

Milton Township
Planning Commission
Unapproved Meeting Minutes
February 1, 2023

Members present: Chairman Hefferan, Renis, Peters, Warner, Standerfer, Ford, and Merillat.

Also present: Kopriva and 7 audience members.

Members absent: None.

Hefferan called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Public Comment:

Chantel Lefebvre asked commission members to try to be inclusive of farmers as you are dealing with the master plan update.

Sharon Hill of Torch River Road said she did not see the RV Park property on the agenda, but it appears it is going back before the township board. Hefferan said this is correct. The points the county raised are good things to address. For Steep Slopes, will there be any opportunity to do a zoom meeting?

Steep slopes subcommittee is scheduled for February 15 and this will be live, not on Zoom.

Approval of Agenda:

Move Utility Grade Solar up to #1.

Motion by Ford to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Renis. **Motion carried.**

Approval of Minutes dated January 4, 2023:

Correction, add max allowed 5% under Township Board Report.

Motion by Renis to approve the minutes as corrected. Seconded by Ford. **Motion carried.**

Correspondence: None.

Old Business: None.

New Business:

1. Utility Grade Solar Energy:

We have had some interest in putting in a solar array that would be managed by a utility. In speaking with the supervisor, we should maybe take a look at it. We do not have anything in the current ordinance. In the packet, there is information from MSU. For tonight's meeting, we are gauging interested and discussing possible regulations or no regulations.

Ford asked how the interest came up? We have had residents who have been approached to put in a solar farm. It is a way to preserve farmland and open space and view sheds since it is closer

to the ground. It is contributing to renewable energy infrastructure. Ford said he sees some issues conflicting with the rural landscape of the township.

Ron Boals, a local farmer, said he was approached about a piece of property he owns. He has contacted the state to see if it is a conflict with his PA116. Everything is moving away from fossil fuels. These things are going to be going up. Agriculture in Milton is on the decline. Returns are terrible. You do not see a lot of young farmers. We will end up with a lot of empty space that will end up as woods if it is not used. For people to survive out here, there needs to be opportunities to make money. I was not aware you had a policy on wind or solar, but apparently you do have a policy for wind. We are looking at maybe five years down the road before anything happens.

Hefferan said in regards to utility grade wind systems we have in the ordinance, we never talked about solar at that time. In regards to location, we were very specific about where windmills can be located.

Tom Paradis asked if wind and solar fall into the same category as the mineral leases? Hefferan said if we would allow windmills, we should allow solar. Looking back, it did not come up probably because it was not cost effective at that time.

Kopriva said she has worked with many communities who have added solar into their ordinance. Warner asked Boals what he meant by not a lot of opportunities for farmers to make money. Boals said other than splitting and selling the land for development, that's about it. Warner said looking at Traverse City and all of the farmland to the south that has vanished, we need to start thinking about how to create housing possibilities. Allowing solar to happen, you do not have to have infrastructure for it and it could be a better thing for the township. Boals said going back to the gas leases, there are substantial taxes being paid, but it is not coming back to me. Not sure how you tax sunshine, but it could work out for everyone and it seems it may be more feel good than anything else, but this thing is coming.

Renis said the farmers have the acreage to do it. I do not think we should be against harvesting a resource on their land, but looking at this briefing by the universities, it is reasonable to ask about the impact and control what others see of it and we should get in front of it.

Standerfer said he is interested in learning more. He read that if you are under PA116, it works. Regarding fencing, it would have to be a six or seven foot fence. It seems like it could be something that could be a good fit here.

Merillat said we should have something in our ordinance about it.

Boals said he was surprised to get the letter, but he said the technology has improved so much, you do not need actual sunny days. I do not know how solar panels will handle the winds, and again, this is preliminary.

Peters said you were probably approached because you are near by a substation and it would be cost effective. We should get in front of it.

Hefferan asked Kopriva to put together some language for this.

2. Master Plan Review: Community Profile, Transportation, Coastal Resiliency.

A. Community Profile:

This is demographics and housing information. This all comes from the 2020 census. It sets up the reasoning for doing different things. Affordability of housing and what that looks like in the community and the idea of ways to create strategies to implement or correct those.

Hefferan said housing is a massive problem for employers in the area. The master plan is the community's opportunity to tell us what they want. I do not get a good feeling from this regarding what our community wants. Kopriva said we are not there yet. Seasonal homes count for 40% of our total housing stock. That was surprising.

B. Coastal Planning

This is related to Lake Michigan waters and calculated for different types of storms dealing with winds and storm surges. It puts together the impact of potential property and shoreline erosion that could be lost from different types of storms. Knowing these things, what are the strategies and these include setbacks, and the hardening of the shoreline and the impacts those can have on the shoreline.

Merillat asked if the inland lakes should be discussed regarding the lake levels being controlled by the dam.

Warner asked if we think the storms will stay the same or increase? They will increase and it is been happening more each year. I am bringing this up because when you start putting in stone break walls, you can cause more problems when time goes on. Wetlands are also a key component in handling excess water. Kopriva said this was discussed in the natural features chapter.

C. Transportation

This is talking about roads. There is a map that needs to be added to tell you where the roads are. There is a quick mention of the boat launch. We have not discussed electric vehicles. Being that this is not a commercial township, we could make the language stronger there.

Ford said there were only three roads that were evaluated? Kopriva said it is based on the classification of the roads. Once we will have a map, it will be clear when it is finished. Under boat launch, should Warring Road and other boat launches be included? The boat launches will be moved to the recreation chapter.

Renis asked about non-motorized transportation like the bicycle groups that ride through on our roads. Peters asked about developing a non-motorized infrastructure plan. Kopriva said this would end up in the implementation plan.

Merillat said Milton collects a millage to fix roads. This should be added.

Hefferan said he would love to have lots of interested citizens giving us feedback on this. This is the community's opportunity to tell us what to do. Kopriva said you could do something to get feedback on specific items, either in a survey or in an open house. Hefferan said he thinks about having a Zoom meeting that could be facilitated by Beckett and Raeder giving others a chance to discuss before a public hearing. Kopriva said the open house could be virtual also. Merillat said he would be surprised if we did not do something like this. Kopriva will discuss options with the township board.

3. Bylaw Review.

Members reviewed the bylaws. No one had any changes to make. The planning commission will continue to operate with the bylaws dated April 21,2022 by **unanimous consent**.

Reports:

ZA Report:

Kopriva provided a report for members to review. The amendment to the RV language and the language to change the ZBA members to five will be on the agenda of the Township Board at their next meeting. We did get an application for a zoning amendment to the short-term rental ordinance. The township board would like the planning commission to make a recommendation on it. This will be on the agenda for next month.

Township Board Report:

Renis said there is a request for bids for a walkway around lake Maplehurst.

ZBA Report:

Hefferan said they have not met.

Planning Commission Updates:

Steep slopes will meet February 15 at 9:00am.

Future Meeting Considerations:

March 1, 2023 agenda items are:

Steep Slopes

Short Term Rentals

Meeting adjourned by order of the chair at 7:58pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Merillat