

**Highland Township Planning Commission  
Record of the 1420th Meeting  
Highland Township Auditorium  
October 3, 2024**

***Roll Call:***

Grant Charlick, Chairman  
Kevin Curtis  
Chris Heyn  
Mike O’Leary  
Roscoe Smith  
Scott Temple  
Russ Tierney  
Guy York (absent)

***Also Present:***

Elizabeth J. Corwin, Planning Director

Visitors: 6

Chairman Charlick called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

**Agenda Item #1: Call to the Public: Opportunity for anyone to bring forward issues of interest or concern for Planning Commission consideration. Each participant limited to 3 minutes.**

Ms. Jacqueline Rhodes, 1450 S. Milford addressed the Planning Commission to explain her issues regarding fencing on a neighboring commercial property. The fencing fell into disrepair, and when the commercial neighbor sought to correct the deficiency, a fence permit was issued in compliance with the approved site plan from 1998. Ms. Rhodes noted that the existing conditions on her site were not noted on the drawing, including her chain link fence that was a few feet off the property line. As a result, a space between the two fences provides room for noxious weeds to grow, resulting in unexpected expense to her as a residential property owner. She asks that the ordinances be reviewed with a clear path for relief to neighboring property owners. She also expressed displeasure with the process and how it was handled by staff.

**Agenda Item #2: Text Amendment discussion – parking for vehicle gas filling stations; maximum lot coverage in HS, Highland Station District; event venues; storage on vacant residential lots, storage containers as accessory structures**

Ms. Corwin reported that the text amendment for gas station parking and maximum lot coverage for Highland Station District has been drafted and will be noticed for a November 7, 2024 public hearing.

She shared red-marked copies of ordinances to address event venues. She noted that the intent is to allow some additional revenue-generating activity on farming parcels, but not open up the use list so as to attract purchase of properties for the primary purpose of offering wedding venues for hire. She noted that there has been general acceptance by residents of some activity at properties such as Bonadeo Farms or Broadview Tree Farm, and believes there is room to allow more activity within limits.

As drafted, events would be one item that could be incorporated into a Special Use Permit for farm markets. There is a minimum lot size, and a requirement that the parcel have access to a major thoroughfare. The Planning Commission could recommend practical limits such as the number of events per month or seasonal limits. There is an acknowledgment in the ordinance that the events are not protected farm activity that is shielded from nuisance complaints by the right-to-farm act. There may be a “sub-permit” process for specific dates.

The ordinance requires inspection of indoor spaces intended for public occupancy and limits what food can be sold on the site. The intent is to disallow banquet halls or commercial kitchens for catering to pop up in the ARR Zoning District. Mobile food trucks or catering from external vendors would be permitted.

Mr. Charlick asked if there should be prohibitions about alcohol. The consensus seemed to be that state law would govern that activity, and that the intent is to allow someone to serve alcohol to their guests, but not sell alcohol.

The ordinance would also require that either the property owner or a registered permittee would be onsite during all events and that their contact information would be registered with the Township.

Ms. Corwin noted that the staff wanted to further discuss the ordinance and a permit scheme and would bring the ordinance back for further discussion.

Attention was shifted to ordinance language for parking of commercial vehicles and recreational vehicles on residential properties. Currently, no commercial vehicles may be parked outside of an accessory structure in residential zones. The Zoning Administrator has proposed language that allows one commercial vehicle to be parked in a driveway and one additional commercial vehicle could be parked inside. She had also proposed some setback restrictions.

The Planning Commissioners agreed that this was progress towards a more reasonable regulation, but disagreed with the setback restrictions and placing limits on the number of vehicles. Ms. Corwin believed that the limits were possibly to restrict the traffic coming to and from the site. It may be acceptable to the neighbors if a contractor drives his large pickup home and parks it in his driveway, but they might be aggrieved if there was a stream of employees coming to and from the site with their personal cars to retrieve or park trailers and equipment. It was agreed that there are other ways to address that traffic rather than the number of vehicles parked on site.

The Planning Commissioners reviewed the list of vehicles that meet the definition of commercial vehicles. They agreed that there is so much variety that a single contractor might own and want to park more than the allotted vehicles on his property. Mr. Tierney argued that there should be no restrictions for a property owner on large acreage where the public and neighbors may not even be able to see the vehicles. Mr. Charlick agreed that it is probably more an issue depending on the type of vehicles being parked on the property rather than the number of vehicles parked on the property.

Mr. Temple noted that the commercial vehicle and recreational vehicle issue had been addressed many times before, and that in those neighborhoods who care deeply, there are probably already deed restrictions that prevent people from parking commercial vehicles in driveways. He noted that within his own experience, he had to have a blank magnetic panel to cover his employer’s logo when he parked at home.

Ms. Corwin suggested that perhaps there should be an option to store vehicles in “non-front” yards, but the storage area must be fully screened.

Mr. Temple asked if there are a lot of complaints about commercial vehicles. Mr. Charlick said that in discussing this issue with the Zoning Administrator, there are some complaints, and she must enforce the

ordinance as written. The commissioners discussed breaking the list of commercial vehicles into subcategories and deciding which ones could be tolerated in front yards and which ones must be either inside or fully screened.

The consensus was to start with the simple small change of one vehicle in a front yard and just monitor how things change, if at all.

Ms. Corwin turned the discussion to recreational vehicles. In the current ordinance, only two such vehicles may be stored outdoors, but any number may be stored inside. The issue had arisen at the recent meeting because of unbuildable upland sites opposite of lakefront lots, where property owners are storing their recreational vehicles, both indoors and in rare cases in accessory structures. These are parcels that do not have a principle permitted use. The Zoning Administrator had proposed a number of amendments, including allowing two vehicles to be stored on any lot, including these vacant lots. By placing such limits, the hope is to prevent packing lots with “other people’s” vehicles.

As in the case of commercial vehicles, Mr. Tierney noted that this limit should not apply to large acreage parcels. He thought there was no public purpose in telling a property owner he had to limit the numbers of recreational vehicles, especially where it has no visual impact to the neighbors. He thought it would not be unusual for one to own both multiple snowmobiles, ATV’s and jet skis. Rules for small lot, densely developed areas do not always make sense for rural residential lots. Often Association rules will dictate in subdivisions.

The Planning Commissioners reviewed the list of vehicles that meet the definition for recreational vehicles, which includes boats, campers, trailers, jet skis and the like.

Mr. Curtis asked if there could be a formula similar to lot coverage that could be used to determine how many recreational vehicles could be stored.

Ms. Corwin asked the Planning Commission to discuss the issue of vacant lots as storage lots. They also reviewed regulations regarding docking. Mr. Charlick thought it would be acceptable to store a pontoon, on a vacant lot that could not be otherwise built on, especially if that was where it was moored when in the water. Ms. Corwin reviewed the docking regulations and explained that there really shouldn’t be many instances of vacant lots with docks. Mr. Charlick thought the issue of parking a camper on a vacant lot would create other issues and could become a blight.

The Commissioners discussed whether there could be a way to tie use of the vacant parcels to a residence on the opposite side of the road so that there would be an owner living in near proximity to the lot.

The Planning Commission turned the discussion to shipping containers as accessory structures. Ms. Corwin reminded the Planning Commission that Matt Whelan’s site plan for his accessory structure has been tabled while the issue was reviewed by the Planning Commission.

Mr. Charlick thought that if a property owner wanted to use a shipping container with a roof structure in an area that is already allowed for outdoor storage, then the setbacks should be met. Mr. Smith said the use of the shipping containers could possibly impact parking requirements, since there is a parking requirement for warehousing.

Mr. Curtis thought it was a crafty idea to add the roof, but that he was concerned about safety. The Commissioner’s agreed that the site plan should address locations of these structures, but the Building Official should be left to the details of how to anchor the structure, and safely add the roof. Mr. Smith was concerned that the ordinances should not incentivize using containers instead of a true site built structure. Mr. Charlick thought there should be a requirement about matching the character of the area. Mr. Curtis

thought that there are areas structures like this might be expected and would be acceptable, such as within a contractor's yard.

Mr. O'Leary thought that there should be a requirement that the shipping container/accessory structure meets the character of that specific site as well as the neighborhood, and it looks more like an intentional building with some longevity.

Ms. Corwin summarized the discussion as follows: Shipping containers in Commercial Zoning Districts are subject to site plan review, must be placed behind the principal structure, and must be modified to compatible to the character of existing structures on the site. Details of construction should be left to the Building Official. In Industrial zones, the shipping containers must be located in designated outdoor storage areas and meet setbacks.

There was discussion about whether shipping containers could be allowed in residential areas, given that there are already many instances in the Township. Mr. Charlick was concerned that someone could cover their lot up to the maximum allowable lot coverage. Mr. Tierney suggested a hard limit of two containers per parcel.

Mr. Charlick said a different approach would be to remain silent on the issue, rather than risk inviting the activity by specifically laying out rules. Mr. Smith thought it was the Planning Commission's duty to examine the issue and get ahead of issues that could become a future problem.

Mr. Karcher, a member of the audience, commended the Planning Commission for taking a flexible approach to shipping containers as building elements. He described "The Shipyard" in Detroit, which is a bar made of shipping containers, and is a well-executed example. The ordinance approach discussed could allow for some very creative ideas.

The Planning Commission agreed to revisit this ordinance discussion in the future.

**Agenda Item #3:** Review of draft Master Plan and Future Land Use Map

Ms. Corwin reported that the map and text corrections discussed at the September 19, 2024, meeting had been made, and that the report was in the Board of Trustee agenda for the coming week for release to neighboring communities and other agencies. She noted that there would be additional opportunities to review the plan before adoption, and asked if there were any more edits the Planning Commission would like prior to release to the public.

Mr. Tierney noted that properties along John Street, including the Township Hall and Huron Valley School District properties should be mapped as Institutional.

**Agenda Item #4:** Committee Updates

- Zoning Board of Appeals:
- Township Board:
- Highland Downtown Development Authority:
- Planning Director's Update

Committee updates and future agendas were discussed.

**Agenda Item #5:**

Minutes: September 19, 2024

Mr. Tierney offered a motion to approve the minutes of September 19, 2024, as presented. Mr. Curtis supported the motion which was approved by voice vote (all ayes, no nays)

***Adjournment:***

Mr. Temple moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:25 p.m. Mr. Curtis supported the motion, which was unanimously approved by voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

A. Roscoe Smith, Secretary  
ARS/ejc