

**CITY OF BIG RAPIDS
PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
April 19, 2017**

Chairperson Schmidt called the April 19, 2017, regular meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 6:30 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PRESENT Jennifer Cochran, Paul Jackson, John Schmidt, Tim Vogel, Bill Yontz

EXCUSED Sue Bean, Renato Cerdena

ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT Mark Sweppenheiser, Neighborhood Services Director
Cindy Plautz, Neighborhood Services Coordinator

There were 4 people in the audience.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion was made by Tim Vogel, seconded by Bill Yontz, to approve the minutes of the March 15, 2017, meeting of the Planning Commission as presented.

Motion passed unanimously with all in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT NOT RELATED TO ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

None heard.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

None

GENERAL BUSINESS

Chickens

Sweppenheiser explained that there are several Big Rapids citizens interested in raising chickens on their properties for their eggs. If it is determined to allow this practice, he would like to study the subject and create an ordinance to govern the keeping of chickens to ensure it doesn't become a nuisance in the City. He would like to have a committee to review the possibility and report back to the Planning Commission. He observed that this is the first time people have been

present to speak or hear about the topic. Sweppenheiser thought that maybe having a trial period in the ordinance would be helpful. He added that a hand out concerning the keeping of chickens was distributed at a previous meeting.

Chairperson Schmidt asked if anyone in the audience wanted to speak about raising chickens in the City.

Clifton Franklund who is a professor of micro biology at Ferris stated that he is in favor of raising chickens within the City. He and his family have raised chickens previously in another location. He provided a handout to the Planning Commission from the Back-Yard Chickens web site. More information is available at <http://www.backyardchickens.com>

Franklund researched other city's ordinances concerning chicken raising and said that the City of Lansing has a good one that could be tweaked for City of Big Rapids use. He listed the benefits of raising chickens as follows:

- If limited to a small number of birds, they become pets
- Chickens consume table scraps
- Chickens consume garden pests (bugs)
- Chicken waste makes good compost
- Chickens produce eggs for consumption.

Franklund listed possible problems as follows:

- Noise
 - a) Limit number of birds
 - b) Do not allow roosters
- Odor
 - a) Limit number of birds
 - b) Use reasonable set backs
- Zoonotic disease
 - a) Limit number of animals
 - b) Provide some basic background information

As roosters are noisy and only used to breed, they would be banned in the City. If owners were limited to 4 to 5 birds, the noise and odor would be kept down. But, he thought 1 to 2 birds in the City would be better due to the size coup that would be needed for more birds, and the small lot sizes in the City. Two to three sq. ft. per bird are recommended for a chicken coup. Franklund said that zoonotic disease would not be a problem. Chickens don't carry bird flu but do carry salmonella which can be avoided by simply washing your hands after handling the chickens.

Franklund said that heat lamps or a 100-watt bulb are sufficient to keep chickens warm in the winter and they would need ventilation in the summer. Hens usually lay eggs for about 4 years and live 5 to 6 years. Owners would be wise to keep the coup safe from predators. Feeders and

waterers can be used for times when the owners go on vacation. Eggs, if left in their bloom, can last at room temperature for several weeks.

Mark Speas is an acquaintance of Franklund and they have spoken about raising chickens. This winter he paid attention to other cities that allow chicken raising. He noticed that the home owners are generally younger (under 30 years old). All had secure fences around the coup area. He does not see any downside to raising chickens in the city.

Matt Nikkari stated that he is not interested in raising chickens, but has friends who raise them. They have shared eggs with him and he believes that they are better tasting. He said he remembers taking care of chickens at his grandmother's house and said once they don't lay eggs any more, they would be eaten. He supports raising chickens in the City.

Sweppenheiser said that the chicken coops themselves would not be regulated, but setbacks would be enforced. Suggested specifications for chicken coops can be found on the following web site: <http://www.backyardchickens.com>

Cochran wondered if the ordinance should govern the sharing of eggs for any liability reasons. Selling eggs would be regulated but not sharing with friends. Franklund added that you cannot see salmonella bacteria. The chickens don't get sick from it but humans need to wash their hands after handling chickens to avoid the bacteria. Larger flocks can be vaccinated, but with smaller numbers of chickens there is no need. Franklund stated that chickens would not make good house pets as they are dusty, dirty animals.

Sweppenheiser said that the ordinance limits pets to 3 dogs and cats. It specifically disallows pigs, sheep and goats. Any other animal must be kept 500 feet away from any structure.

Yontz, Vogel and Jackson will serve on a committee to work with the City Attorney to come up with some language for a Public Hearing and eventual recommendation to the City Commission. The Chicken Committee will have the information for the next City Commission meeting.

Parking Regulations

Sweppenheiser introduced the discussion saying he is concerned about the regulations for multi-family rentals. Currently, the ordinance requires 2 spaces per unit, plus 1 space for each bedroom. The development at 113 Chestnut was required to provide an overabundance of parking – they needed 8 extra spaces. The regulations may have been developed in hopes of not creating too many student rentals, but now it seems we also discourage good development. Most of our larger apartment complexes have gotten variances for a lesser amount of parking spaces than is required by ordinance. He feels we need to reduce the number of spaces required for multi-family housing rather than give variances and the reduced parking requirement may attract new development. Single family parking regulations can stay the same at 2 per dwelling. He is proposing 1 spot per bedroom in multi-family dwellings. Sweppenheiser noted that in general, 80% of downtown land is used for vehicles.

Sweppenheiser would like to encourage new development rather than let existing housing continue to get older.

Cochran wondered if this new regulation would apply to existing housing and said she would like to see the dirt parking areas paved. Schmidt thought that requiring paved parking may deter people turning single family dwellings into rentals.

Sweppenheiser will come up with some new language for multi-family parking for the Planning Commission to review.

Rezoning

The owner of 218 S Warren is interested in using it as a residential dwelling. Previously it was the Red Cross building. The property is zoned C-2 and is located in the DDA. The property owner would like the property to be changed to R/P. Since this would be considered spot zoning which is illegal, Sweppenheiser is suggesting the whole block be considered. The Master Plan and the Hyatt Palma Plan do not recommend any other use for this property other than C-2. Next month this will be considered at a Public Hearing. The R/P Zone is considered a buffer to the Commercial Zone.

The properties in this block are included in the Tax Increment Financing Plan. Currently, real property values are going up but are not seen in the tax capture. In 5 years, the tax on personal property will no longer exist. Additionally, parking is allowed across the alley from a business so AMC could expand parking in this area if they wished.

Schmidt warned that we should be careful of the zone slowly enlarging over time without the City realizing what is happening. He advised that we should bring it into conformance if we can.

Surplus Property

Sweppenheiser said that recently several properties were recommended for surplus designation. The recommendations were made without first checking the deeds for any stipulations. Unfortunately, some of the properties had stipulations about resale. The Hanchett property had stipulations about usage due to contamination. Another property was purchased for a storm water easement and if sold, must be used as park land. Yet, another stated that if the City ever wanted to sell the property, it would go back to the State.

The City needs to develop a procedure to follow in selection of properties for surplus designation. A title search should be performed before the property is recommended for surplus designation.

There being no further business, motion was made by Jennifer Cochran, seconded by Bill Yantz to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m. with all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia J. Plautz
Planning Commission Secretary