

**Highland Township Planning Commission
Record of the 1419th Meeting
Highland Township Auditorium
September 19, 2024**

Roll Call:

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

Also Present:

Elizabeth J. Corwin, Planning Director
Megan Masson-Minock, Carlisle-Wortman Associates

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.

No public comment was offered

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to bring SPR24-06 for the Wiggles and Giggles Childcare Center expansion back to the table for discussion and possible action. Mr. Tierney supported the motion, which carried by voice vote (all ayes, no nays)

Agenda Item #2:

Parcel # 11-02-300-002
Zoning: ARR, Agriculture and Rural Residential
Address: 1131 White Lake Rd (Wiggles & Giggles)
File#: SPR 24-06
Request: Site Plan for expansion of childcare center
Applicant: Khalid Mheisen
Owner: KHAB, LLC

Mr. Charlick introduced the site plan for the Wiggles & Giggles Childcare Center expansion at 1131 White Lake Road. He explained that the applicant had presented a request for variances on the south, north and west property lines, based on the renderings provided the Planning Commission in this packet, and that the variances had been approved. He invited the applicants to update the Planning Commission on their progress.

Mr. Brandon Chaney of Nederveld explained that since the last time they presented the proposal to the Planning Commission, they had also met with the Board of Trustees who had approved the Special Land Use for the childcare center expansion. They have also updated the site plan to show the traffic circulation pattern as discussed and as requested by the Fire Marshal. Two additional spaces have been provided, including barrier free spaces. Landscaping has been enhanced and one light pole is added at the entrance. The building elevations have been redesigned to comply with the character requirements of horizontal lap siding and a pitched roof. The unit is still a portable structure, but the axles will be removed and the structure will be installed on a slab.

Mr. Temple asked if the pitch of the roof indicated on the sketches was representative of what is proposed. Mr. Chaney explained that the pitch will be relatively flat compared to most site built structures.

Mr. York was concerned about the long, relatively blank wall facing the public road on the west. There are only two windows and no features to break up the perspective. He had hoped to see a canopy over a door or something else to add interest. The Planning Commissioners discussed the orientation of the building with the applicant. The east façade, which is the more “front” side of the building will face into the site, with the primary entrance to the north. There will be an enclosure around the HVAC units to give the appearance of a faux chimney. At this time, they need to respect the setbacks allowed by the Zoning Board of Appeals, which does limit the possibilities.

Mr. O’Leary asked the applicant if he thought he was providing ample parking based on their experience. There was considerable discussion of the parking area, which is proposed as a gravel-surfaced lot. Ms. Corwin explained that the Planning Commission does have the authority to approve a gravel surfaced lot under Section 11.02.H.2 if they determine this to be a “low usage” parking lot. Low usage is not defined in the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Tierney asked the applicant if they could explain the traffic volumes. Ms. Westlake, the childcare center director explained that at most, the center might generate a trip for each child in the a.m. and again in the p.m. With 60 children enrolled, this could amount to as much as 60/120 trips per day, depending on how many families had more than one child enrolled. Mr. Tierney commented that this does not seem like a low volume use. Ms. Westlake noted that there has never been an issue with maintenance of the existing gravel parking lot. Mr. Mheisens agreed, and committed to maintain the lot in a safe and convenient condition for his clients. Mr. Temple cited other examples where gravel parking lots have been allowed, such as a church on Wardlow Road and Fragments.

Mr. Charlick suggested that the gravel parking lot may be in keeping with the character of the area, but that at minimum, the driveway approaches must be paved up to the right-of-way line so that mud is not tracked out into the public streets. He cautioned the applicant that the gravel parking lot will require greater maintenance effort. He asked about the drainage system, and whether the intent of the gravel was to reduce stormwater volumes. Mr. Chaney explained that there will be raingardens to deal with the runoff.

Mr. Tierney asked about the three driveways. Ms. Corwin explained that it will be up to the Road Commission for Oakland County to determine whether the multiple driveways would be allowed. The Fire Marshal asked for one driveway off White Lake Road for easier access to the existing building. The driveways on Milford Road are existing, but the Road Commission could require one to be closed.

Mr. Temple asked if the two large trees in the center of the property would be removed. Mr. Chaney noted that the site plan does call for removal, in order to accommodate the new structure. He noted that landscaping plans have been updated to include canopy trees adjacent to the public rights-of-way.

Mr. York reiterated his previous concern about the adequacy of the parking. Mr. Chaney noted that they are providing twelve parking spaces, which exceeds code, and that the staff will continue to park in the gravel areas off the driveway in the southeast corner of the site. Mr. York noted that twelve spaces will

clearly be inadequate for events. Ms. Westlake noted that she is formalizing a written shared parking agreement with Bonadeo Farms to the east and noted that if parking proved to be a problem, their events would be held offsite on Township properties

Mr. York also asked for clarification of the fencing. The playground is slightly reconfigured to accommodate the parking lot. The applicant intends to reuse the existing fence, moving sections as necessary.

Mr. Charlick offered the following motion: To grant preliminary approval of the Site Plan, SPR24-06 for an expansion at the Wiggles and Giggles Childcare Center, 1131 White Lake Road, Parcel 11-02-300-002, based on the site plan by Nederveld, dated September 11, 2024 with the condition that the driveway approaches to Milford Road must be paved to the right-of-way line. Mr. Curtis supported the motion.

There was discussion on the motion, with Ms. Corwin reminding the Planning Commissioners that the gravel surfaced parking lot is not merely a “grandfathered” condition because it has been allowed to exist as gravel surface in the past, but depends on their finding that the driveway is low usage and appropriate for the proposal.

Mr. York noted that a gravel surfaced lot seems in keeping with the rural character of the neighborhood and that he is pleased to hear Mr. Mheisen express his commitment to the additional maintenance that will be necessary. He noted that since this is not a true “drop-off”, but that the parents must park and bring the child into the center, this should be a quiet parking lot. He is also pleased with the landscaping plan and the attempt to develop a tree canopy over the road.

Mr. Heyn noted that his appreciation of how the plan had been modified, and acknowledged that in ways it would be more difficult to alter an existing portable building than to build something new.

Mr. Charlick called for a vote: O’Leary, yes; Tierney, yes; York, yes; Curtis, yes; Heyn, yes; Temple, yes; Smith, yes, Charlick, yes. Motion carried (8 yes votes, 0 no votes).

Agenda Item #3: Text Amendment discussion – parking for vehicle gas filling stations; maximum lot coverage in HS, Highland Station District

Ms. Corwin explained that there were two ordinance amendments that they had agreed to take up quickly in order to accommodate the site plan approval for the gas station at 394 N. Milford Road. The packet includes a memorandum discussing a proposed ordinance approach.

First, Ms. Corwin went on to explain that she had analyzed the parking provided at the six gas stations that currently exist in the township and had distributed a spreadsheet and aerial photographs showing the results. None of the gas stations provided the one space per 125 square feet noted in the ordinance, but most provided more than one space per 200 square feet as required in the ordinance. It was noted that although some of the gas stations seem to utilize all of the spaces. Mr. Curtis noted that during the morning rush hours, many of the spaces at the Mobil station on West Highland Road are full. It was agreed to proceed with the proposal presented in the memorandum, whereas all gas stations require one space per 200 square feet of floor area, plus two spaces per filling station.

Ms. Corwin noted the maximum lot coverage is simply too low given the size of the parcels in the Highland Station, HS Zoning District. At twenty percent coverage, most residential homes would exceed the coverage limits. In the Highland Township zoning ordinance, lot coverage refers only to roofs and decks, not to impervious surfaces such as driveways and parking lots.

Mr. O’Leary suggested that there may be no reason for a coverage percentage at all. Once a property owner accounts for space for septic systems, parking and the like, what ever is left is unlikely to overwhelm the neighboring properties. This is especially true given that there is not sewer or centralized public parking. After discussion, it was determined to use the 35 percent lot coverage proposed in the staff memorandum, with the understanding that this could be adjusted before the recommendation to the Board.

There was some discussion of the setbacks in the Highland Station District. Setbacks are negotiated with the Planning Commission based on the scale of the buildings and surrounding properties. The setbacks would be enforced through the Highland Station Design Guidelines. In some areas, the buildings might be set at the right-of-way line, such as at the Meck Building on the corner of Milford and Livingston Road, whereas the redevelopment of a residential lot might require a front yard. Mr. O’Leary suggested that reducing the requirement might encourage better and more dense development.

Mr. York thought that having a target number might allow for better negotiations with the developer. Mr. Charlick was concerned that having no number, might open the township to inappropriately dense development, especially if sewers became available. Ms. Corwin noted that there would be time for the Planning Commission to get ahead of sewers and re-explore all the ordinances that might be impacted. Mr. Tierney also pointed out that building code requirements would limit the potential to overbuild a site.

Ms. Corwin noted that the Highland Downtown Development Authority is planning to revisit their master plan in 2025, and that the Planning Commission should expect that the entire Highland Station District regulation will be reviewed once that planning effort is completed, to ensure the ordinances assist in implementation of the plan.

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to set a public hearing for the proposed text amendments for the next feasible date. Mr. Curtis supported the motion. Roll Call vote: O’Leary, yes; Tierney, yes; York, yes; Curtis, yes; Heyn, yes; Temple, yes; Smith, yes, Charlick, yes. Motion carried (8 yes votes, 0 no votes).

Agenda Item #4: Review of Master Land Use Plan and future Land Use Map

Ms. Masson-Minock explained that she had completed some suggested edits, including updating some of the background studies to reflect the most recent data provided by SEMCOG and Oakland County, adjusting the color ramps for better differentiation between uses on the future land use map, and changing the designation on a parcel at the south property line. Mr. Smith has also suggested changes to improve the graphics in the appendix so that there is not a false impression of the significance of a response where only a handful of the survey sample actually answered a specific question.

After discussing the map at some length, it was decided that the land use category of “Large Lot Residential” should be renamed as “Rural Residential” and that the map should be reviewed and refined by the Planning Director to correct a misclassification of parcels in the center of the Township that led to a muddling of the 3-acre and 5/10 acre parcels into one category.

Mr. Smith offered comments from his careful reading of the document. He noted several instances where the language required a more nuanced approach.

Ms. Masson-Minock explained that this would not be the last time the Planning Commission had an opportunity to review and comment on the plan. Forwarding this plan to the Board would allow staff to provide the plan to neighboring communities and utilities and start the 90+ day comment period. The plan would come back to the Planning Commission for edits based on comments received and a public hearing would be scheduled.

Mr. Charlick offered a motion to forward the Master Plan to the Board of Trustees at their October meeting with a request to release for public comment. Mr. Curtis supported the motion, which passed with a voice vote (8 ayes, 0 nays).

Agenda Item #5.
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 #6:

Minutes: September 5, 2024

Mr. York offered a motion to approve the minutes of September 5, 2024, as presented. Mr. Curtis supported the motion which was approved by voice vote (all ayes, no nays)

Adjournment:

Mr. York 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