

PLANNING COMMISSION

February 16, 2017

The City of Portage Planning Commission meeting of February 16, 2017 was called to order by Vice-Chairman Stoffer at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers of Portage City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue. Three citizens were in attendance.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Vice-Chairman Stoffer led the Commission, staff and citizens in the Pledge of Allegiance.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Christopher Forth, Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Services.

ROLL CALL:

Mr. Forth called the roll: Patterson (yes), Stoffer (yes), Richmond (yes), Shoup (yes) and Joshi (yes). A motion was offered by Commissioner Patterson, seconded by Commissioner Joshi, to approve the roll excusing Chairman Welch and Commissioners Schimmel, Bosch and Dargitz. The motion was unanimously approved 5-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Vice-Chairman Stoffer referred the Commission to the February 2, 2017 meeting minutes contained in the agenda packet. Commissioner Shoup noted his name was misspelled. A motion was made by Commissioner Patterson, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, to approve the minutes as amended. The motion was unanimously approved 5-0.

SITE/FINAL PLANS:

None.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

None.

NEW BUSINESS:

None

7:05 p.m. - The Commission took a short recess.

7:10 p.m. - The Commission reconvened the meeting in City Hall Conference Room No. 1

OLD BUSINESS:

1. FY 2017-2027 Capital Improvement Program (preliminary). Staff and the Commission reviewed the comments provided by Commissioner Dargitz in an email message dated February 16, 2017. With regard to the acquisition of two parcels located along West Centre Avenue and currently owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Mr. Forth indicated MDNR officials have advised that these two parcels have been identified for possible sale since they are no longer desirable as hunting areas as a result of surrounding development activity. The MDNR has not formally announced the property will be sold, but the city for many years has indicated a desire for a "first right of refusal" opportunity. Placement of the property acquisition in year 10 of the CIP indicates a commitment by the city to consider moving forward with the purchase. The proposed \$4

million purchase price was an estimate provided by the City Assessor's Office. If the city were to acquire the property, the price would likely vary depending on several factors, including applying a conservation easement over the entire 378 acres. If the property were to be acquired by the city, a specific management plan would be developed and implemented. At that time, the actual annual cost would be budgeted. The Commission discussed development of various recreational improvements for the MDNR property for the benefit of Portage residents such trails to connect people to places rather than simply leaving it in a natural state.

The Commission also discussed Commissioner Dargitz's suggestion to consider a separate CIP project to purchase property, which may be of interest to the city when it becomes available. Mr. Forth indicated that including a CIP project so funds can be available if and when property becomes available may be problematic, since other projects may not be funded. Mr. Forth indicated City Council can approve property acquisition with the use of general fund money, separate from the Capital Improvement Program, if a specific public use for the property has been identified. Commissioner Patterson didn't believe the city should assemble property then try to attract a developer. Commissioner Patterson suggested this is best left to the private sector. Commissioner Stoffer noted it may be beneficial for a single property owner (such as the city) to negotiate with a developer to achieve the vision rather than negotiate with 15 different property owners. Mr. Forth noted there are tools available to implement the vision such as the City Centre Area zoning district. Commissioner Stoffer asked if it was too late to suggest a CIP project for land acquisition. Mr. Forth stated it was not too late. Commissioner Patterson noted he didn't see the benefit to having a separate CIP project for land acquisition. If property important to the city becomes available, the city has the resources to acquire it. The Planning Commission should focus more on planning efforts to guide development and leave financing and property acquisition matters to City Council. Commissioner Stoffer suggested the city could take a more aggressive approach such as property acquisition. The Commission noted this type of project has also been discussed in prior years. After additional discussion, the Commission made no recommendation to include a CIP project for land acquisition.

In regard to Commissioner Dargitz's comment about the Austin Lake Trail project, Commissioner Patterson noted this is a separate project from the Portage Road corridor and the proposed road diet for the section south of Lakeview Drive. Mr. Forth explained the Austin Lake Trail is designed to connect to a planned trail in Vicksburg.

With regard to the Neighborhood and Community Enhancement project, Commissioner Patterson noted 1) the CIP project profile states a resident can submit a proposal but it may be too much for one resident to accomplish and 2) the time table to identify, develop and submit a project is too short. Commissioner Patterson suggested two months to identify, develop and submit a project. Mr. Forth stated staff will consider options to increase the deadline for project submission. Commissioner Richmond summarized the sub-committee discussions about early outreach efforts. Mr. Forth noted that before outreach efforts begin, City Council needs to first approve the budget, which occurs during the month of May. Consequently, outreach could begin the first part of June. Mr. Forth explained the process and time that would be needed to evaluate projects and prepare a recommendation to City Council.

Commissioner Patterson indicted the subcommittee consists of Commissioners Dargitz and Richmond. However, Commissioner Dargitz' term ends in May of this year and another Commissioner will need to step forward to keep the project moving forward. Commissioner Patterson stated he was supportive of Neighborhood and Community Enhancement project when it was initially proposed but due to other commitments, does not have the time to participate as a subcommittee member. Commissioner Joshi volunteered to serve on the subcommittee. The Commission discussed efforts to reach out to various neighborhoods and potential projects.

Commissioner Stoffer asked if there was anything else to discuss. Mr. Forth asked if the Commissioners had any changes to the Neighborhood and Community Enhancement application form, to please forward them to him. Mr. Forth stated this item will be placed on an upcoming agenda for further discussion. Finally, staff and the Commission discussed timing for implementation of the funded projects.

STATEMENT OF CITIZENS:

None

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher T. Forth, AICP
Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Services