

REGULAR MEETING OF THE WEST BRANCH PLANNING COMMISSION HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF CITY HALL, 121 NORTH FOURTH STREET, ON TUESDAY, AUGUST 8, 2017.

Chairman Mike Jackson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Bob David, Kara Fachting, Heather Grace, Jan Hasty, Mike Jackson, June Longstreet, Lisa Saurer, Jason Stroebel, and Dan Weiler.

Absent: None

Others officers in attendance: City Clerk/Treasurer John Dantzer.

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Stephen Wallace addressed Council on the zoning ordinance not allowing a garage taller than the house. It was noted that he is allowed to apply for a zoning amendment which would allow the Planning Commission to look into possibly changing the ordinance.

A sign permit variance was submitted by Loggers Depot. Ken Earle was on hand to answer questions and noted it is the exact same size as the one it is replacing. He also noted it does have a Victorian theme shape.

Member Grace noted the Commission has a fairly long standing tradition of approving signs that are larger than allowed if they are the same size as the one they are replacing.

Member Fachting noted the size of sign is appropriate to the size of the building because the store front for that particular building is so big.

Member Saurer asked about the material that it is being made of and noted that the Downtown Development District requires wood or something that will simulate wood.

MOTION BY GRACE, SECOND BY LONGSTREET, TO RECUSE JASON STROEBEL FROM VOTING ON THE VARIANCE DUE TO HIM BEING AN EMPLOYEE OF THE BUSINESS.

Abstain - Stroebel

Motion carried

MOTION BY GRACE, SECOND BY FACHTING, TO APPROVE THE SIGN PERMT VARIANCE AS PRESENTED AND ALLOW THE LARGER SIZE AND ALTERNATIVE MATERIAL.

Abstain – Stroebel

Motion carried

Chairman Jackson brought up the issue of making changes to the sign ordinance which would allow for the size of the sign to be proportionate to the size of the front of the building instead of a set size for all buildings.

Member Grace noted she would like to see the ordinance reflect the amount of frontage that can have signage as opposed to the size of one sign so a business could choose to have a few smaller sized signs or one larger one if it preferred. She also encouraged having all members come up with a percentage of coverage that they thought would be appropriate.

Member Saurer noted the ordinance would need to make sure the smaller business fronts would still be able to have a sign big enough to make them recognizable.

Chairman Jackson also noted the ordinance could allow to have a sign as long as it has so much of a building border. He also noted they needed to change the ordinance so businesses have more options to draw attention to them.

Member Fachting noted she would like to see the ability to allow signs that project out from the building.

Member Stroebel noted he would like to see the ability for downtown businesses to allow illuminated and LED signs. It was the consensus to not allow any illuminated signs that would have flashing, oscillating, or strobing.

Member Saurer noted the more vibrant signs they allow, the more it would allow the businesses to attract more interest.

Chairman Jackson noted the need to make changes to draw more businesses downtown.

Member Hasty noted the need to look at other communities that are thriving and incorporate what they do into any changes that will be considered.

Chairman Jackson asked all members to go through the sign ordinance or any other ordinances and make notes on changes they would like to see and then they can discuss the changes at the next meeting. Member Grace noted that they could drop off any changes to Kelli Collins at the Police Department.

The Commission discussed the need for more wayfinding signs including the need to have signs to direct people to the parking lots downtown. They also discussed the need for wayfinding signs to direct people downtown at the off ramps of I-75. It was noted that there was a grant that did pay for those signs but so far no signs have been put up. It was the consensus to contact West Branch Township to get an update on the status of the sign.

Member Grace noted the City is applying for a grant for 25 trees and part of the grant submission is to list the areas where they would be planted. The Commission discussed areas and came up with the following locations.

- Corner of 4th and Wright St.
- Irons Park
- Brookside Cemetery
- Riverwalk between 2nd and 4th
- Median on N. Fourth St.
- By Kmart and Ace
- Between the parking lots on N. Fourth and N. Third St.
- By the Chamber of Commerce Depot

The Commission discussed possible changes to the downtown including the redesign of the downtown and promoting the City more.

The 2016 Planning Commission Annual Report was submitted as part of the Redevelopment Ready Communities Program.

MOTION BY JACKSON, SECOND BY FACHTING, TO APPROVE THE ANNUAL REPORT WITH CORRECTIONS.

Motion carried

The Commission discussed the Future Land Use changes of the Masterplan. It was discussed to incorporate a list of objectives and actions. It was the consensus to add a list of goals for the objectives and actions.

MOTION BY DAVID, SECOND BY HASTY, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE REGULAR MEETING HELD TUESDAY, JULY 11, 2017.

Motion carried

Member Stroebel noted the next video seminar and that the City Council did take into account the Planning Commission recommendations on the noise ordinance at their last meeting.

Member Hasty stressed the need for everyone to work together to make the downtown a better place.

Member Longstreet asked about a Historic District downtown. Manager Grace noted that she was not aware of one that was ever adopted but would look further into it.

Member Saurer brought up issues with downtown alley ways being blocked by parked vehicles. She also noted the possibility of adding a 15 minute parking spot next to Edith M's. She also questioned in home businesses in the Downtown Business District. She further stressed the need to get wayfinding signs for the City parking lots as soon as possible.

Member David encouraged the Commission to look around the community to find things that they think needs to be improved. He also noted some of the no parking signs on State St. are hard to see because of trees blocking them.

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Mayor Lawrence noted the rededication of the new Fireman's Memorial and discussed the several boards she is on and that she would be able to provide updates on the meetings if the Commission was ever interested.

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MOTION BY HASTY, SECOND BY DAVID, TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:04 PM

Motion carried