

January 20, 2009 – 3:30 p.m.

Delegation of the Ionia County Planning Commission attending the Board of Commissioners' Committee-of-the-Whole meeting

ICPC members in attendance: Gregg Yeomans, Joel Palmer, and Quentin Harwood.

Discussion time approximately 25 minutes.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a direction and future goals for the planning commission. Gregg Yeomans, who serves as vice chairman of the planning commission, spoke on behalf of the members as Chairman Paul Bowering was unable to attend due to illness.

Yeomans outlined the two current functions of the planning commission stating they review proposed changes to township zoning ordinances and maps as well as maintain/update the county's master plan.

As to reviewing proposed local zoning ordinance changes, the planning commission has no ultimate authority in the process. Recommendations may be offered but it is up to the local governing body to accept or reject a recommendation. The allowed timeframe for such review is thirty days. If the 30-day period would lapse without the planning commission meeting, the local unit is allowed to proceed. Over the past several years, the planning commission has met infrequently due to lack of agenda items. Because of this, most times a local issue has not been addressed by the planning commission. Yeomans stated the statute allows the county board of commissioners to eliminate the need for local zoning ordinance changes to be brought before the planning commission and asked if this is something the board wishes to consider. Tiejema suggested possibly a sub-committee of the planning commission could be established to handle this function. Fewer members would be required to attend, therefore less cost incurred, while at the same time allowing for input from the planning commission. Banks stated such input may be valuable particularly where two adjoining townships are zoned. Powell asked if an electronic method of communicating would be an alternative. Banks stated such a method may violate the Open Meetings Act. No action to change the current review process requirement was recommended.

Yeomans reviewed the status of the existing master plan, which was adopted in June 2002, explaining that at the current time the plan document is undergoing a conversion from a PDF document to a Microsoft Office Word document. This conversion will facilitate future updating of the document. However, as to when, or if, an actual update should occur, Yeomans asked for commissioner's input. He suggested that due to the cost which would be associated with an update, perhaps it would be wise to wait until figures from the 2010 census are available. Banks was of the opinion that waiting may make sense if the planning commission feels the existing plan is still viable. Shattuck pointed out that the availability of various grants may depend on the existence of a master plan; however it was generally felt that even if the plan has not undergone a recent

update, it would still be a viable plan for any potential grant. Tiejema stated a master plan can be used as a tool which anticipates growth in various areas throughout the county and then planners can begin the process of determining if there is sufficient infrastructure to sustain the growth. Such areas could include roads, drains, private road standards, etc. He likened it to looking into a 'crystal ball' to see what the future may hold and then determining how best to coordinate the efforts of those involved.

Aside from the current planning commission functions, commissioners offered thoughts on what additional services could be provided with Vroman suggesting the county board remember that its planning commission should be considered a valuable resource tool.