

Village of Onekama Planning Commission
Meeting Minutes
5283 Main Street, Onekama, MI 231-889-3171
December 12, 2023

Meeting called to order at 6:03

Members Present:

Chair Christopher Forth, Vice Chair Deborah Storms, Tom Foster, Susan Halloran and Wendy Kamaloski

Motion to accept/amend the agenda:

Chair Forth indicated an email communication was received by Katie Mehl, Manistee County Planning Department, requesting action on the Certification of the site plan for Travelers Motel, 5606 8 Mile Road, be postponed until the January 9, 2024 meeting. A motion was offered by Foster to accept an amended December 12, 2023 Planning Commission agenda and seconded by Storms. The motion was unanimously approved.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

Chair Forth asked if there are any recommended changes to the November 14, 2023 Planning Commission meeting minutes. There being no changes, a motion was offered by Storms and seconded by Foster to approve the meeting minutes as submitted. The motion was unanimously approved.

New Business:

1. Travelers Motel, 5606 8 Mile Road. Chair Forth reiterated an email communication was received by Katie Mehl requesting action on the Certification of the site plan for Travelers Motel, 5606 8 Mile Road, be postponed until the January 9, 2024 meeting. The Commission accepted the postponement request.
2. Master Plan Update RFP. The Planning Commission discussed the questions submitted by a consultant who is preparing a proposal to update the Village Master Plan. The questions are posed by the consultant asking for additional background information about the Village such as current issues being addressed, establishment of economic programs to encourage investment, adequacy of public infrastructure, regional issues that impact the Village and hot topic issues such as short-term rentals and marijuana sales. The Commission discussed responses provided by Commission members. Foster discussed in more detail the responses he prepared to each question. After additional discussion by Commission

3. members, Chair Forth indicated he would edit the responses prepared by Foster and forward them to Village President Burger. Chair Forth also indicated the responses will need to be forwarded to the Michigan Association of Planning so other consultants who may be preparing a proposal to update the Master Plan can review prior to finalizing and submitting their proposal. Chair Forth mentioned all consultant questions are due on or before December 29, 2023 and proposals are due on or before January 14, 2024.

The also briefly discussed whether or not the Onekama is a retirement community and how can we keep visitors in Onekama. While the demographics may suggest Onekama is a retirement community, efforts to attract/retain young families should continue, which will also provide continued support to the school system. Kamalowski suggested more services, restaurant's, places to shop would keep visitors in the area. Chair Forth suggested the Commission members review the survey completed for the Township during their Master Plan update process since some survey responses are applicable to the Village.

4. 2024 Planning Commission meeting schedule. The Commission reviewed the 2024 calendar for any meeting conflicts. Chair Forth mentioned he may need to be excused from the April 2024 meeting. The Commission discussed possibly moving the April 2024 meeting date. Chair Forth indicated he would confirm his April 2024 availability and advise the Commission at the next meeting. Other than perhaps the April meeting date, no other conflicts were identified so all meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00 pm at the Farr Center.

Old Business:

1. Mixed-Use Zoning: Chair Forth indicated an email communication had been received from Mr. Greg Carlson in response to the memorandum the Planning Commission had prepared and provided to the Village Council regarding several concepts related to the development of a mixed-use zoning ordinance. Mr. Carlson is supportive of mixed-use ordinance language but is concerned about over-regulation. Chair Forth noted the Village's zoning ordinance currently does not permit mixed-use buildings so an amendment is necessary.

Chair Forth noted that Mr. Carlson described the Village as a hodge-podge collection of different buildings. In an attempt to explain how this situation may have occurred, Chair Forth suggested there likely were no early community planning efforts that would have established a clear vision for the Village and a path to implement that vision; zoning wasn't adopted until 1990; current zoning regulations are minimal when compared to other zoning codes in the area; and the commercial residential district permits a wide variety of land uses from single-family to industrial. In spite of the number of different types of buildings, there are some existing mixed-use buildings that share similar architectural elements such as the Blue Slipper, former Mason building and Yellow Dog building.

The memorandum the Planning Commission submitted to the Village Council regarding development of future mixed-use buildings suggested an architectural style similar to the existing mixed-use buildings in the Village. These types of design guidelines can be adopted if the Village desires (Michigan is a home rule state). Other area communities such as Arcadia, Bear Lake, Frankfort and Suttons Bay have adopted basic building design guidelines in their downtown areas based on Master Plan recommendations.

Given the number of vacant sites and old/underutilized/deteriorating buildings in the Village, there is a fair amount of (re)development potential in the Village. Location on Portage Lake with close proximity to Lake Michigan makes the Village even more desirable to developers wishing to invest. Chair Forth suggested the current zoning ordinance (and every community has zoning) is not the only reason why there has been little development activity in the Village. Developers also consider the availability of municipal water and sanitary sewer. The importance of these utilities by the development community was emphasized by both Marc Miller, Manistee Chamber of Commerce and Dan Leonard, Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC). Developers also consider investment in the community by the local government. Developers want to know the community they are about to invest in is investing in itself. The availability of financial incentives offered by a local unity of government can also influence (re)development activities.

Chair Forth asked the Commission if the development of a mixed-use zoning district should be delayed until after the Master Plan is complete and a vision for the future, including the downtown area, has been established. After a brief discussion, the Commission decided to move forward with development of the mixed-use zoning district. There was also discussion about limiting the area of mixed-use development near the west end of Main Street but it could be expanded in the future.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment

Adjournment:

Halloran gave an update about bringing the Village zoning map out of the President's office a hanging it in the main hall. The request was denied without reason.

The Commission briefly discussed the condition of the Village Beach, which needs regular cleaning and maintenance

Halloran stated that the village needs sidewalks, benches, and trash receptacles. Forth stated that this could be done by increasing property taxes.


Halloran mentioned that during a Village Council work session, it was stated the Commission was supposed to develop short-term rental regulations. The Commission members noted the Village Council asked the Planning Commission to work on developing zoning regulations to address parking, signage and fencing. Development of a short-term rental ordinance was not included. Halloran explained that short term rental regulations would require additional staff to implement and administer. Forth suggested the Commission request clarification from the Village Council about development of short-term rental regulations. If the Village Council wants to move forward with regulating short-term rentals, the Commission should start by reviewing the Township's short-term rental zoning ordinance for consistency around the Portage Lake area.

The Commission briefly discussed the Village and Township working together to bring businesses to the Onekama area.

The next Planning Commission meeting will be on January 9, 2024 at 6 pm.

There being no further business to come before the Planning Commission, a motion to adjourn was offered by Foster and seconded by Storms. The motion was unanimously approved. Meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectively submitted.

Christopher Forth, AICP 
Planning Commission Chair