

SHERMAN TOWNSHIP ZONING/PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
January 14, 2020

Chairman Ford called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Members Present: Alan Ford, Roger Krantz, Vince Mifsud, Bill Puschel, Frank Kalasky

Members Absent: None

Visitors: Steve Yorks, Connie Yorks, Robin Weekly, Mitzi Thornton, Lyn Roberts, Joan Southworth, Tony & Christian, Liz Sibert, Sue Stantan, Deanna Williams, Don Williams, David Huber, Joe & Devin Heitger, Marcia Taylor, Rhonda Thoms, Joy Heitger, Aaron Stroup, Lisa Stroup, Roxanne Persing, Marcy Emmendorfer, Tina Morency, Faith Hopper, Kim Meyer, Tim Bullock, Christi Wilkowski, Stephen Stockwell, Steve Stockwell, Ryan & Taylor Singleton, Kelli Cay Kendall, William Kelley, Nathan Johnson, Matthew Kaisley, Sharon Bowerman, Victoria Stedman, Chris Hays, Tim Lutz, Bonnie Myers, Shelly Carpenter, Toni Swope, Jack & Carla Rupert, Jackie Hennig, Jesse Troyer, Lon Morency, Emily Neice, Michael Miller, Ray Ward, Cynthia Thomason, Corey Thomason, Peggy Schuler, Rod Borgert, Chris Hamilton, Molly Trueblood, Steve Wolf,

Minutes: Motion by Puschel, support by Mifsud, to approve the December 10, 2019 minutes as presented. Motion carried 5-0.

Agenda: Approved by consensus

Public Comment: See new business

Old Business: None

New Business:

Chairman Ford opened the new business section of the meeting by stating that the Planning Commission has been charged by the Township Board with updating the dog kennel ordinance for the Township. (The current ordinance manual has a definition for kennels (Section 2.12) and permits kennels in Neighborhood Commercial districts with a special land use permit (9.05J)). All options are open at this time. The Planning Commission has seen a draft ordinance by Doug Kuhlman but has not made any decision on this specific proposal. Chairman Ford then opened the meeting for comments from the audience.

Lisa Stroup (65504 N. M-66) stated she was against the proposed Kuhlman dog kennel ordinance. She owns numerous dogs on her property but would not meet the five (5) acre requirement in the proposed ordinance. She is concerned there is no "grandfathering" provision in the proposed ordinance that would permit current animal owners from continuing their foster programs. She is open to suggestions on a remedy to the puppy mill/animal hoarding situation.

Marcy Emmendorfer (65504 N. M-66) supports the welfare of all animals and is concerned about the wording in the proposed Kuhlman dog kennel ordinance. She thinks the five (5) acre requirement does not accommodate many pet owners and that this ordinance in general would limit pet adoptions in the area. She thinks the noise limits in the proposed ordinance are open ended and would be difficult to enforce.

Cindy Miller (Ark Animal Sanctuary, LaGrange, Indiana) thinks the proposed Kuhlman ordinance as written would limit the assistance her organization receives from St. Joseph County Michigan residents.

Kelli Cay Kendall (25019 Featherstone Rd.) operates a senior dog sanctuary. Since she started her program she has been in contact with Sherman Township supervisors and has received no formal complaints about her

dogs and other animals. She stated there is no noise ordinance in the County. She is concerned about the three (3) animal limit and the open ended provisions in the proposed Kuhlman ordinance.

Devin Heitger (24103 Banker St.) has fourteen (14) personal dogs at home and operates a pet adoption facility for dogs, cats and horses. She feels that the proposed Kuhlman ordinance language needs to be revised.

Steve Yorks (67463 Stubey Rd.) is concerned that the proposed Kuhlman ordinance language would unjustly apply to many pet owners. He appreciates the animal rescue operations in the County and would like to have the opportunity for input in drafting any dog kennel ordinance.

Amanda (White Pigeon) thinks any ordinance should include some form of exception for rescue operations and for spayed or neutered animals. She believes any noise concerns would be difficult to regulate.

Robin Weekly (29278 Findley Rd.) is a pet owner and was concerned about possible restrictions on lost & found animal group activities. Additional restrictions could create more unwanted animals in the Township.

Bonnie Myers (21307 W. US-12) stated that she is not a “puppy mill” but has received many unwanted pets that she attempts to find permanent homes for. She would not meet the requirements of the proposed Kuhlman ordinance.

A few general questions from the audience included the reason for the concern about kennels now (the influx of “puppy mills” in the Michigan counties adjacent to the Indiana border), were these “puppy mills” primarily operated in the Amish community (no definite data), and what is the timetable for adopting an ordinance (no definite timetable, this subject will be included in a list of other updates/revisions to the Township Ordinance Manual).

Chairman Ford stated this topic will be included in discussions at the Planning Commission meetings for the next few months and that any input from the community would be welcomed.

Molly Trueblood, Southcentral Michigan Planning Council, updated the Commission on the status of the updated Master Land Use Plan. The Township Board approved the draft plan pending revised language for the issue of farming operations in Rural Preservation (RP) districts. Rod Borgert’s (62831 Borgert Rd.) interpretation of the current language in the draft Master Plan does not permit farming if current grandfathered farm operations are sold. After discussion it was determined that even if a farm property was sold, the new owners would remain under the grandfathering protection. Ms. Trueblood is to craft new language providing clarity on this issue and then prepare a revised draft for the Commission. If accepted by the Planning Commission, the public comment period would commence and this draft would then be distributed to all required public bodies.

The Planning Commission also requested Ms. Trueblood’s assistance for possible language on animal rescue/sanctuary operations.

Upon review of the current Township zoning map, William Kelley (26549 Featherstone Rd.) noted that his parent’s farm (67238 North Centerville Rd.) was shown as being in the Light Industrial (LI) district north of the Sturgis city limits. A correction to the map will be investigated.

Adjourn: Motion by Mifsud, support by Pueschel to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 8:30 PM.

Next scheduled meeting: Tuesday, February 11, 2020, 7:00 PM at the Township Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank J. Kalasky, P.E.
Secretary