**

The minutes for both the February and March meetings were included.

Bob Krzewinski, 706 Dwight, Chair of the Non-Motorized Advisory Committee, was in attendance to share communications the Advisory Committee that they plan to send to MDOT to identify four non-motorized user crossings under their jurisdiction that are very much in need of safety improvements, none of which require major construction, only the addition of signs, pavement markings, etc. these improvements would help non-motorized users, especially the disabled attempting to cross streets in a safe manner. The problem areas are:

1. North Huron Street at West Cross (M-17)
2. North Huron Street at Pearl Street
3. Hamilton Street at Michigan Avenue
4. Huron Street Crossing of I-94.

Chairman Johnson thanked Mr. Krzewinski for the update and dedication to improving city streets.

Commissioner Zuellig moved to support this effort sending communications to MDOT for ADA crossing compliance (Support: J. Talaga) and the motion carried unanimously.

## **IX ADJOURNMENT**

Since there was no further business, Commissioner Zuellig moved to adjourn the meeting (Support: P. Hollifield). The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.