

REGULAR MEETING OF THE WEST BRANCH PLANNING COMMISSION HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER OF CITY HALL, 121 NORTH FOURTH STREET, ON TUESDAY, MAY 10, 2016.

Chairman Tim Schaiberger called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Members: Bob David, Kara Fachting, Jan Hasty, June Longstreet, Tim Schaiberger, and Dan Weiler.

Absent: Heather Grace, Mike Jackson, and Shirley McClenahen.

Others officers in attendance: Mayor William Ehinger, City Council Members Kimi Ervans, Denise Lawrence, and Dave Lucas, City Clerk/Treasurer John Dantzer, City Deputy Clerk/Treasurer Michelle Frechette (arrived at 6:30), Police Chief Ken Walters, and Waste Water Treatment Plant Superintendent Dan Robb.

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Mayor Ehinger noted the City has received some complaints that too many of the parking spots on Houghton Ave are being used by business owners and their employees and therefore not available for people that would like to shop downtown. He noted that some potential ways to help discourage this would be to add metered parking or add signs that limit the parking to 2-3 hours.

Samantha Fabbri spoke on behalf of the Downtown Retail Merchants Association and noted that recently their association did send a letter to all downtown merchants encouraging all business owners and their employees to park in the public parking spots and not use the limited parking that is available on Houghton Ave. She also noted that hopefully the letter would be enough to curb the issue and not have to add the signs or the parking meters.

Mayor Ehinger noted that this has always been an issue and that the business owners have worked it out in the past but that the issue is coming up again and the only way to enforce it would be to go back to the parking meters like they had at one time.

Council/ Planning Commission Member Schaiberger noted that he would like to try and avoid either of the proposed solutions but if we did need to do one, then he would rather it be the parking limit signs.

Corey Jones of Stick and Stones noted that she believed the issue started in the winter due to the ease of walking when we had lots of snow. She further noted that if we have to add the parking meters then it is going to hurt downtown sales because people will go out to Walmart or somewhere else rather than have to pay to park downtown.

Council Member Ervans noted that the downtown businesses are only hurting themselves and that he believes the meters would discourage downtown shopping.

It was also noted that meters would be costly to the City because they would need to purchase them and then have someone going around to constantly check them.

Planning Commission Member Fachting noted that 2-3 hours may not be enough time if they are going to a movie or stopping to eat and that may discourage people as well.

Beth Peszko of Edith M's noted that they may have to look into some time limit on parking and that at times it looks like the downtown is busy and there are no parking spots but it may be mostly full for people going to the movies.

Vicki Seltz-Barnes of Hospice of Helping Hands noted that some of the issue is because the tenants that are renting the apartments above the businesses are using the Houghton Ave. parking spots.

Council/ Planning Commission Member Schaiberger noted that all tenants are assigned spots in parking lots and shouldn't be using the Houghton Ave spots.

Chief Walters noted that tenants are supposed to be using the parking lots that are assigned to them when they rent the apartments but there is no way to enforce it because there are no ordinances against them parking on Houghton Ave. and that the ordinance that prohibits parking on Houghton Ave. all night is only during winter months.

Samantha Fabbri noted that maybe the parking note that was sent to all businesses could also be sent to tenants.

Planning Commission member Jan Hasty asked about the possibility of being able to ticket tenants that are not parking in their designated areas.

Council Member/ Planning Commission Member Schaiberger noted that the letter sent out every year to all business owners as well as tenants may be enough to curb the issue and should be the first step taken before we do anything else and monitor the situation to see if it is better during the next month or so.

Council Member Lawrence noted that they have talked in the past about extending the ordinance against night time parking to all year round at the request of the DPW because they would like to use that time to sweep those areas or make repairs which is difficult when there are vehicles in the way and that if they did, would also help with this issue as well. She also noted that as more apartments are added downtown, the more parking issues you are going to have and that maybe we need to limit the amount of apartments.

Mayor Ehinger noted that extending the restriction against all night parking on Houghton Ave. to all year round is something that should be looked at and would like it to be put on the agenda for the next Council meeting.

Beth Peszko asked if the City had any plans to add additional parking. It was noted that they have looked at trying to add new parking ideas if MDOT redesigned Houghton Ave as well as eliminating the bump outs that are currently downtown. It was also noted that Manager Grace has looked into trying to obtain funding to help with the cost of building parking ramps with the possibility of having one of the ramps house the Farmers Market on the ground floor and still have parking above it.

Joe Clark of Morse Clark Furniture and the Retail Merchant Association noted that this has been an issue forever and that hopefully this letter will be enough to scare people into changing their parking habits so they do not have to deal with the consequences of adding the parking restrictions.

It was also noted that maybe in the future a letter should go out on behalf of the Retail Merchants Association and the City of West Branch so the people that receive them know that this is an issue that both groups are concerned with. Chief Walters noted that he would be willing to hand deliver the notes and that maybe someone from the Merchants could go with him and they could answer questions together if needed.

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Mai Yang of Kue's Café addressed Council on her sign permit to have banners placed in front of her business and that she needed to come to the Planning Commission because the banners will be approximately 15 foot high and that the ordinance only allows a 5' height maximum.

Member David noted his concern would be visibility issues.

Member Longstreet asked if this was going to be temporary or permanent and Mrs. Yang noted that she was planning on putting them out every morning and bringing in at night.

Chairman Schaiberger noted that they have had complaints at times and at other times no issues.

Mrs. Yang noted that Kmart has similar banners out all of the time.

Member Hasty asked what the advantage of the banner would be. Mrs. Yang noted that because of the location of her building in a plaza, she doesn't get much recognition and that the banner would get the attention of people.

City Council Member Ervans asked if the Planning Commission had recently made changes to the sign ordinance. Chairman Schaiberger noted they did because of new State requirements but that most of the changes were due to substance of the sign changes and that size restrictions were still allowed.

City Council Member Lawrence noted that she does see any issue and that if you are coming from the West, you would have no idea the restaurant is there. She also noted that she has been asked from people where the other Chinese restaurant is because they couldn't find it.

Mrs. Yang noted that she believed the banners would help with that issue. She further noted that she did not plan on keeping them out year round.

Chairman Schaiberger noted that maybe it would be better to approach the issue as a temporary sign permit.

Member David asked about only allowing them to be placed out at certain times. Mrs. Yang noted that she would be willing to work with anything allowed.

Member Fachting noted that the ordinance also says signs must be in the front yard and that because it is in a plaza that they do not really have their own front yard so the location allowed would also need to be addressed.

Samantha Fabbri noted that it has been proven that having signs put out with balloons or something that move and waive will help attract business and she understands why Mrs. Yang would want them.

Beth Peszko noted that at that particular location there is the traffic light as well as the rest of the businesses in the Plaza and that it is very busy and with the banner it would help draw attention to your business.

MOTION BY SCHAIBERGEER, SECOND BY FACHTING, TO ALLOW THE BANNER FOR KUES CAFÉ FOR A MAXIMUM OF UP TO 15' IN HEIGHT FOR A TIME PERIOD OF 30 DAYS TOTAL ON FRIDAYS, SATURDAYS, AND SUNDAYS ONLY AS LONG AS IT IS TAKEN IN AT NIGHT

Motion carried

Chairman Schaiberger made the request to send a letter to Kmart notifying them of the need for a sign permit.

Ira David and Thomas Rounds of Dixon Engineering presented themselves and presented a power point presentation on water tower maintenance and noted some concerns they had with a RFP that they City had released asking for bids on water tower repairs.

Member Ervans asked what the cost for an inspection was and when the last one was. It was noted that the last one was in 2011 for \$2,200 and the current cost is \$2,400 per inspection.

Mayor Ehinger asked how often we should get an inspection and it was noted that DEQ recommends every 5 years and that they would agree with that.

Member Ervans noted that we should talk with Superintendent Jameson and that an inspection seems like something we should look into.

The next item for discussion centered on proposed changes to the City's designated truck routes. It was noted there are routes that are used frequently by large trucks right now that are not made for the heavy loads and it is taking their toll on the roads. It was also noted that by changing the roads to truck routes, it would allow for the City to apply for State and Federal funds to help with repairs to the roads.

There were questions raised on what the current truck routes were and it was noted State Rd. from Fairview to N. Valley, all of S. Valley and Refinery Rd, and all of N. Third. It was noted that the additional roads that we would be looking to add to the designated truck routes would be Lindsay St to N. Third, N. Seventh, N. Eighth, and Greenland Rd.

Planning Commission Member David noted that there are heavy loads coming from neighboring townships from Dow Rd. to Lindsay Street and that if we have a designated truck routes they can use then we could possibly keep them off the other roads. He further noted that the tandem axle garbage truck that is currently being used is tearing up the roads and that we should be requiring them to use a single axle truck.

Chief Walters noted that if they do designate roads as truck routes then he could get the motor carrier to help enforce those laws which would allow for higher fines and more of a discouragement against using non truck routes. He also noted that maybe they could also look into getting current officers trained to enforce them ourselves. He further noted that because of needed water/sewer infrastructure projects any additional funding than can be obtained from other sources would allow us to repair more roads each year.

The next item for discussion centered on the Capital Improvement Plan. Waste Water Treatment Plant Superintendent Robb updated those in attendance on the plan and informed them that they have to keep an Asset Management Plan which keeps track of all of the assets, when will they need to be replaced, and the estimated costs of replacement. He noted that with fewer funds being available from State and Federal Agencies, the State is requiring you to develop the Capital Improvement Plan which takes the Asset Management Plan one more step and lays out how you are going to save the money to pay for these replacements when they fail. He further noted that he is certain that they will make the Capital Improvement Plan be in place as a requirement to get grants in the future.

Chief Walter noted that this will basically force everyone to start a rainy day fund which is something he noted he has heard several Council members speak of needing in the past.

A communication from the MDOT Rural Elected Officials meeting was shared.

Mayor Ehinger noted that the building the City was looking to purchase for storage in the City was sold to someone else.

Chairman Schaiberger adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.